Temperament Determines How We Act and React

Everyone is born with their own unique temperament. We cannot change it, but we can be aware of what we are like and make adjustments in how we deal with life and other people. It’s good for a parent to be aware of temperamental differences. Your child’s temperament may not be the same as yours. That does not mean there is something wrong with your child or with you, but you do need to adjust your reactions to the needs of your child.

There are three basic temperament types – easy or flexible; difficult, active, or feisty; and slow to warm up or cautious. Most children fall into one of these categories, but some have a combination of these patterns. Parents need to understand this so they can adjust their parenting expectations to their child’s temperament. One of the temperament styles will probably be the dominant one for your child, but aspects of the other types may also be factors.

- Easy or flexible children are usually happy, calm, and have regular habits for eating and sleeping. They adapt easily to new situations and do not become upset easily. Children with this temperament probably won’t express frustrations. If your child fits this category it is important to have good communication so you know what your child is thinking and feeling and so you can be helpful when it is needed.

- Difficult, active, or feisty children may be fussy, easily upset by changes, have irregular eating and sleeping patterns, are high strung, and are intense in their reactions. They need lots of active play to work out frustrations and use up energy. It’s good for them to have chances to make choices when it’s appropriate so they feel successful. They need warnings before upcoming changes and guidance in how to deal with those changes.

  - Slow to warm up or cautious children are sometimes labeled shy. They tend to be inactive, fussy, and withdraw or act negatively when faced with new situations. These children do respond positively after learning from a prior experience. Daily routines they can count on help these children acquire skills they need to gain confidence and independence.

Are you a calm person with a child who is extremely excitable? If so, teach your child how to think before she acts. If you are outgoing and your child is shy, be sensitive to this and assist him gently to deal with new situations. Take time to learn and understand what you are like. Don’t expect your child to be just like you. Make allowances for differences in your temperaments. If you have more than one child, each one may have a different temperament. Learn the best ways to help each child. This will make life easier for all of you.

Resources: Kathy K. Oliver, 2002, Family and Consumer Sciences and Community Development Agent, Hardin County, Ohio State University Extension, The Ohio State University

For more information:  www.ohioline.osu.edu/ffm02/pdf/fs05.pdf
www.temperament.com/parenting.html