

How the 9 Temperament Traits Affect Behavior

Sensitivity:

High sensitivity children are like radios with the antennas up, only they are not picking up just one station but ALL the stations at once. Sensitive children may notice everything from the tag in their tee-shirt to the temperature of their milk. They often perceive minute changes in their environments. Because of this, they can become easily overwhelmed or over-stimulated, especially in busy environments. They perceive others' feelings and their own feelings may be easily hurt. They are very empathetic and conscientious.

Low sensitivity children are not usually bothered by sand in their shoe or a playmate's critical remarks. He may have difficulty picking up social cues or nuances and be unaware of the effects of his behavior on others. He is more likely to take risks because he is not reflective or observant, and he is not slowed down by a slight injury. The low sensitive child may not indicate that he is ill as soon as a sensitive child. These children are often viewed as resilient or "tough."

Activity Level:

High activity children have a zest for life. Their activity level propels them into the world to explore and experience it. They are independent and insist on doing things themselves. They approach a task with their entire body and learn by doing, not watching. They go through motor milestones earlier than less active children and they excel at gross motor skills. They are often in constant motion. They can exhaust caregivers. They dislike being confined. When in high activity pursuits they are hard to slow down.

Low activity children move more slowly. Sometimes their physical slowness is viewed as intellectual slowness which is not accurate. They excel at fine motor coordination. Their caregivers don't have to worry about them running off into a crowd or jumping from a high play structure. Because their low activity level, they are dependent on adults longer and are content to "stay put." They move through gross motor milestones more slowly.

Intensity of Reaction:

Intense children are LOUD and DRAMATIC. Their emotional highs are higher and their lows are lower than typical so others often think they over react to situations. They are expressive whether happy, sad or angry. No one has to guess how intense children are feeling. Intensity colors how other temperament traits are expressed.

Low intensity children are quiet and subdued in their emotional expression. Instead of having a tantrum, a low intensity child may fuss mildly. Adults may not recognize how the child is feeling.

Rhythmicity:

Children high in rhythmicity are very predictable in eating, sleeping and elimination patterns. You can set your watch by them. They adapt easily to schedules but have problems when the schedule is changed. They may have trouble with day light savings time or adjusting to different time zones. They make toilet learning easier.

Children low in rhythmicity have varying sleep, eating and toileting patterns from day to day. It is difficult to schedule regular meal or bed times. They may have disorderly rooms, misplace possessions and have fewer set routines.

Adaptability:

Highly adaptable children can shift to a new activity quickly from one situation to the next. Because of their adaptability they may be overlooked or taken advantage of by less adaptable children.

The Temperament Perspective: Working with Children's Behavioral Styles, Jan Kristal, 2005

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Slow adapting children have difficult times with changes and intrusions. They like to know what to expect, when to expect it. Little things may set off large reactions. Slow adapting children like to control situations when they don't know what to expect. The slow adapting child loves structure and schedules.

Mood:

Children with positive moods are generally happier and less easily upset. This trait is greatly affected by the other temperament traits and goodness of fit. This trait is viewed as a downstream trait. For example a highly sensitive child, low adapting, intense children may have reasons to exhibit more negative mood than the low sensitive, adaptable, less intense child. Because of this, some temperament assessment tools have eliminated the quality of mood.

Approach/Withdrawal:

Approaching children are attracted by novelty. If it is new, they want to investigate it. They approach new people, things, and places. They can be accident prone, especially if they are highly active. They are sociable and outgoing and tend to be hands on learners.

Withdrawing children need time to warm up to novel stimulation. They are cautious with new people, things and places. They prefer the familiar. They avoid risky situations. Anything novel is initially rejected. They are observers, not doers and learn by watching. These children are described as shy but may be quite outgoing once they are used to a situation or in a familiar surroundings.

Persistence:

Highly persistent children like to finish what they start. They also practice a new task over and over until they master it. They often have a hard time stopping an activity before it is finished. The ability to stick with a task or behavior may cause them to be labeled "stubborn." Persistent children are able to play on their own and have excellent attention spans.

Low persistent children have difficulty maintaining attention and may move from one thing to another, especially if they are unable to achieve a goal quickly. They are often overwhelmed by difficult tasks. They become irritated with obstacles and delays. They often need caregivers to relieve their frustrations. Because of this, they like to have the caregiver close by and may protest separations. Their low persistence makes it easier for them to switch between activities.

Distractibility:

Highly distractible children are perceptive. They notice everything from a person walking past the door to the noise the refrigerator makes when it turns on. They are often side tracked by these distractions. Their high perceptions make it difficult for them to focus on one in a busy environment but they have an excellent eye for detail. These children move from one activity to another because something new catches their eye.

Low distractible children have endless focus. When concentrating on something, they can block out all other stimuli. Nothing diverts their attention. They differ from a highly persistent child since a highly persistent child becomes distracted by something but they return to finish the task at hand. The low distractible child is difficult to be soothed.