Understanding how each of the nine temperamental traits identified by Chess and Thomas (1996) impacts a person’s (infant or adult) behavior is critical in providing responsive care and developing a close, caring relationship.

Temperament is the way you tend to behave or the types of emotions you tend to exhibit. How you tend to act or the kinds of feelings you exhibit are often assumed to be an early indication of personality. However, personality combines temperament with experiences to shape lifelong traits. These traits also determine how children learn and tend to behave, the types of emotions they have, and how they feel about and manage to act in the world around them. There is no right or wrong temperament—every person has a unique style of thinking, acting, and interacting with the world. Parents can tailor their parenting strategies to the particular temperamental characteristics of the child (Carey 1997).

**Nine Temperament Traits**

1. Activity level
2. Biological rhythms
3. Sensitivity
4. Intensity of reaction
5. Adaptability
6. Approach/withdrawal
7. Persistence
8. Distractibility
9. Mood

Chess and Thomas (1996)

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**What Influences Individual Differences in Temperament?**

Most of these traits are pretty stable throughout the life span.

**Things to Do Together—Match Your Child’s Style**

- Read your favorite childhood books together.
- Write stories.
- Play soccer. (Socks and a laundry basket work well.)
- Paint or draw.
- Create a fort in your living room out of blankets.
- Go on a walking adventure.
- Have a sunset picnic outside or inside.
- Play board games.
- Go to a playground.
- Play hide-and-seek.
- Have a pillow fight.

Kurcinka (1991)
Parenting Strategies for Slow-to-Adapt Children

- Establish clear routines.
- Prepare the child by discussing plans for the day when the routine changes.
- Prepare the child for transitions.
- Give warnings.
- Allow time for closure.
- Keep transitions to a minimum if possible.

Chess and Thomas (1996)

Parenting Strategies for Very Intense Children

- Provide activities that are soothing, such as a warm bath, massage, water play, or stories.
- Recognize and help the child learn to recognize the cues signaling that the intensity is rising.
- Use humor to diffuse intensity.
- Teach the child to use time away to calm down.
- Avoid overreacting to the child’s behavior and escalating intensity. Give calm, clear, brief feedback.

Turecki and Tonner (1989)

References


Penn State Extension Relatives as Parents Program

Many organizations and groups have emerged to support grandparents-raising-grandchildren families and help them navigate the unique set of emotional, legal, and daily living challenges they face. This program aims to expand supportive services available for Pennsylvania relative caregivers and the children they are raising, particularly in helping them find needed information and resources, locate and enroll in support groups that serve kinship care families, and engage in family-based recreational and relationship-enhancing activities. Learn more at https://aese.psu.edu/outreach/intergenerational/program-areas/kinship/relatives-as-parents-program-rapp.