

## All About Temperament



By having an understanding of temperament and how to best support your child's temperament style can help support the relationship the two of you share. Everyone has their own unique temperament. This article aims to explain the different sides of temperament, why understanding temperament is important.

### So what is temperament?

According to research, temperament can be defined as a biological set of traits that influence how you see and react to the world around you. In other words, it is something you are born with. It is part of your DNA. Recent research has highlighted that even though temperament is genetic, the people and environment's you experience in infancy and early childhood can influence how these traits are expressed. This influence can have both positive and negative effects depending on the trait. Researchers have studied temperament for several decades and have completed longitudinal studies. A longitudinal study is where researchers follow their participants for many years. In the case of temperament research, some participants were followed from infancy into adulthood. This body of research concluded that 9 areas/domains contribute to a person's temperament.

The 9 aspects of temperament include:

<b>1. Activity Level</b>	how much physical movement a person does or needs to do
<b>2. Approach/Withdrawal</b>	how a person reacts to new situation, people, or things
<b>3. Adaptability</b>	how a person reacts to changes in their daily routine or moves from one activity to another
<b>4. Sensory Sensitivity</b>	how sensitively a person reacts to stimulation caused by pain, smell, light, taste, sound and feel.
<b>5. Intensity of Reaction</b>	how a person reacts to emotions and the length of time they are emotional
<b>6. Distractibility</b>	how easily a person is distracted
<b>7. Persistence</b>	how long a person will try to complete a new of difficult task

8.	<b>Quality of mood</b>	how a persons general mood is, happy, friendly, sad, angry or aggressive
9.	<b>Regularity</b>	how routine and consistent a persons biological functions (sleeping, eating, washroom) are

Each of the above characteristics is measured on a scale.



For example, if we look at **persistence** scale, the scale would go from 'gives up easily' to 'keeps trying for a long time'. For a second example, we can look at the **regularity** scale, does an infant 'almost always eat and poop at the same time daily' or is it always a 'different time from day to day'. Based on where you fall on all the different scales you may fall into a specific temperament "style."

### What is a temperament type or style?

Based on the characteristics above a person's temperament style may be categorized into one of three main temperament styles. The researchers named these different styles 'easy going', 'slow to warm up', and 'difficult'.



**Easy Going:** About 40% of children fall into this style of temperament. Children in this style tend to be seen as "easy" children. They are easily soothed, very predictable in their eating and sleeping routines. Easy going children are also generally open to new situations and make friends easily. They are typically seen as happy.

**Slow to Warm up:** About 5-10% of children fall into this temperament style. Children who are slow to warm up are often called shy and reserved. They generally have low levels of physical activity and often choose to play quietly and independently. Slow to warm up children tend to need more time to become comfortable with new people and situations. They can be seen as avoidant and often give up easily when frustrated. Slow to warm up children often appear to unfamiliar adults as stand-offish and sad.

**Difficult:** About 10% of children fall into this temperament style. Children who are seen as difficult often have very high and intense emotions and can be difficult to sooth. They are often very physically active, find change difficult, and are very irregular in their eating, sleeping, and bowel movements. Parents who are unaware of the different temperament styles often question their parenting skills due to the challenges faced by raising a child who has a difficult temperament. Research tells us that when parents recognize and understand what is needed to support a 'difficult temperament' parenting becomes a little easier. They understand the needs of their child and what is needed to best support them. These same parents also change their expectations to reflect their understanding of how their child will react and interact with the world around them. Research also tells us that when children with a 'difficult temperament' are supported by parents and educators they have the capacity to be more intellectually intelligent.



**Other:** About 40% of children do not fit into one of the above temperament styles. This 40% fall on different levels of the above traits and display a mixture of the temperament styles.

If you are interested in finding out what your child's temperament style is there are numerous website designed to help you see how they fall into the 9 above listed temperament traits.

Here are two sites for you to explore:

1. <https://www.ecmhc.org/temperament/>

This site allows you to select your own temperament traits and the temperament traits of your infant or toddler based on the nine areas of temperament. After completing the chart, the website will provide you with a list of tips and strategies specific to the different areas of temperament.

