

Another Way to Understand Children's Behavior

Rona Renner, RN

Is your child growing up to be very different than you expected? Do you sometimes wonder where your daughter learned to be so outspoken and strong willed, or your son so quiet and reserved? Understanding a child's temperament can help you step back and see his or her unique style more clearly.

"Temperament" is a person's first and most natural way of responding. It's the way they move in the world. Just as some children are born with curly hair and others with straight hair, some children are high energy right from birth and may want to interact with you all the time, while other babies are happy to play quietly in their crib while you make dinner. Our children come into the world with a style all their own.

There are no good or bad temperaments, but some children are more challenging than others. So much also depends on your temperament, and how well you and your child "fit" with each other. For example:

- Your high-energy daughter may want you to practice soccer with her when she wakes up, but you may have lower energy and want to sit and read the paper or sleep in. Her energy might annoy you, even though it's normal for her.
- Your son may be slow to warm up and sensitive to new places and people, so when you go to a relative's house he may want to sit on your lap. Just because you're outgoing and friendly, doesn't mean that he will be that way. Give him time to get comfortable, and then he's bound to venture out and play with the other children.
- You might be intense in your reactions, and yell easily. Your child might be low in intensity and sensitive to loud noise. When you yell, she may cry easily. Do your best to lower your voice and talk to her after you've calmed down. On the other hand, you may have a child who is loud and reactive. If so, take a deep breath and count to 10 before responding to her, in order to avoid a yelling match.
- Some parents are fast adapting and are impatient with a child who is slow to get out of the house in the morning. Slow down a bit, and give your son clear instructions about what you expect, and a timer so he'll know when it's time to leave the house.

Understanding temperament is a tool to use in the never-ending process of building a healthy relationship with your child. For more information check out *Raising Your Spirited Child*, by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka.

