

“HOW AM I SMART?”

AN INTRODUCTION TO MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Grace¹ and Melody, two young girls I know well, are into princesses and ballet. Grace and Melody love their ballet class and often dance through their home to the music playing in their minds. They prefer wearing dresses because that's what princesses and ballerinas wear. Plus, they like the way they look when twirling around as they dance.

Their mom, Anna, and I have joked that Grace and Melody, even though they're only three and four years old, could win a trivia game about Disney princesses and the Barbie videos, if anyone ever created such a game. They watch and rewatch the videos, have memorized some of the dialogue, and often pretend they're Cinderella, Ariel, Odette, or Elina.

God used these quality videos to awaken at least three of

Melody's and Grace's eight intelligences—or “smarts”—their music smart, picture smart, and body smart. What do I mean?

Many of the videos the girls watch, like the Barbie versions of the *Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, include gorgeous classical music recorded by some of the best orchestras in the world. At a very young age, as they've heard numerous instruments in stunning combinations, their music-smart intelligences have been awakened.

The videos are visually appealing. These fast-moving productions have exposed the girls to vivid colors, stimulated their creativity and imaginations, and sparked their picture-smart intelligences.

Melody and Grace observe the characters dancing in the videos, so they dance. From twirling and leaping throughout the living room, they gain balance and an understanding of how their bodies work. This movement activates their body-smart intelligences.

Melody and Grace's parents haven't left it at that, though. They parent the way I hope you do! They respond to the girls' obvious interests in dance and music. As a result, their girls' music, body, and picture smarts weren't merely awakened, they have been strengthened and, more significantly, trained.

In addition to the videos, the development of these girls' music smart is influenced by their mom's playing worship CDs in their home. The girls attend a church that has a vibrant worship program, so they're exposed to music there, too. Because Anna is part of the worship team, her daughters hear her practicing her singing parts, and occasionally her oboe and saxophone. There's a piano in their living room, and the girls know they will take piano lessons when they're older. I just had dinner at their house and we sang the prayer! Music abounds in their home and is important to Anna and her husband, Will.

Grace's and Melody's picture-smart abilities have been further activated with the blank paper, crayons, and many creative coloring books that Anna and Will purchase for them. What do the girls draw? Dancing princesses, of course! As Melody and Grace grow older and gain additional eye-hand coordination, their picture-smart abilities will continue to improve. The point is to start with expressed interests. These girls have lots of interest in activities that grow their picture smarts!

To help strengthen Melody's and Grace's body smarts, Anna and Will chose to enroll them in a dance class. That wise decision honored the girls' strong interest in ballet, which stemmed from their video viewing. Once a week they attend class with several other little girls. Their balance and coordination is improving. The girls learn special dance positions and steps and are enjoying dancing more and more.

I was privileged to attend Melody and Grace's first dance recital. They looked adorable in their bright lime tutus with puffy velvet sleeves. Just like the other girls in the group, they stared at the audience during part of the dance, looked at the girls next to them for a while, and then managed to dance a few steps. They were perfect for beginners. At home, Grace and Melody love wearing their tutus as they dance throughout the house. They look forward to continuing their lessons.

Some teens at Melody and Grace's recital have clearly chosen to focus on dance. They've taken lessons for years and their body-smart and music-smart intelligences have been focused and trained. They are quite talented. One dancer, in particular, impressed me. I believe she had more music-smart abilities than the other dancers. Though the other girls danced to the beat, I sensed she

actually *felt* the music. She interpreted the emotion in the songs through her facial expressions and the flow of her arms. Our eight intelligences rarely, if ever, work alone, and this is a beautiful example of that. Her music-smartness enhanced the way she used her body-smart abilities.

Melody and Grace have been in their dancing and princess phases for a long time. Eventually other things will interest them. They may leave dancing and princesses totally behind, or these interests may continue while other interests develop. Some children tend to focus; others broaden their interests. There's probably nothing wrong with either approach, as long as children are content and pursuing their own dreams and not their parents'.

Maybe your children are into soccer, video games, math, or reading. It's important that we expose young children to a variety of activities so their own unique, God-designed passions can be discovered. Considerate parents nurture their development.

