

Eyes on



Temperament

Understanding your child's
unique personality



Centre of Excellence
for Early Childhood
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE
CLUSTER ON EARLY

child development

PARENTS



“Children’s temperament develops early in life. It is influenced by biology and experiences.”

What do we know?

- Children are born with their unique personalities. Some smile and reach out to explore. Others are irritable and fearful. Even week-old babies have differences.
- Children’s temperament develops early in life. It is influenced by biology and experiences (e.g., parenting).
- Some features of temperament include:
 - Activity level: How active (hyper) is your child?
 - Positive feelings: How often does your child laugh or smile in the presence of others?
 - Negative feelings: How easily does your child become fearful, frustrated, irritable and sad?
 - Reactions to the unknown: How comfortable is your child with new people and situations?
 - Attention and concentration level: How well does your child pay attention and focus on a task?
- Children’s temperament has an impact on how they get along with others, their mental health and how well they do at school.
 - Children who are fearful and inhibited tend to be better at understanding the feelings of others. But they are also more likely to become anxious and depressed.
 - Children who learn to manage their impulses can pay attention for longer periods and stay focused on a task.
- Fortunately, although children are born with a bias towards a given temperament, they can learn to overcome the more challenging aspects.
- Children’s temperament and developmental outcomes (e.g., impulsivity, fearfulness) can also be changed naturally over time or through interventions.
- Different parenting strategies work better for children with certain temperaments. Parents can help by learning about their child’s temperament and adapting their behaviour and demands to it.

Paying attention to...

What can be done?

... the way your infant reacts to unfamiliar sounds, sights and smells.

- Observe your infant. Does he approach or avoid new situations?
- Try to understand his unique temperament.
- Be open to changing the way you interact with your infant based on his temperament.

... whether your child is shy, afraid and withdrawn when he is in new situations or around new people.

- Encourage him to explore new surroundings and situations.
- Try not to be over-protective.
- Be gentle with your child when you need to discipline him.
- Build a secure attachment with your child.
- Be sensitive to your child's feelings and needs.

... whether your child is fearless and takes too many risks.

- Set firm boundaries.
- Provide consistency in his everyday schedule.
- Be warm and use gentle discipline strategies.

... whether your child acts before thinking (if he is impulsive) or finds it hard to pay attention and stay focused on a task.

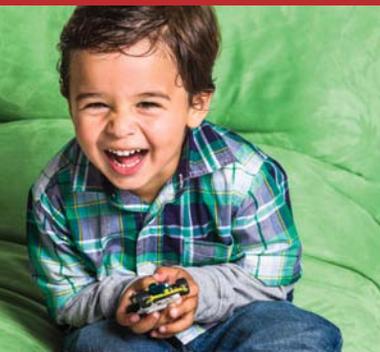
- Provide consistent discipline.
- Be calm and gentle when you discipline.
- Reward and praise his good behaviour (e.g., *Good job! You really focused on building that tower and finished it off.*)

... whether your child is often hyper when it's time to be calm and quiet.

- Teach and model behaviours that are more socially acceptable.
- Consider specific interventions including training your child to develop self-regulation skills if you think he might need it.

... the way you react to your child's temperament. These reactions may improve or worsen your child's behaviours depending on his temperament.

- Seek out support and education to learn about effective parenting strategies to improve your child's positive behaviours.



Encyclopedia
on Early Childhood
Development

Coordinator:
Valérie Bell

Collaborators:
Mélanie Joly
Kristell Le Martret

Copy editor:
Lana Crossman

Graphic design:
DesJardins Conception Graphique inc.

Photo credit page 2:
Aristeea Dobrinescu



Centre of Excellence
for Early Childhood
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE
CLUSTER ON EARLY
child development

Prévention^{MD}
Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon



THE
LAWSON
FOUNDATION

Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of temperament, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at www.child-encyclopedia.com.

Several organizations financially support the CEECD and the SKC-ECD, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Université Laval, and private foundations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies of these organizations.

We are grateful to the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research for their financial contributions to produce this information sheet and to The Lawson Foundation for its financial support of this revised edition.

Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development

Université de Montréal
3050, Édouard-Montpetit Blvd., GRIP
P.O. Box 6128, succursale Centre-ville
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7

Telephone: 514.343.6111, extension 2541
Fax: 514.343.6962

E-mail: cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca

Websites: www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca and www.skc-ecd.ca

In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

