



Temperament Lines

Module: I
Topic: Temperaments
Type: Mixer/IceBreaker and Discussion
Group Size: Large or Small Groups
Time: 30 minutes

Purpose:

1. To help participants identify and rate their own temperament traits.
2. To develop an understanding of the positive and negative aspects of each temperament trait.

What you will need:

Participant Materials	Trainer Materials	Equipment
<p>The following handouts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> :: Your Temperament Assessment :: Temperament Chart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> :: PITC Module I Trainer manual <i>Social-Emotional Growth and Socialization: Temperament handouts</i> :: PITC Video: <i>Flexible, Fearful and Feisty</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> :: TV/VCR

Directions:

1. Ask participants to stand in a line across the length or width of the room.
2. Explain that you will read the description of one temperament trait, and then ask them to rate themselves. Explain that you will designate one of end of the line as “most” (e.g. active) and the other end of the line as “least” (e.g. active).
3. Read the questions for the first trait and point to one end as “most” and the other end as “least”. Explain that they can place themselves anywhere along the line where they feel they fit.
4. When the group is lined up, ask them to look at where they are in relation to the group. Ask if there are any surprises about where people have placed themselves. Discuss issues of self perception and the social environment.
5. Ask the participants who are at the “least” end to say why they are there and what they like about being there, or what they think are the advantages of their position.
6. Ask the participants who are at the “most” end to say why they are there and what they like about being there – and what the advantages are.
7. Ask participants in the middle to talk about why they have placed themselves there.
8. Repeat with each temperament trait.
9. Once activity is completed, show the first section of the PITC video, *Fearful, Flexible and Feisty*, stopping after viewing the 9 temperament traits in children.

PITC ACTIVITIES

Variations:

- :: If time is limited, choose 3 or 4 of the 9 temperament traits for the line up.
- :: If the group is large, ask for 10-12 volunteers to line up to rate themselves.
- :: Be sure to include participants from the large group in discussing the impact of the traits.

Links to Head Start Program Performance Standards:

- :: 1304.21(a)(1)(i)-(iii) Education and Early Childhood Development

Activity Developed by:

Cheryl Oku, PITC Certified Trainer

Source Material:

Mangione, P.L., Lally, J.R., & Signer, S. (2000). *Module 1: Social Emotional Growth and Socialization Trainer Manual*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

WestEd. (1990) *Flexible, Fearful, Feisty: The Different Temperaments of Infants and Toddlers* (Video) Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.



Handout #4

Nine Temperament Traits of Infants and Toddlers

(from "Temperaments of Infants and Toddlers" by Stella Chess, M.D., in *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Social-Emotional Development*)

Temperamental Traits and Their Handling

In describing the nine different traits, I will emphasize the extremes in each case - for example, high levels of energy or sensitivity versus low levels - because children with these traits are the ones most likely to need special attention or handling. I will give typical examples of how very young children express such traits and suggest the best caregiving approaches to take.

The majority of children display temperament at a level somewhere in between the extremes of temperament, and these children will fit into home or child care routines fairly easily. In this sense, temperament is similar to intelligence, that is, children of low average or very high intelligence may require special attention, and those of average or slightly superior intelligence will adapt to the routine school curriculum without great difficulty. We will also look at how these specific traits often combine in a child's overall makeup to form a certain major type of behavior.

1. *Activity Level:* Amount of movement and bodily activity

High Activity

The child who is highly active prefers games and play with a lot of movement, kicks and splashes in the bath, likes to run around, gets restless and distressed if made to sit quietly in one spot for long periods. Give a child with this level of activity opportunities for active play. If the group is engaged in some quiet activity, let this type of child move around from time to time.

Low Activity

The child with low activity prefers quiet games and can sit calmly looking at picture books or coloring for long periods of time. Because this child moves slowly, she or he is sometimes teased as a slowpoke. You should expect that it will take a child with this level of activity extra time to get things done, such as dressing or moving from one place to another.

2. *Biological Rhythms:* Regularity or irregularity of such functions as sleep-wake cycle, hunger, and bowel elimination

Handout #4 (cont'd)

Nine Temperament Traits of Infants and Toddlers

Regularity

The regular child sleeps through the night, takes a regular nap, eats about the same amount from day to day, and has a bowel movement about the same time each day. This child presents no problem with feeding or sleeping schedules and is usually easily toilet trained.

Irregularity

In contrast to the regular child, this one varies in sleep habits and hunger patterns, and she or he may wake up several times at night. The irregular child's big meal may be lunch one day and dinner the next, and her or his bowel movements are unpredictable. You should accept this child's irregular nap and feeding schedules. The child can be trained to sleep through the night if not picked up every time she or he cries. Toilet training will usually take longer and may not succeed until the child learns to be consciously aware of the internal sensation that signals a bowel movement.

3. ***Approach/Withdrawal:*** How the child responds to a new situation or other stimulus

Approach

The approacher responds positively to a new food by swallowing it, reaches for a new toy, smiles at strangers, and when first joining a play group, plunges right in. Such a child presents few problems to the caregiver, except when this responsiveness is combined with a high level of activity. Then the approacher may run impulsively to climb a new high rock or jungle gym which she or he cannot really manage or try to explore a potentially dangerous object.