WHAT ARE THE MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES?

Dr. Howard Gardner, of Harvard University, is considered the father of the theory of multiple intelligences. His first book on this topic was published in 1983. Others, including his former colleague, Dr. Tom Armstrong, have written more popularized and less academic versions of Dr. Gardner's work. For example, in the chart that follows, you can see that Dr. Armstrong's labels for the intelligences are easier to understand. Therefore, I'll use them in this book.

THE EIGHT INTELLIGENCES

Dr. Armstrong's Labels

Word smart

Logic smart

Picture smart

Music smart

Body smart

Nature smart

People smart

Self smart

Dr. Gardner's Labels

Linguistic intelligence

Logical-Mathematical intelligence

Spatial intelligence

Musical intelligence

Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence

Naturalist intelligence

Interpersonal intelligence

Intrapersonal intelligence

Dr. Gardner determined that everyone is born with all eight of these distinct intelligences.² Each intelligence has to be awakened, but they're there, built into each child at birth. I like to use the words *nature* (the genetic makeup we inherited from our parents) and *nurture* (the varied experiences and attitudes that influence our development), when teaching about the source of our intelligences. *God has "wired" everyone with eight intelligences.* He created our unique combination of genes and wants us to develop His gift of the varied intelligences. Dr. Gardner stated the idea this way, "I reject the 'inherited versus learned' dichotomy and instead stress the interaction, from the moment of conception, between genetic and environmental factors."³

Unfortunately, because of sin entering the world, some children's intelligences aren't developed. Perhaps illness or disease is the cause. For example, Merry, the twenty-one-year-old daughter of our scheduling director, is both physically and mentally severely disabled, with capabilities similar to a two-month-old. Yet Miki

beams when sharing evidence that Merry's strongest intelligences are music and people. The nurturing Merry receives from her parents, younger sister, teachers, caregivers, and family friends makes the difference. Though the development is very limited, Merry responds to music and people around her. For instance, when a prospective nurse arrives, Merry's parents have learned to use Merry's quick evaluation when determining whether to hire her. Merry will give her mom a certain look if she doesn't like the nurse, and Miki knows not to hire her.

A lack of quality nurturing experiences and attitudes can also stunt the development of a child's intelligences. If a child grows up with apathetic or absent parents, poverty, abuse, or any number of other factors that lead to poor parenting, his or her intelligences may remain dormant throughout life.

When you help nurture your children's smarts, as Merry's parents have done, you cooperate with God in the development of your child's full potential. Nature and nurture together determine which intelligences will become strengths, which ones may not develop much at all, and which ones will plateau at a point in between.

The earlier we awaken children's smarts, the greater the likelihood they might be developed as strengths. Don't get me wrong—it's never too late to awaken a part of the mind. A particular intelligence might not become a definite strength because of a late start, but any smart can be improved, focused, and trained. Moreover, once it's awakened and stretched, it never goes back to its original size. Picture a balloon. You can always tell if it's been used. The mind is the same. I'm a former viola player, so I could more easily learn to play that instrument again in less

time than someone who has never played it. Perhaps you can think of an example of this “it’s never too late” principle from your life.

We don’t rely on just one smart at any one time. For example, when using word smart to read, many people will use their logic smart to ask questions about what they’re reading. They may also use their picture smart to create visual images of what they’re reading. Playing chess uses the picture-smart and logic-smart intelligences. If you’re playing golf, you’d add body smart to those two, and perhaps nature smart, too.

Even though our smarts always work together, for the purposes of this book, I’ll be writing about “music-smart children” and “people-smart children,” etc. This doesn’t mean these children⁴ don’t have the other seven intelligences. It’s just that I need to isolate the qualities of each in order for you to understand them.

HOW CAN UNDERSTANDING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES HELP CHILDREN?

Your children probably wonder if they’re smart. (If you’re typical, you’ve wondered if you’re smart, too!) If your children haven’t asked, “Am I smart?” have they ever asked, “How smart am I?” Are your children ever discouraged because they don’t think they’re as smart as they need to be? Perhaps you’re sometimes disheartened, too.

