

Flexible, Fearful or Feisty-Ways to Succeed with All Children

This is an interactive workshop that introduces the three temperament types of children based upon California's Program for Caregivers. You will gain understanding of how your temperament, background, personality, experience, and culture impacts your work. It encourages participants to expand their understanding of temperament by creating their own profile and that of a child close to them to learn how it influences their relationship.

Learn practical ways to adapt your work for each type of child.



“Right from the start babies are different. Each has his or her own way of showing feelings and responding to the world around him or her.” Stella Chase, M.D., Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Social –Emotional Growth and Socialization.

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Participants in this training will:

Gain knowledge of the 3 temperament types of children identified by researchers

Understand how their own temperament, background, personality, culture, experiences and stress may influence the way they work with children

Practice a 3 step process to examine how they may change their approach for increased success with a child.

The relationships that develop between young children and adults, both at home and at school, are strongly influenced by temperament

Temperament influences the way young children relate to each other and the way adults experience a group of children

For every child in a group to thrive, adults need an understanding of temperamental differences and the flexibility to meet each child's temperamental needs

Temperaments

Right from the start, babies are different. Each has a unique style of showing feelings and responding to the world. These differences, clearly visible in the first few months of life, are expressed in many ways. They can be uncovered by adults who pay attention to:

- How active the child is in body movements
- How regular or irregular she or he is in sleeping, feeding, and having bowel movements
- How easily the child accepts a new food, person, or place
- How long it takes the child to adjust to a change in schedule or surroundings
- Whether the child's mood is mainly cheerful, neutral, or fussy
- How sensitive she or he is to loud noises, bright lights, rough clothing, a wet or soiled diaper
- How intensely the child expresses her or his feelings and reactions
- Whether or not the child can be easily distracted from the activity she or he is engrossed in
- How long the child persists in attending to any single activity

Such traits make up a child's individual temperament. Being alert to these temperamental differences and understanding how they require different approaches are crucial to nurturing children's healthy emotional growth.

Three Temperament Types

The Easy or Flexible Child (about 40% of most groups of children)

Typically, the easy child is regular in biological rhythms, optimistically approaches most new situations, adapts quickly, and has a predominantly positive mood of low or medium intensity. Such a child is indeed easy for the caregiver. She or he is easily toilet trained, learns to sleep through the night, has regular feeding and nap routines, takes to most new situations and people pleasantly, usually adapts to change quickly, is generally cheerful, and expresses her or his distress or frustration mildly. In fact, children with easy temperaments may show very deep feelings with only a single tear rolling down a cheek.

The Difficult or Feisty Child (about 10% of children)

The difficult child is the opposite of the easy child. The child may be hard to get to sleep through the night, her or his feeding and nap schedules may change from day to day, and the child may be difficult to toilet train because of irregular bowel movements. The difficult child typically fusses or even cries loudly at anything new and usually adapts slowly. All too often this type of child expresses an unpleasant or disagreeable mood and, if frustrated, may even have a temper tantrum. In contrast to the "easy" child's reaction, an intense, noisy reaction by the difficult child may not signify a depth of feeling. Often the best way to handle such outbursts is just to wait them out.

Caregivers who do not understand this type of temperament as normal sometimes feel resentment at the child for being so difficult to manage. They may scold, pressure, or appease the child, which only reinforces her or his difficult temperament and is likely to result in a true behavior problem. Understanding, patience, and consistency, on the other hand, will lead to a "goodness of fit," with a final positive adjustment to life's demands.

The Slow-to-Warm-Up or Fearful Child (about 15% of children)

Finally, there is a group of children who are often called shy. The child in this group also has discomfort with the new and adapts slowly; but unlike the difficult child, this child's negative mood is often expressed slowly, and the child may or may not be irregular in sleep, feeding and bowel elimination. This is the child who typically stands at the edge of the group and clings quietly to her or his mother when taken to a store, a birthday party, or a child care program for the first time. If the child is pressured or pushed to joining the group, the child's shyness immediately becomes worse. But if allowed to become accustomed to the new surroundings at her or his own pace, this child can gradually become an active happy member of the group.

Nine Temperament Traits

From "Temperaments of Infants and Toddlers" by Stella Chess, M.D., in Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Social-Emotional Development

Temperamental Traits and Their Handling

In describing the nine different traits, I will emphasize the extremes in each case—for example, high levels of energy or sensitivity versus low levels—because children with these traits are the ones most likely to need special attention or handling. I will give typical examples of how very young children express such traits and suggest the best caregiving approaches to take.