Withdraw

Typically cautious about exploring new objects, the withdrawer is likely to push away a new toy or to spit out new food the first few times. Around strangers or when first taken to a new place, this child may fuss or cry and strain to get away. You should be patient with these initial negative reactions. Pressuring the child to make an immediate positive adjustment only increases her or his discomfort and makes it harder for the child to accept new people and things. Instead, small repeated exposures to the unfamiliar let the child gradually overcome her or his early reluctance.

Handout #4 (cont'd)

Nine Temperament Traits of Infants and Toddlers

4. ***Adaptability***: How quickly or slowly the child adapts to a change in routine or overcomes an initial negative response.

High Adaptability

The quickly adaptive child adjusts easily to the family's move to a new home or a visit to a strange place. This child accepts new food that was first rejected after only a few trials, and this child is agreeable to changes in mealtimes and sleeping schedules. Such a child does not usually present problems to a caregiver. Occasionally, the youngster may give in too early to unreasonable requests for change, such as a playmate changing the rules in the middle of a game. The quickly adaptive child may benefit by encouragement to "stick to your guns."

Low Adaptability

By contrast, the slowly adaptive child takes a long time to adapt to change or to accept something new she or he originally rejected. Such a child is sometimes misjudged as stubborn or willfully uncooperative. A more accurate term would be cautious. Your approach should be the same as for the withdrawing child - being patient, giving the child a number of exposures to the change, and encouraging the child when she or he begins to show signs of adjusting. Pressure to make such a child adapt very quickly will only boomerang and have the opposite effect.

5. ***Quality of Mood***: The amount of pleasant, cheerful, and openly friendly behavior (positive mood) as contrasted with fussing, crying, and openly showing unfriendliness (negative mood)

Positive Mood

Smiling and laughing often, the child whose mood is positive is easily pleased and shows it openly. Fussing and crying are infrequent. This positive mood usually causes positive responses in adults, who find it easy to care for such children.

Handout #4 (cont'd)

Nine Temperament Traits of Infants and Toddlers

Negative Mood

The child whose mood is negative tends to fuss or complain a lot, even at trivial discomforts, and cry before going to sleep. The child may show little or no open expression of pleasure, even at games or other events which please, but rather will have deadpan expression. You should be sure to spot such a child. While not ignoring the child's fussing or complaining, respond cheerfully to her or him. You may find to your

surprise that although the child gives no outward evidence of pleasure at some special event, such as an expedition to the zoo, the child later reports it to her or his parents or friends as an exciting, happy event.

6. ***Intensity of Reactions:*** The energy level of mood expression, whether it is positive or negative.

Low Intensity

The low intensity child expresses both pleasure and discomfort in a low-key way. If happy, this child may smile or say quietly that she or he is pleased; if upset, the child may whine a little or fuss, but not loudly, or say quietly that she or he is unhappy. It is easy to misjudge and miss what is going on inside the child if you take the mild reactions as evidence that she or he is not really displeased or upset. Remember that mild expressions may mask strong emotions. Pay careful attention to such expressions and take seriously the feelings behind them.

High Intensity

By contrast, the high-intensity child expresses her or his feelings with great intensity. When happy, this child bubbles and laughs; when upset she or he cries loudly and may even have a tantrum. In this case you have an opposite task: to evaluate objectively whether the issue is important or trivial and not be guided only by the intensive reactions of the child.

7. ***Sensitivity Threshold:*** How sensitive the child is to potentially irritating stimuli

Handout #4 (cont'd)

Nine Temperament Traits of Infants and Toddlers

Low Threshold

The child with a low threshold may be easily upset by loud noises, bright lights, a wet or soiled diaper, or sudden changes in temperature. This child may not be able to tolerate tight socks or clothing with rough texture. You should be aware of and attend to those reactions but not try to change them.

High Threshold

The child with a high threshold is not bothered by the same kind of stimuli as the child with a low threshold is. You should check regularly to see if the infant has a wet or soiled diaper to avoid diaper rash. Otherwise, this child may be content to suffer the diaper irritation because this child's high threshold keeps her or him from feeling irritated and uncomfortable.

8. ***Distractibility:*** How easily the child can be distracted from an activity like feeding or playing by some unexpected stimulus - the ringing of a telephone or someone entering the room

High Distractibility

The highly distractible child may start and look up at the sound of a door closing softly. As one parent put it, half the solid food feeding went into the child's ear because she constantly turned her head at small noises or glimpses of movement. In the early childhood period, the tendency can be an asset to the caregiver. The child who is fussing at being dressed or is poking at an electric outlet can be easily distracted by showing her or him a toy or other attractive object. In older childhood, however, when persistent concentration on a task like homework is welcomed, high distractibility may not be such a desirable trait.

Low Distractibility

The child who is not easily distracted tends to stick to an activity despite other noises, conversations, and people around her or him. This is desirable at certain items, such as feeding or dressing, when the child's full attention makes her or him cooperative. But low distractibility creates a problem if the child is intent on trying to reach a hot stove and will not be easily diverted; the child may have to be removed from the situation.