One of the main reasons to learn about the eight intelligences is to discover *how* your children are smart. Such practical knowledge about the unique ways God designed each of us should encourage, inspire, and empower you, as well as your children. The question changes from being about the amount of their

intelligence (“How smart am I?”) to which intelligences they have (“How am I smart?”) and how they will use them (“How can I be smart with my smarts?”)

An understanding of the intelligences can lead to an improvement in your children’s grades. When they study with more than one intelligence, they’re bound to better understand what they’re learning. They’ll remember what they learn longer, apply their learning more accurately, and possess more optimism for the future. Successes in applying the multiple intelligences will help reinforce the best question: “How am I smart?”

I enjoy helping children understand that they’re smart in eight different ways: word, logic, picture, music, body, nature, people, and self. However, at the beginning of my school assemblies, some children have a hard time believing me. They truly doubt they’re intelligent. Maybe school is hard for them. Or they may have been told they’re stupid. Maybe they don’t earn many A’s. Something or someone has caused them to believe they’re not smart.

As I describe each of these intelligences, they begin to believe the evidence I provide. They elbow their friends and I see them mouth the words, “That’s me!” Healing of past hurts and current doubts often occurs. I rejoice when I see that. The children relax before my eyes. By the end of the program, when I ask them to raise their hands to indicate their top four intelligences, many struggle with the limit. What joy to see them go from not thinking they’re smart to struggling to choose only four intelligence strengths an hour later!

It’s also a delight to help children understand they can learn with all eight intelligences. They don’t have to study everything

with all eight, but they can learn to choose which intelligences to use with different activities and assignments. In addition, ideally their teachers will use a variety of intelligences while teaching. Of course, you can use different intelligences when helping your children complete their homework or study for tests. (Chapters three to ten are full of many ideas.)

Multiple intelligences don't just help children understand how they're smart in different ways. Intelligence strengths also help to explain why children might be prone to get into certain types of trouble. For example, picture-smart children like drawing and creating. Therefore, they might color on the report you wrote for your boss and left on the table. Logic-smart children like exploring things on their own, so they might walk away from you to go investigate something that catches their attention. When children understand the cause of the behavior that gets them into trouble, they are more empowered to change. You'll have more hope, too! Children may also be encouraged to discover that improving their behavior simply requires them to use their intelligences in different ways or with less intensity to help and not hurt themselves and others. They need to be smart with their smarts!

Recently, one of my coworkers heard me speak on this topic. As we talked on the drive back from the training event, she began to see her ten-year-old grandson in a new and very positive light. She realized the behaviors that often irritated his cousins, classmates, and teachers were rooted in his body-smart and logic-smart strengths. That night, she lovingly explained to him what she had learned and asked if he agreed with her that he was very body smart and logic smart. He lit up when discovering he was

smart in these two important ways. At the office the next day, my coworker smiled broadly when testifying that her grandson was different that morning. Her summary comment says a lot: “It makes a difference to be understood, doesn’t it?” Yes!

I teach children they can choose to be stupid, but God didn’t make them that way. As that truth sinks in, they laugh. Being smart is a choice. So is stupidity. Children can choose to *not* use their intelligences, to let their strengths get them into trouble, or to use their smarts for evil purposes. Such choices, of course, are stupid.

I often teach young people that much of the evil in the world is done by smart people who are stupid. They get it, and nervous laughter follows. At one extreme are those who caused the tragedies on 9/11. Among other things, those men had to be logic smart to get through airport security with weapons, choose which airplanes to hijack, and get into the planes’ cockpits. They were probably body smart, too, and used this intelligence for evil.

Admittedly, that’s an extreme example of an unhealthy use of intelligences. The point is that we constantly make choices when using our intelligences. Throughout my school and church programs, I demonstrate that much of the trouble children get into is a result of using their strengths in improper or ill-timed ways. Children are not necessarily stupid and not necessarily “bad,” but rather have not learned self-control, self-respect, and/or respect for others. These are keys to children (and adults) being able to use their intelligence strengths for good and not evil, to help and not hurt.

Does your son keep his eyes glued to his book when you’ve asked him to talk with his grandmother? He may be *word smart*.

