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## Your Child's Temperament: Some Basics

How often have you heard a child described as "easy" or "difficult" or "shy until you get to know her"? These casual labels all refer to characteristics of temperament, those traits that influence how your child reacts in various situations.

Researchers have described nine temperament traits which individually, or in combination, affect how well your child fits in at school, with peers, and even at home. Temperament influences how teachers, peers, and family relate to her, as well as how she relates to them. Your child's temperament directly affects how she approaches her school work and chores at home.

When a child's natural behavior doesn't fit with what is expected, social, family, or academic problems may arise. For a child with an identified learning disability (LD) or behavior issues, her particular temperament may help her achieve success more easily or it may compound her difficulties.

Behaviors for each temperament trait described below fall along a continuum. Responses toward either the high or low end — while still completely normal — may be cause for concern.

### The Nine Temperament Traits\*

**Activity Level:** amount of physical energy evident in typical daily activities and behavior.

Low Energy <-----> High Energy

At school, the more active child struggles to fit into an environment where suddenly she is expected to sit still for long periods of time. Her fidgeting and restlessness may disrupt the class and make it difficult for her to stay on task, but extra energy can be a benefit if channeled in a positive direction. In contrast, kids with low activity levels adapt well to a structured school day but may be viewed as unmotivated.

**Sensitivity:** sensory threshold, or how easily your child is bothered by changes in the environment.

Low sensitivity <-----> High Sensitivity

Kids who are highly sensitive are very aware of their environment and can be disrupted in countless ways: clothes may itch, noise may distract, the chair may be too hard. While these children often have a heightened awareness to others' thoughts and feelings, such a low sensory threshold may distract from studies and affect academic performance. Less sensitive kids are more tolerant of environmental sensations but may be slow to respond to warning signals, such as school bells and smoke detectors.

**Regularity:** rhythm or predictable recurrence of daily activities or routines (such as waking, hunger, becoming tired), a child's personal habits or patterns in after-school routines.

Low Predictability <-----> High Predictability

Children with high regularity enjoy a structured classroom but may have problems with changes in routine, such as a field trip. Kids with low regularity, on the other hand, may have difficulty following the school routine and cause disruptions in class, yet are less bothered when things don't go