The majority of children display temperament at a level somewhere in between the extremes of temperament, and these children will fit into home or child care routines fairly easily. In this sense, temperament is similar to intelligence, that is, children of low average or very high intelligence may require special attention, and those of average or slightly superior intelligence will adapt to the routine school curriculum without great difficulty. We will also look at how these specific traits often combine in a child's overall makeup to form a certain major type of behavior.

Activity Level: Amount of movement and bodily activity

High Activity: The child who is highly active prefers games and play with a lot of movement, kicks and splashes in the bath, likes to run around, gets restless and distressed if made to sit quietly in one spot for long periods. Give a child with this level of activity opportunities for active play. If the group is engaged in some quiet activity, let this type of child move around from time to time.

Low Activity: The child with low activity prefers quiet games and can sit calmly looking at picture books or coloring for long periods of time. Because this child moves slowly, she or he is sometimes teased as a slowpoke. You should expect that it will take a child with this level of activity extra time to get things done, such as dressing or moving from one place to another.

Biological Rhythms: Regularity or irregularity of such functions as sleep-wake cycle, hunger, and bowel elimination

Regularity: The regular child sleeps through the night, takes a regular nap, eats about the same amount from day to day, and has a bowel movement about the same time each day. This child presents no problem with feeding or sleeping schedules and is usually easily toilet trained.

Irregularity: In contrast to the regular child, this one varies in sleep habits and hunger patterns, and she or he may wake up several times at night. The irregular child's big meal may be lunch one day and dinner the next, and her or his bowel movements are unpredictable. You should accept this child's irregular nap and feeding schedules. The child can be trained to sleep through the night if not picked up every time she or he cries. Toilet training will usually take longer and may not succeed until the child learns to be consciously aware of the internal sensation that signals a bowel movement.

Approach/Withdrawal: How the child responds to a new situation or other stimulus

Approach: The approacher responds positively to a new food by swallowing it, reaches for a new toy, smiles at strangers, and when first joining a play group, plunges right in. Such a child presents few problems to the caregiver, except when this responsiveness is combined with a high level of activity. Then the approacher may run impulsively to climb a new high rock or jungle gym that she or he cannot really manage or try to explore a potentially dangerous object.

Withdraw: Typically cautious about exploring new objects, the withdrawer is likely to push away a new top or to spit out new food the first few times. Around strangers or when first taken to a new

place, this child may fuss or cry and strain to get away. You should be patient with these initial negative reactions. Pressuring the child to make an immediate positive adjustment only increases her or his discomfort and makes it harder for the child to accept new people and things. Instead, small repeated exposures to the unfamiliar let the child gradually overcome her or his early reluctance.

Adaptability: How quickly or slowly the child adapts to a change in routine or overcomes an initial negative response.

High Adaptability: The quickly adaptive child adjusts easily to the family's move to a new home or a visit to a strange place. This child accepts new food that was first rejected after only a few trials, and this child is agreeable to changes in mealtimes and sleeping schedules. Such a child does not usually present problems to a caregiver. Occasionally, the youngster may give in too early to unreasonable request for change, such as a playmate changing the rules in the middle of a game. The quickly adaptive child may benefit by encouragement to "stick to your guns."

Low Adaptability: By contrast, the slowly adaptive child takes a long time to adapt to change or to accept something new she or he originally rejected. Such a child is sometimes misjudged as stubborn or willfully uncooperative. A more accurate term would be cautious. Your approach should be the same as for the withdrawing child-being patient, giving the child a number of exposures to the change, and encouraging the child when she or he begins to show signs of adjusting. Pressure to make such a child adapt very quickly will only boomerang and have the opposite effect.

Quality of Mood: The amount of pleasant, cheerful and openly friendly behavior (positive mood) as contrasted with fussing, crying, and openly showing unfriendliness (negative mood).

Positive Mood: Smiling and laughing often, the child whose mood is positive is easily pleased and shows it openly. Fussing and crying are infrequent. This positive mood usually causes positive responses in adults, who find it easy to care for such children.

Negative Mood: The child whose mood is negative tends to fuss or complain a lot, even at trivial discomforts, and cry before going to sleep. The child may show little or no open expression of pleasure, even at games or other events that please, but rather will have a deadpan expression. You should be sure to spot such a child. While not ignoring the child's fussing or complaining, respond cheerfully to her or him. You may find to your surprise that, although the child gives no outward evidence of pleasure at some special event, such as an expedition to the zoo, the child later reports it to her or his parents or friends as an exciting, happy event.

