

## Your Child's Temperament

From birth, children have a natural style of interacting with or reacting to people, places and things that child development professionals and psychologists refer to as temperament traits. These traits are influenced by our environment, but the basic underlying temperament has been shown to persist into our golden years.

In the early 1900's it was believed that children were born as "blank slates", just waiting for parents to impress upon them the manner in which they were to behave. Since the late 1950's (starting with the NY Longitudinal Study by Alexander Thomas, Stella Chess, e.t.al.) many scientific studies of temperament have continued to show that children's health and development are influenced by temperament. We all know children who are much more challenging to deal with than other children from birth. The understanding that many behavior tendencies are inborn – and not the result of bad parenting- is a very important insight parents can gain from learning how their children react to their environments.

Clinicians use a series of interview, observations, and parental questionnaires to measure nine temperament traits using a scale indicating mild to intense response or reactions in the following areas: Activity, Rhythmicity, Approach/Withdrawal, Adaptability, Intensity, Mood, Persistence/Attention Span, Distractibility and Sensory Threshold. Once the scales are scored the results are combined to form three basic types of temperaments in children.

1. **Easy or flexible** – usually calm, happy, regular in sleeping and eating habits, adaptable and not easily upset
2. **Difficult, active, or feisty** – often fussy, irregular in feeding and sleeping habits, fearful of new people and situations, easily upset by noise and commotion, high strung and intense in their reactions.
3. **Slow to warm up or cautious** – relatively inactive and fussy, tend to withdraw or to react negatively to new situations, but their reactions gradually become more positive with continuous exposure to the person or environment.

Parents need to get a clear picture of their own and their child's temperament. Respect their child's uniqueness without comparing them to others. Communicate. Explain decisions and motives. Listen to your child's view point and encourage teamwork on coming up with solutions to problems. Set limits to help your child develop self-control. Respect opinions but remain firm on important limits for behavior. Be a good role model because children learn by imitation and most importantly, enjoy the journey!

*Sources:*

*Please Understand Me II, Temperament, Character, Intelligence*

*1998 David Keirse*

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