

The Benefit of Understanding a Child's Temperament

Hello and welcome to the Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs website. We're delighted that you have joined us. My name is Robin. Today we're going to be discussing child temperament.

It is obvious from birth that children have their own unique personalities, likes and dislikes. For example, some babies LOVE their pacifier and want one from day one. Others won't take a pacifier for anything! Some babies come into this world screaming at the top of their lungs and others are very passive and quiet. When working with children, it is extremely beneficial to become aware of their specific personality traits to help us better understand each child. This means we are learning the child's temperament and what makes them who they are. Let's talk about some of these different temperament characteristics.

Let's start with activity levels, which vary greatly. From the beginning, some babies are what we describe as "restless sleepers", which means they move constantly in their beds while others sleep very soundly. Some toddlers seem to be on the go all day while others prefer to sit quietly and listen to a story. Does this make one baby "good" and one "bad"? By no means! But understanding the child's activity level can help us determine ways to keep the child occupied and learning.

What about encountering new situations or new people? Some babies are very curious and jump right in with exploring the environment and smiling at everyone they meet. Others are very cautious and need to study their surroundings and people before feeling comfortable getting down and interacting. They may need more reassurance during new situations and more time to adapt.

With some babies it is easy to predict when they will eat, sleep and even have a bowel movement. Other babies are much more unpredictable. Paying close attention to the child's body signals will help us to understand her wants and needs.

Babies have different thresholds for distress. One might wake and wait patiently to be fed while another may scream until they are fed. One child may take a tumble while learning to walk and pick themselves right back up while another will take longer to recover. Understanding a child's threshold for distress helps us determine if their crying means slight distress or a bigger problem.

Attention span or the ability to focus is another important characteristic. Some children are able to focus in on a task no matter what is going on around them while others are easily distracted by noises or movements in the room. Understanding the child's attention span will help you provide an effective learning environment for him.

All of these characteristics help describe the child's temperament and help us to understand what makes each child a unique individual. Temperament in parenting is important. Since parents can't change or determine the child's

temperamental style, parenting needs to be molded around the child's temperament. When we try to make the child fit our concept of perfection, we usually end up frustrating ourselves and the child. A better approach is to observe and learn about the child's behavioral style, or temperament, and then change the way that we react to the situation.

We hope this information proves helpful and useful to you. And remember.....babies can't wait!