Intensity of Reactions: The energy level of mood expression, whether it is positive or negative.

Low Intensity: The low-intensity child expresses both pleasure and discomfort in a low-key way. If happy, this child may smile or say quietly that she or he is pleased; if upset, the child may whine a little or fuss but not loudly. It is easy to misjudge and miss what is going on inside the child if you take the mild reactions as evidence that she or he is not really displeased or upset. Remember that mild expressions may mask strong emotions. Pay careful attention to such expressions, and take seriously the feelings behind them.

High Intensity: By contrast, the high-intensity child expresses her or his feelings with great intensity. When happy, this child bubbles and laughs; when upset, she or he cries loudly and may even have a tantrum. In this case, you have an opposite task: to evaluate objectively whether the issue is important or trivial and not be guided only by the intense reactions of the child.

Sensitivity Threshold: How sensitive the child is to potentially irritating stimuli

Low Threshold: The child with a low threshold may be easily upset by loud noises, bright lights, a wet or soiled diaper, or sudden changes in temperature. This child may not be able to tolerate tight socks or clothing with rough texture. You should be aware of and attend to those reactions but not try to change them.

High Threshold: The child with a high threshold is not bothered by the same kind of stimuli as the child with a low threshold. You should check regularly to see if the infant has a wet or soiled diaper to avoid diaper rash. Otherwise, this child may be content to suffer the diaper irritation because the child's high threshold keeps her or him from feeling irritated and uncomfortable.

Distractibility: How easily the child can be distracted from an activity like feeding or playing by some unexpected stimulus-the ringing of a telephone or someone entering the room.

High Distractibility: The highly distractible child may start and look up at the sound of a door closing softly. As one parent put it, half the solid food feeding went into the child's ear because she constantly turned her head at small noises or glimpses of movement. In the early childhood period, the tendency can be an asset to the caregiver. The child who is fussing at being dressed or is poking an electric outlet can be easily distracted by showing her or him a toy or other attractive object. In older childhood, however, when persistent concentration on a task like homework is welcomed, high distractibility may not be such a desirable trait.

Low Distractibility: The child who is not easily distracted tends to stick to an activity despite other noises, conversations, and people around her or him. This is desirable at certain times, such as feeding or dressing, when the child's full attention makes her or him cooperative. But low distractibility creates a problem if the child is intent on trying to reach a hot stove and will not be easily diverted; the child may have to be removed from the situation.

Persistence/Attention Span: Two closely related traits, with persistence referring to how long a child will stay with a difficult activity without giving up, and attention span referring to how long the child will concentrate before her or his interest shifts

High Persistence: The highly persistent child with a long attention span will continue to be absorbed in what she or he is doing for long periods of time. In the early childhood years, the highly persistent child is often easy to manage because once absorbed in an activity, the child does not demand your attention. However, the child may get upset and even have a tantrum if she or he is forced to quit in the middle of an activity, for example, at bedtime, mealtime, or departure time at a child care center. In such cases, you should warn the child in advance if time is limited, or you may decide to prevent the child from starting an activity that will have to be ended abruptly. The highly persistent child may also keep badgering to get something she or he wants, even after a firm refusal.

Low Persistence: The child with low persistence and a short attention span will not stick with a task that is difficult or requires a long period of concentration. If the bead does not go on the string right away, or if the peg does not slip into the hole after a few pokes, the child will give up and move on to something else. This child presents few caregiving problems in the early stages of childhood. Later, however, a short attention span and lack of persistence make learning at school and home difficult.

Your Temperament Traits Assessment Scale

Activity Level. How much do you need to move around during the workday? Can you sit through a long meeting without wiggling?

High Activity 1 3 5 Low Activity

Regularity. How regular are you in your eating , sleeping and elimination habits?

Regular 1 3 5 Irregular

Adaptability. How quickly do you adapt to a change in schedule or routine, a new place or foods?

Adapts quickly 1 3 5 Slow to adapt

Approach/Withdrawal. How do you react the first time to new people, new places, new activities or new tools?

Initial approach 1 3 5 Initial Withdrawal

Physical Sensitivity. How aware are you of slight differences in noise level, temperature, or touch?

Not sensitive 1 3 5 Very sensitive

Intensity of Reaction. How strong are your reactions?

High Intensity 1 3 5 Mild Reaction

Distractibility. Are you easily distracted?

Very distractible 1 3 5 Not distractible

Positive or Negative Mood. How much of the time do you show pleasant, joyful behavior compared with unpleasant or grouchy moods?

