

## Tips for Handling Problematic Temperament Traits

After gathering information and rating your child's temperament, did you find any traits that fell at either end of the continuum? Although the whole scale represents a normal temperament range — high and low do not mean “dysfunctional” — some extreme traits can be problematic for kids at home, at school, and in the community. And remember that for kids with learning or behavior difficulties, certain traits can either help or hinder success.

### Tips for Managing the Extremes

Here are some tips for helping your child modify the traits that might be problematic for her. If you have other ideas that have worked, please share them on our [Parent to Parent message board](#).

#### Activity Level

For the child with very **high** energy:

- Heed the signals that indicate it's time for your child to blow off steam and find a way to let her do so.
- Incorporate some active time during the day. Walk to school instead of driving, or stop at the park on the way to go grocery shopping.
- Avoid using confinement as a method of discipline.

For the child with very **low** energy:

- Allow enough time for tasks and activities.
- Use a timer to set a goal for when a chore should be finished.
- Reward your child for sticking with a project and completing it in a timely fashion.

#### Sensitivity

For the child who shows **high** sensitivity:

- Acknowledge your child's feelings and provide ways for her to make herself more comfortable.
- Layer clothes to allow for adjustments on days that are too warm or too cold.
- Avoid overstimulation, e.g., loud music, strobe lights, noisy groups of people.

For the child who shows **low** sensitivity:

- Help her notice external cues by pointing out sounds in the environment, odors, and changes in the colors of stoplights.
- Explain interpersonal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, personal space.

#### Regularity

For the child who demonstrates **high** predictability:

- Provide advance warning of changes in routine.

- Help her learn to handle changes now to develop flexibility as she gets older.

For the child who shows **low** predictability:

- Create routines, even if they seem odd. Ask her to sit down with the family for dinner even if she's not hungry or go to bed at a regular time even if she's not sleepy.
- Reward successes, such as turning in a paper on time.

## Approach/Withdrawal

For the child who **approaches** new situations easily:

- Provide firm rules and close supervision. This child is curious!
- Teach her to use reasonable caution with new people or in new situations.

For the child who **withdraws**:

- Allow time to adjust to new situations; let her set the pace.
- Quietly encourage her, without pushing, to try new activities and make new friends.

## Adaptability

For the child who is **slow** to adapt:

- Give plenty of warning about transitions.
- Role play or practice expected behaviors before going into new situations.
- Acknowledge the stress she feels in new situations and encourage her to talk about it.

For the child who adapts **too easily**:

- Teach her to make her own decisions rather than just go along with her peer group.
- Encourage her to find out all she can about an activity before signing up and committing her time.

## Mood

For the child who tends to be **negative**:

- Try to ignore her general negative mood, but tune in to real distress.
- Encourage her to recognize and talk about the things that make her happy.
- Act as a role model for positive social interactions.

For the child who's always **positive**:

- Be sensitive to subtle signs of unhappiness that she may be bottling up inside.
- Teach appropriate ways to express feelings of sadness, anger, fear, and frustration.

## Intensity

For the child who is **less** responsive:

- Don't equate a lack of intensity with lack of feelings.
- Watch and listen carefully to pick up more subtle clues to problems.

For the child who is **overly** responsive:

- Teach her to control her emotional responses through anger management, self-talk, or calming strategies.

## **Persistence**

For the child who shows **low** persistence:

- Break tasks into small steps, and acknowledge small successes.
- Try timed work periods followed by short breaks.
- Reward her for sustained effort and finished assignments.

For the child who is **overly** persistent:

- Provide lots of warning before transitions.
- Remind him that it's not always possible to be perfect.

## **Distractibility**

For the child who is **highly** distractible:

- Reduce external distractions as much as possible.
- Keep instructions short.
- Use a special cue — gesture or word — to remind her to get back on task.

For the child who shows **low** distractibility:

- Cue her when it's time to move on to something new, e.g., say her name or touch her arm.
- Set a timer to remind her when to move on to the next task or activity.

## **Appreciate Your Whole Child**

No matter what your child's temperament, show respect and understanding; let her know you accept her the way she is. Her temperament traits combine to make her the very unique and special individual she is.

Remember that some traits seen as challenging in kids are valued later. The extremely open and approaching child becomes an adventurous and exploring adult who makes new discoveries. And the child with high energy and persistence could become the next Olympic gold medal winner!

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## Other Resources

### Books

Temperament Tools: Working with Your Child's Inborn Traits

[www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1884734340/schwabfoundation](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1884734340/schwabfoundation)

By Helen Neville and Diane Clark Johnson

Understanding Temperament: Strategies for Creating Family Harmony

[www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1884734324/schwabfoundation/](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1884734324/schwabfoundation/)

By Lyndall Shick