

# Temperament

Temperament is a set of in-born traits that organize the child's approach to the world.

# **The 9 Temperament Traits**

Classic child development research conducted by Doctors Chess and Thomas has identified 9 temperamental traits:

# Activity Level:

- This is the child's "idle speed or how active the child is generally.
- Does the infant always wiggle, more squirm? Is the infant difficult to diaper because of this?
- Is the child always on the go? Or, does the child prefer sedentary quiet activities?

# Distractibility:

- The degree of concentration and paying attention displayed when a child is not particularly interested in an activity.
- Is the infant easily distracted by sounds or sights while drinking a bottle? Is the infant easily soothed when upset by being offered alternate activity?
- Does the child become sidetracked easily when attempting to follow routine or working on some activity?
  - High distractibility is seen as positive when it is easy to divert a child from an undesirable behavior but seen as negative when it prevents the child from finishing school work.

# Intensity:

- Does the infant react strongly and loudly to everything, even relatively minor events?
- Does the child show pleasure or upset strongly and dramatically?
- Does the child just get quiet when upset?

# Sensory Threshold:

- Related to how sensitive this child is to physical stimuli. It is the amount of stimulation (sounds, tastes, touch, temperature changes) needed to produce a response in the child.
- Does the child startle easily to sounds? Is the child a picky eater or will he eat almost anything?

# Regularity:

- The trait refers to the predictability of biological functions like appetite and sleep.
- Does the child get hungry or tired at predictable times? Or, is the child unpredictable in terms of hunger and tiredness?

# Approach/Withdrawal:

- Refers to the child's characteristic response to a new situation or strangers.
  - Does the child eagerly approach new situations or people? Or does the child seem hesitant and resistant when faced with new situations, people or things?

# Adaptability:

- Related to how easily the child adapts to transitions and changes, like switching to a new activity.
  - Does the child have difficulty with changes in routines, or with transitions from one activity to another?
  - Does the child take a long time to become comfortable to new situations?

# Persistence:

- This is the length of time a child continues in activities in the face of obstacles.
  - Does the child continue to work on a puzzle when he has difficulty with it or does he just move on to another activity?
  - Is the child able to wait to have his needs met? Does the child react strongly when interrupted in an activity?

# Mood:

- This is the tendency to react to the world primarily in a positive or negative way.
  - Does the child see the glass as half full? Does he focus on the positive aspects of life?
  - Is the child generally in a happy mood? Is the child generally serious?

- **Parenting Strategies For Very Intense Children:**
- Provide activities that are soothing such as warm bath, massage, water play, stories.
- Recognize cues that signal that intensity is rising.
- Help child learn to recognize cues that signal that intensity is rising.
- Use humor to diffuse intensity.
- Teach child to use time-out as a time to calm self-down.
- Avoid escalating intensity of child be reacting intensely to his/her behavior. Give calm, clear, brief feedback.

- **Parenting Strategies for Slow-to-Adapt Children:**
- Establish clear routines.
- Prepare child by discussing plans for the day when routine changes.
- Prepare child for transitions.
- Give warnings a few minutes before transition from one activity to next occurs.
- Allow time for closure of one activity before going on to next.
- Stay aware of number of transitions required, and keep transitions to minimum if possible.