Does your daughter struggle with obedience because she's always asking, "Why?" She may be *logic smart*. Does your daughter doodle all over her notes rather than studying her notes? She may be *picture smart*. Does your son irritate others with his constant humming and finger tapping? He may be *music smart*. Do your children constantly move and touch everything? They may be *body smart*. Does your daughter pay so much attention to her cats that she doesn't finish her homework? She may be *nature smart*. Does your son interrupt you constantly because he needs to know what you think about his ideas? He may be *people smart*. Does your daughter spend most of her time alone and ignore your input? She may be *self smart*.

Multiple intelligences are also worth understanding because God can use them to help meet our core needs. As I'll explain in the next chapter, God created us with a need for security, identity, belonging, purpose, and competence. Would you like your children to have healthy answers to the questions represented by these needs? *Who can I trust? Who am I? Who wants me? Why am I alive? What do I do well?* Knowing which intelligences are their strengths and how to use them in smart ways can help children meet these five basic needs. When needs are met, it's more likely they'll experience contentment, peace, and obedience.

HOW CAN I IDENTIFY MY CHILD'S MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE STRENGTHS?

Within each intelligence, there's what I call a "hierarchy of giftedness." As I explained, each child's potential for the eight intelligences depends on nature and nurture. Yet we know they have all eight to some level. God may have designed your son's mind

to have logic-smart strengths. You maybe haven't called them that before, but you will once you see him in the descriptions and details I include in the logic-smart chapter. Perhaps you noticed his natural leanings toward solving puzzles when he was young (i.e., his nature) and, therefore, you created relevant experiences for him (i.e., the nurture). Or, because of his interest, he created his own experiences and you had no choice but to go along with him! These experiences and interactions strengthened and focused this intelligence so that he may currently have a great deal of logic-smart ability.

At the same time, as you read the logic-smart chapter, it should be clear which of your children needs to have this intelligence awakened because it's very weak. You'll also see that other children's logic-smart abilities and interests may fall somewhere in the middle. As a result, you'll decide which activities and focused instruction you will encourage to strengthen their logic-smartness.

I'm not a fan of children comparing themselves to others. That's one reason I don't like the questions "Am I smart?" and "How smart am I?" Comparing causes some children to feel good about themselves and others to feel bad. Comparing encourages some parents to gloat about their children while other parents hope no one asks them about their children's abilities.

Some comparisons *are* healthy, however. For example, it can be very valuable for children to compare themselves to their former selves. I know they feel smarter at the end of my programs than at the beginning, and that's a good thing! When they make wise choices one day, I want them to know they're smarter than they were the day before. When they study with more than one intelligence, they're smarter than when they studied with just one.

An additional comparison is very important. I ask children to express it this way: *“God is smarter than I am!”* Smart children understand that God will always be smarter than they are. In addition, smart children know they need a smart God. I tell them that God could have created them to be like marionette puppets that He controls. Instead, He gave them eight different intelligences and He trusts them to use those smarts to help and not hurt. That’s humbling, isn’t it?

You must observe and know your children to discern which intelligences are strengths and which aren’t. Spending time with your children—to see and to hear them—is essential. This will reveal their strengths and weaknesses, as well as answers to valuable questions like these: What’s easy for them? What’s hard for them? What do they avoid doing? What holds their attention? What do they do in their spare time? What do they play? How do they play? In what classes do they do well? In what classes do they consistently struggle? What gives them joy? What gets them into trouble? What about them drives me nuts?

Teaching children about the smarts can help you identify their intelligence strengths and weaknesses. You can observe their reactions to details and examples you share and note which ones pique their curiosity. Then ask *them* to identify their strengths. They’ll often know and be able to provide evidence. Often it’s also easy for them to indicate which of the smarts are their weakest. (As you’ll understand after reading chapter ten, children who are not very self smart will have a harder time with this self-analysis.)