2. <https://centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/child-development/temperament-rating-scales/>

This site provides you with specific questions to help support you in identifying where your child fits on the scale for the 9 temperament traits. This site also includes a 10th trait which they call "Emotional Sensitivity to Self and Others". This website does not determine your child's temperament but does provides in depth information about all the traits. It also gives specific information on supporting your child based on where they fall on the scale by selecting

each trait individually. This is a direct link to the trait page - <https://centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/child-development/temperament-overview/>

## What is “Goodness of Fit”?

“Goodness of Fit” is a term used in psychology that describes how well a parent’s temperament matches their children’s temperament. Goodness of fit can also be used when a parent understands their child’s temperament and enhances their parenting style to best support their child’s temperament. When a child’s temperament is the opposite of their parents this can create challenges for parents. This is referred to as a “poor fit.” For example, a child who has a slow to warm up temperament might be a challenge for an easy going parent. An easy going parent may not understand why their child is shy, has difficulty in new situations or why they prefer to play alone. These parents may push their child into difficult situations without allowing time for the child to warm up or undermine their feelings by telling the child to “get over their shyness.” Similarly, if your child has a difficult temperament parents may feel their child is purposefully misbehaving or overreacting. However, research tells us that this behavior may be because a child is experiencing a high level of emotions because of something that has happened or a factor in the child’s environment.



When parents learn about their child’s temperament and understand how their child interprets the world around them through a temperament lens they are better equip to support their child’s development. They are better able to understand their child’s point of view and support them through life challenges.



## How do I support my child’s temperament?

How best to support your child’s temperament is dependent on what style of temperament your little one has. All children thrive from predictable environments with stable routines and age appropriate expectations. However, children with a difficult temperament styles need these features even more than other children. These routines and patterns also help to support children

stay focused and on task as they tend to be easily distracted and low in persistence. Change is very disruptive for children with difficult temperaments and can trigger behavioural outbursts and challenging emotions. Children tend to thrive when their parent/caregiver talk about and support emotional intelligence, especially important for children with a difficult temperament style. This is because children with a difficult temperament tend to have very high levels of activity and very strong emotional reactions.



Slow to warm up children need time and support when asked to face new situations and challenges. Pushing too hard and too quickly can cause children with a slow to warm up temperament to become anxious and typically withdrawn in situations. Sharing that you understand their feelings and that it is okay to take sometime to get comfortable lets the child know they are supported by a caring adult. Also try and provide advance notice of upcoming events and changes to their routine. Children who are slow to warm up can also internalize their emotions and can be missed in a busy school environment because they tend to be quite and play peacefully alone. Letting your child's educator know about their temperament can help them to keep an eye out for them to help the educator know that calling on them without warning can cause anxiety for your child.

For children who have a mixed set of temperament traits it is important to understand what these traits are and how your child interprets the world. For questions or concerns about your child's temperament and how best to support their development you can speak to your doctor, nurse practitioner, or child's educator. There are also tons of great resources, articles and websites full of information. If you are looking for more information, try and ensure that you are visiting official sites designed to support parents and families.

### Some Additional Resources:

#### Temperament

- [https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/the\\_nine\\_traits\\_of\\_temperament](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/the_nine_traits_of_temperament)
- <https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/Article?contentid=499&language=English>
- <http://readyforlife.kera.org/ready-for-life/parents/temperament/>

## EYET EarlyON Child and Family Centres

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/How-to-Understand-Your-Childs-Temperament.aspx>

### Difficult Temperament

- <https://www.rickhanson.net/working-challenging-child-temperaments/>
- <https://www.easternflorida.edu/community-resources/child-development-centers/parent-resource-library/documents/parenting-the-difficult-temperament.pdf>
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Strategies-and-Solutions-For-Handling-A-Difficult-Child.aspx>

### Slow to Warm Up

- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/13-supporting-a-child-who-is-slow-to-warm-up>
- <https://www.easternflorida.edu/community-resources/child-development-centers/parent-resource-library/documents/parenting-the-slow-to-warm-temperament.pdf>
- <http://www.drrobertbrooks.com/pdf/0003.pdf>