Positive Mood 1 3 5 Negative Mood

Persistence. How long will you continue with a difficult task?

Long Attention Span 1 3 5 Short Attention Span

The Temperament Traits Assessment Scale for Children

Activity Level. How much does the child wiggle and move around when being read to, sitting at a table, or playing alone?

High Activity 1 3 5 Low Activity

Regularity. Is the child regular about eating times, sleeping times, amount of sleep needed, and bowel movements?

Regular 1 3 5 Irregular

Adaptability. How quickly does the child adapt to changes in her or his schedule or routine? How quickly does the child adapt to new foods and places?

Adapts quickly 1 3 5 Slow to adapt

Approach/Withdrawal. How does the child usually react the first time to new people, new foods, new toys, and new activities?

Initial approach 1 3 5 Initial Withdrawal

Physical Sensitivity. How aware is the child of slight noises, slight differences in temperature, differences in taste, and differences in clothing?

Not sensitive 1 3 5 Very sensitive

Intensity of Reaction. How strong or violent are the child's reactions?

High Intensity 1 3 5 Mild Reaction

Distractibility. Is the child easily distracted, or does she or he ignore distractions? Will the child continue to work or play when other noises or children are present?

Very distractible 1 3 5 Not distractible

Positive or Negative Mood. How much of the time does the child show pleasant, joyful behavior compared with unpleasant crying and fussing behavior?

Positive Mood 1 3 5 Negative Mood

Persistence. How long does the child continue with one activity? Does the child usually continue if it is difficult?

Long Attention Span 1 3 5 Short Attention Span

The Responsive Process

Step One: Watch

Try to see the world as this child sees it.

Begin by just watching, not rushing to do things for the baby.

Watch for both verbal and nonverbal cues.

Only by first learning from the child what she or he is calling for can you choose the right response.

Step Two: Ask

Ask yourself how you can arrange the environment-physically, emotionally, and socially-in ways that will assist the child most.

Ask yourself: What messages is the child sending? What are the emotional, social, intellectual, and physical parts to the message? Does the child want something from me at this moment?

If so, ask the child: What is it that you want?

Be aware of your own emotional state and feelings that may interfere with hearing the child's message, including your current feelings and those from past experiences.

Know your "hot spots" and "blind spots".

Step Three: Adapt

Engage the child to discover the child's preferences.

Adapt your actions according to what you believe to be the child's desires.

Watch how the child responds to your actions.

Modify your actions according to the child's response and watch, ask, and adapt again.

Improving the "Goodness of Fit"

1. How can you improve the "goodness of fit"?
2. Based on what you learned, how might you approach the child differently?
3. How can you adapt your expectations and behavior to fit with this child's temperament?

Important Points to Remember About Temperament

Differences in temperament, even at the extremes, are differences in the normal range of behavior. The key is to understand how a particular trait influences the child's behavior and to find the best way of handling it.

A feisty or fearful child can be helped to learn to handle potentially distressing situations gradually, by a supportive adult who understands and accepts the child's temperament issues.

Do not blame the child for a child's troublesome temperament trait. The child is not being deliberately troublesome. However, adults may not understand the child's temperament and may be applying behavior management practices that do not fit the child's temperament needs.

The adults way of relating to the child's temperament can play a big role in the child's emotional development. The response the child gets from adults contributes to the self-image she or he develops.

Any temperament trait can be an asset or a liability to a child's development, depending on whether the adults recognize what type of approach is best suited to that child.

Tips for Getting in Tune

1. **Be respectfully attentive.** Observe without interfering. Spend time quietly looking and listening-without interrupting or breaking into the child's activity.
2. **Be an asker:** Ask the child through words and actions what is right for her or him. Ask yourself: "I wonder what it is that Meg wants?" "I wonder what Joseph is interested in at this moment?" "Is what I'm doing meeting the child's needs?"
3. **Pay attention to your own feelings.** Gauge the part your feelings play in the relationship.
4. **Keep in mind your own special emotional inclinations**-your "hot spots" and "blind spots".
5. **Watch the infant as you act.** When you take an action, watch the infant while you do it, and do not go too fast. Give the baby time to show you a response that you can learn something from.
6. **See behind the action.** Do not just see an action or behavior, but see the reason and emotion behind the action.
7. **Use the information you have learned** about children-how children develop, how to work with cultural differences, how to use materials-to assist you in the adaptation process.
8. **Pay special attention** to what you have already learned from your interactions with each child in your care.