Each chapter that covers a particular intelligence ends with a graph like the one below. You’ll place the names of your children in the correct quadrant by considering the information I present

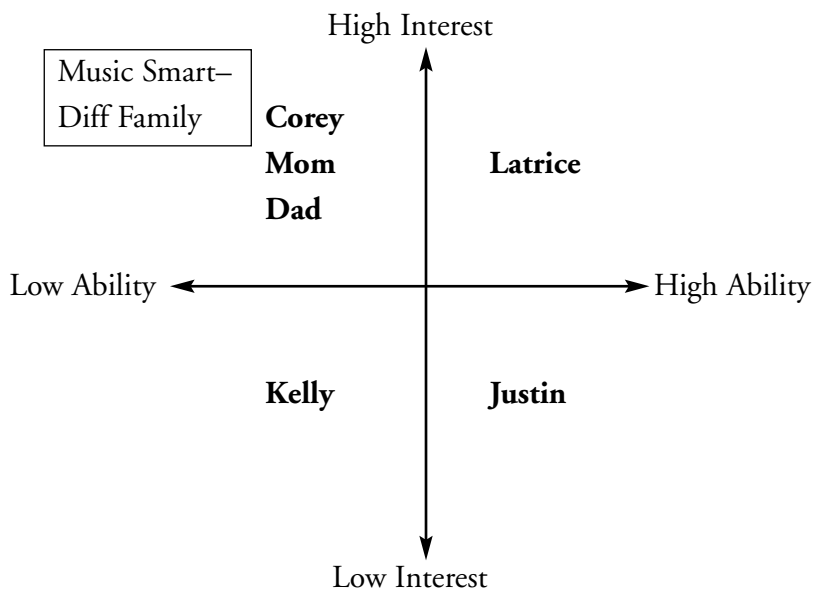
and what you know about your children. You'll do this for yourself, too. As you can see from the graph, you'll consider both ability and interest for each intelligence.

For example, in my music-smart sample on the next page for the Diff family:

- Latrice has been judged by her parents as having both *high ability* and *high interest*. She is apparently talented and enjoying using her musical abilities.
- On the other hand, Corey currently has *high interest*, but *low ability*. Even though he lacks ability, it's encouraging that he still has interest. If his ability doesn't improve, though, his interest may eventually wane. Therefore, his parents should intervene. Perhaps private lessons would help, or maybe his parents could help him take his practice times more seriously.
- Justin's situation is the opposite. He has plenty of *ability*, but *low interest*. His intervention needs to be different than Corey's. Maybe Justin's interest will increase when he's allowed to play different musical selections. Perhaps attending a professional concert, where he'll see and hear polished performers, will inspire him to commit, again, to his trombone.
- Her parents have judged Kelly as having *low interest* and *low ability*. She's only three, though, so there's no reason to worry. They're a bit surprised that she hasn't shown interest in the little songs that are a family tradition, but they're encouraged that her other intelligences seem to be developing well. They'll watch more carefully for the next month or two to

see if any particular musical style causes a reaction in Kelly. If so, they plan to use that to engage her mind. (If we were rating word smart or logic smart, which relate more directly to school success, I would encourage Kelly's parents to plan some nurturing experiences right away.)

- Both parents are most like Corey. They have *great interest*, but their *ability* isn't currently strong. (Perhaps when they were younger, they would have been judged to have high ability and high interest, but that's no longer the case.)



These graphs can also shed light on conflicts within your family. For instance, let's consider word smart. You and your oldest son might be in opposite quadrants. Perhaps by the end of that chapter you'll see that you have high ability and high interest, while your son has neither. Maybe this is why you become impatient when he cannot express himself as easily or clearly as you can.

Maybe by the end of the nature-smart chapter you'll see that your youngest daughter has high ability and high interest, while you don't have much of either. This difference can explain why you have a hard time deciding what to do together on Saturdays, why she collects pinecones and acorns even though you don't like the mess in her bedroom, and why she's so interested in cloud formations and you're not.

Awakening, strengthening, and training children's multiple intelligences are key ways to help them become who God created them uniquely to be. By discerning children's passions and potentials, and nurturing their development, you help them fulfill their God-given niche in the family, community, church, and in history. This is a significant responsibility!

The next brief chapter will explain children's five core needs, and why I've organized the eight intelligence chapters around them. I'll also introduce the very important concepts of paralysis and crystallization. You'll want to learn how to do one and how *not* to do the other!