

# Temperament Continuum

## HANDOUT 23

Place the initials of each of the children in your care on the continuum for each trait based on your observations and discussions with the child's family. Then, write your initials where you feel you fall on each trait in the continuum. Use this tool to analyze where your temperament is similar and different to the children you care for. Then, knowing that it is the adult who must adjust to make the "fit" good, use the suggestions above to create care strategies that provide the best possible experience for each child.



### ☀ Activity Level:

#### **Very Active**

wiggle and squirm, difficulty sitting still

#### **Not Active**

sit back quietly, prefer quiet sedentary activities

### ☀ Distractibility:

#### **Very Distractible**

Difficulty concentrating

Difficulty paying attention when engaged in an activity

Easily distracted by sounds or sights during activities

#### **Not Distractible**

High degree of concentration

Pays attention when engaged in an activity

Not easily distracted by sounds or sights during activities

### ☀ Intensity:

#### **Very Intense**

Intense positive and negative emotions

Strong reactions

#### **Not Intense**

Muted emotional reactions

### ☀ Regularity:

#### **Very Regular**

Predictable appetite, sleep patterns, elimination

#### **Not Regular**

Unpredictable appetite, sleep patterns, elimination

### ☀ Sensory Threshold:

#### **High Threshold**

Not sensitive to physical stimuli including sounds, tastes, touch, temperature changes

Falls asleep anywhere, tries new foods, wears new clothing easily

#### **Low Threshold**

Sensitive to physical stimuli including sounds, tastes, touch, temperature changes

Picky eater, difficulty sleeping in strange crib/bed

### ☀ Approach/Withdrawal:

#### **Tendency to Approach**

Eagerly approaches new situations or people

#### **Tendency to Withdraw**

Hesitant and resistant when faced with new situations, people, or things.

### ☀ Adaptability:

#### **Very Adaptable**

Transitions easily to new activities and situations

#### **Difficulty Adapting**

Has difficulty transitioning to new activities or situations

### ☀ Persistence:

#### **Persistent**

Continues with a task or activity in the face of obstacles

Doesn't become frustrated easily

#### **Easily Frustrated**

Moves on to a new task or activity when

faced with obstacles. Gets frustrated easily

### ☀ Mood:

#### **Positive Mood**

Reacts to the world in a positive way, generally cheerful

#### **Serious Mood**

Reacts to situations negatively, mood is generally serious

<sup>1</sup> ZERO TO THREE, Retrieved from worldwideweb [http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key\\_temp](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_temp) June 11, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Dimensions of temperament (found in several places and merged/adapted).

<sup>3</sup> WestEd. (1995). The Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers' (PITC) Trainers Manual, module 1: Social-emotional growth and socialization (p. 21). Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, Chess, Birch, Hertzog, & Korn, 1963.

# Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

We welcome your feedback on this What Works Brief. Please go to the CSEFEL Web site (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel>) or call us at (866) 433-1966 to offer suggestions.

---

## Where Do I Find More Information on Temperament?

See the CSEFEL Web site (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel>) for additional resources.

Blackwell, P. L. (2004, March). *The idea of temperament: Does it help parents understand their fussy babies?* Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

California Department of Education, Child Development Division and Far West Laboratory, Center for Child and Family Studies. (1990). *The program for infant/toddler caregivers*. Sacramento, CA.

Honig, A. S. (2005, April). Infants & toddlers: Getting to know babies' temperaments. *Early Childhood Today*, 19(6), 20-23.

Keogh, B. K. (2002). *Temperament in the classroom: Understanding individual differences*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Kristal, J. (2004). *The temperament perspective: Working with children's behavioral styles*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Lerner, C., & Dombro, A. L. (2005). *Bringing up baby: Three steps to making good decisions in your baby's first years*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

Parlakian, R., & Seibel, N. L. (2002). *Building strong foundations: Practical guidance for promoting the social-emotional development of infants and toddlers*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

Strum, L. (2004). *Temperament in early childhood: A primer for the perplexed*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

Wittmer, D. S. & Petersen, S. H. (2006). *Infant and toddler development and responsive program planning: A relationship-based approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice-Hall.

---

This *What Works Brief* is part of a continuing series of short, easy-to-read, "how to" information packets on a variety of evidence-based practices, strategies, and intervention procedures. The Briefs are designed to help teachers and other caregivers support young children's social and emotional development. In-service providers and others who conduct staff development activities should find them especially useful in sharing information with professionals and parents. The Briefs include examples and vignettes that illustrate how practical strategies might be used in a variety of early childhood settings and home environments.

*This material was developed by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (Cooperative Agreement N. PHS 90YD0215). The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nor does mention of trade names, commercial projects, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. You may reproduce this material for training and information purposes. 10/2010*

Newsletter constructed by the Graphics Core of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University. [kc.vanderbilt.edu](http://kc.vanderbilt.edu)  VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER  
FOR RESEARCH ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT