Eyes on

Temperament:
A life-long influence

PRACTITIONERS

CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN’S WELL-BEING
Early Childhood Development
Children’s temperaments have an impact on their social competence and mental health.

What do we know?

- The way that people behave and react to situations is influenced in part by their temperament. All children are born with a tendency toward a particular temperament.

- Children’s temperament influences
  - their level of activity
  - their level of fear, frustration, sadness and discomfort
  - how readily they approach new people and situations
  - their ability to pay attention, focus on and complete a task, and manage impulses.

- Children’s temperaments have an impact on their social competence and mental health.

- Certain temperamental features predict future behaviours:
  - Children who are fearful and inhibited, tend later to be more empathetic. But they are also more at risk of suffering from anxiety and depression.
  - Children who are able to pay attention for longer periods and able to restrain themselves, tend later to be able to manage their impulses and stay focused on a goal. They will also be more likely to pay attention for longer periods.

- Genetics plays a strong role in shaping temperament, but environmental factors can also influence it.

- The way parents and caregivers respond and adapt to children, can mitigate challenging aspects of their temperament.
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<th>Paying attention to...</th>
<th>What can be done?</th>
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<td>... an irritable, impulsive, timid or hyperactive child. He may be perceived negatively by adults and peers.</td>
<td>■ Observe the children in your care to become familiar with their temperaments. ■ Inform and support the parents so they can react in a warm and loving way.</td>
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<td>... a child who sometimes is aggressive and irritable and behaves in challenging ways due to his temperament.</td>
<td>■ Advise parents to adopt a constructive parental style and set clear boundaries.</td>
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<td>... a shy child. He has an even greater need to be encouraged.</td>
<td>■ Encourage him to explore new surroundings and situations. ■ Advise parents to try not to be over-protective. ■ Suggest that parents be gentle in their discipline.</td>
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<td>... a fearless child.</td>
<td>■ Encourage parents to provide sensitive care and build a strong attachment to help him to develop self-awareness.</td>
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<td>... adapting to children’s temperaments. This can help children overcome the more challenging aspects of their temperaments, leading to more positive outcomes.</td>
<td>■ Try to be flexible in your approach to children. ■ Adapt as much as possible to best suit their temperament. ■ Share with parents the strategies that you use with children of particular temperaments. ■ Support parents to build a secure attachment with their children.</td>
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<td>... skills associated with self-regulation (e.g.: controlling one’s thoughts, behaviours and emotions, being able to plan a course of action and correct one’s mistakes). These skills develop considerably during the first years of life.</td>
<td>■ Consider specific interventions including training for self-regulation skills for children who need it.</td>
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Information

The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development identifies and summarizes the best scientific work on the social and emotional development of young children. It disseminates this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.


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The masculine form was used in this document for reasons of readability.