

Temperament



WHAT KIND OF TEMPERAMENT DOES MY BABY HAVE?

Every child is born with their own way of approaching the world. This is sometimes known as their temperament. Temperament is important to understand because it shapes a child's behavior and development. For example, your child may have a hard time with changes. Knowing this will help you support your child more at drop-off time. You might create a goodbye routine (like a special song and hug) that is comforting.

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG TEMPERAMENT

Children don't choose their temperament. It's just how they're wired. That's why it's important to accept them for who they are. However, some temperaments are easier to handle than others. An intense, reactive child can be harder to soothe than a more laid-back, flexible one. A child who is shy may require more support to feel comfortable joining a group of children. The goal is to help your child thrive by nurturing strengths and providing support when needed. When you notice your child's temperament, you help your child adapt, learn, and feel more confident in the world.

FIVE OF THE NINE TEMPERAMENT AREAS:

- **Sociability.** This means the way your child usually responds to new things. Some children are "slow to warm." They need time and support from trusted caregivers to feel comfortable in new situations. "Glad to meet you" children approach new people and situations eagerly. They connect to people by smiling, cooing, talking, and looking them in the eye.
- **Coping with change.** Children face many changes in their lives. This includes small changes, like a new jacket, and larger changes, like moving to a new home. Some children find any



change difficult and tend to react to even the smallest ones. Even a new nipple on the bottle or a new food on their plate can be too much at first. Other children are more easygoing.

- **Activity level.** Some children are not action oriented. They are “watchers” and are happy to play quietly. These children prefer to take in the world by looking or listening. Other children are “movers and shakers” who are always on the go. They like to reach out, crawl, and explore. These children aren’t “bad,” “wild,” or “out of control.” But they may need lots of supervision.
- **Emotional intensity and reactivity.** Some children are intense. Others are less so and tend to be quiet and less fussy. They sleep more than average and might get on a schedule more quickly. Children who are “big reactors” tell the world how they feel in big voices and actions. They express their feelings with intensity. They squeal with delight or shout in anger. They also might react strongly to small things like an itchy tag on a T-shirt.
- **Frustration tolerance.** Children who are “easily frustrated” tend to get very upset the minute something doesn’t go their way. They have a hard time waiting and may give up quickly when faced with a challenge. When they fall apart, let them know you understand. Say, “Puzzles are hard! You get so mad when the piece doesn’t fit.” Then coach them to think through solutions.



DON'T FORGET ABOUT YOU

Remember that you have a temperament, too. If your temperament is different from your baby's, you may need to change your approach to create a “good fit.” This good fit has been shown to support your baby's healthy development. For example, you may enjoy quiet reading and want to share this activity with your child. But if they have a high activity level, you may find that active play is always preferred. A change might look like acting out the story instead of sitting to read it. If you're upset by your child's temperament, talk with your HealthySteps Specialist.

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