Handout #4 (cont'd)

Nine Temperament Traits of Infants and Toddlers

9. ***Persistence/Attention Span:*** Two closely related traits, with persistence referring to how long a child will stay with a difficult activity without giving up, and attention span referring to how long the child will concentrate before her or his interest shifts

High Persistence

The highly persistent child with a long attention span will continue to be absorbed in what she or he is doing for long periods of time. In the early childhood years, the highly persistent child is often easy to manage, because once absorbed in an activity, the child does not demand your attention. However, the child may get upset and even have a tantrum if she or he is forced to quit in the middle of an activity, for example, at bedtime, mealtime, or departure time at a child care center. In such cases, you should warn the child in advance if time is limited, or you may decide to prevent the child from starting an activity that will have to be ended abruptly. The highly persistent child may also keep badgering to get something she or he wants, even after a firm refusal.

Low Persistence

The child with low persistence and a short attention span will not stick with a task that is difficult or requires a long period of concentration. If the bead does not go on the string right away, or if the peg does not slip into the hole after a few pokes, the child will give up and move on to something else. This child presents few caregiving problems in the early stages of childhood. Later, however, a short attention span and lack of persistence make learning at school and home difficult.

Handout #5

Three Temperament Types

The Easy or Flexible Child (about 40% of most groups of children)

Typically, the easy child is regular in biological rhythms, optimistically approaches most new situations, adapts quickly, and has a predominantly positive mood of low or medium intensity. Such a child is indeed easy for the caregiver. She or he is easily toilet trained, learns to sleep through the night, has regular feeding and nap routines, takes to most new situations and people pleasantly, usually adapts to change quickly, is generally cheerful, and expresses her or his distress or frustration mildly. In fact, children with easy temperaments may show very deep feelings with only a single tear rolling down a cheek.

The Difficult or Feisty Child (about 10 percent of children)

The difficult child is the opposite of the easy child. The child may be hard to get to sleep through the night, her or his feeding and nap schedules may change from day to day, and the child may be difficult to toilet train because of irregular bowel movements. The difficult child typically fusses or even cries loudly at anything new and usually adapts slowly. All too often this type of child expresses an unpleasant or disagreeable mood and, if frustrated, may even have a temper tantrum. In contrast to the "easy" child's reaction, an intense, noisy reaction by the difficult child may not signify a depth of feeling. Often the best way to handle such outbursts is just to wait them out.

Caregivers who do not understand this type of temperament as normal sometimes feel resentment at the child for being so difficult to manage. They may scold, pressure or appease the child, which only reinforces her or his difficult temperament and is likely to result in a true behavior problem. Understanding, patience, and consistency, on the other hand, will lead to a "goodness of fit," with a final positive adjustment to life's demands.

The Slow-to-Warm-Up or Fearful Child (about 15% of children)

Finally, there is a group of children who are often called shy. The child in this group also has discomfort with the new and adapts slowly, but unlike the difficult child, this child's negative mood is often expressed slowly and the child may or may not be irregular in sleep, feeding, and bowel elimination. This is the child who typically stands at the edge of the group and clings quietly to her or his mother when taken to a store, a birthday party, or a child care program for the first time. If the child is pressured or pushed to joining the group, the child's shyness immediately becomes worse. But if allowed to become accustomed to the new surroundings at her or his own pace, this child can gradually become an active, happy member of the group.

Handout #6

The Temperament Assessment Scale for Children

By answering the following questions for each child, you can increase your understanding of the temperaments of the children you serve. Refer to Handout #4 to help complete the scale.

1. **Activity Level.** How much does the child wiggle and move around when being read to, sitting at a table, or playing alone?

High Activity 1 3 5 Low Activity

2. **Regularity.** Is the child regular about eating times, sleeping times, amount of sleep needed, and bowel movements?

Regular 1 3 5 Irregular

3. **Adaptability.** How quickly does the child adapt to changes in her or his schedule or routine? How quickly does the child adapt to new foods and places?

Adapts quickly 1 3 5 Slow to adapt

4. **Approach/Withdrawal.** How does the child usually react the first time to new people, new foods, new toys, and new activities?

Initial approach 1 3 5 Initial withdrawal

5. **Physical Sensitivity.** How aware is the child of slight noises, slight differences in temperature, differences in taste, and differences in clothing?

Not sensitive 1 3 5 Very sensitive

6. **Intensity of Reaction.** How strong or violent are the child's reactions? Does the child laugh and cry energetically, or does she or he just smile and fuss mildly?

High intensity 1 3 5 Mild reaction

7. **Distractibility.** Is the child easily distracted, or does she or he ignore distractions? Will the child continue to work or play when other noises or children are present?

Very distractible 1 3 5 Not distractible

8. **Positive or Negative Mood.** How much of the time does the child show pleasant, joyful behavior compared with unpleasant crying and fussing behavior?

Positive mood 1 3 5 Negative mood

9. **Persistence.** How long does the child continue with one activity? Does the child usually continue if it is difficult?

Long attention span 1 3 5 Short attention span