**Temperament**

Children differ in the intensity of their reactions to stimulation. These reactions to stimulation have two aspects: the **level of attention** children pay to the stimulation and the **intensity of their responses**, both physical and emotional. These underlying response differences help define a child’s **temperament**. Temperament is basically the child’s reactivity or expression of emotion.

- Differences in temperament influence...
  - Activity level,
  - Sociability,
  - Adaptability,
  - Reaction intensity,
  - Persistence, and
  - Mood.

A child’s temperament is measured by his/her responses on different scales. There are three broad factors or components of temperament which scales measure (Putnam, Sanson, & Rothbart, 2002, p. 257). They are...
  - Surgency,
  - Negative Affectivity, and
  - Effortful Control.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors of Temperament</th>
<th>Defined by...</th>
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<tr>
<td>Surgency</td>
<td>activity level, high intensity pleasure, approach and lack of shyness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Affectivity</td>
<td>fear, anger, frustration, discomfort, and lack of soothabilty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effortful control</td>
<td>attention focusing, low intensity pleasure, inhibitory control and perceptual sensitivity</td>
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**Temperament** characteristics are...
- Apparent early in a child’s life; however, they are not extremely stable until later.
- Demonstrated in different ways at different ages in children.

Although there are genetic or biological influences on temperament, a child can learn to control his or her natural propensities through the development of **self-regulation**.

CAREGIVER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Caregivers recognize the influence of temperament on children’s behavior after the birth of their second child. At this point caregivers realize their first child’s behavior is not entirely dependent on their child rearing practices. Approaches used with the first child might be ineffective with subsequent children and by the same token, behaviors of the first child which were considered problematic might be non-existent in a second child, or sometimes replaced with different problems (Putnam, Sanson, & Rothbart, 2002).

Interactions Influencing Temperament
The child’s temperament interacts with other environmental factors in the child’s life. It can influence caregiver-child interactions, family relations, and social support for the child. Children with different temperaments might react differently to the same or similar environments or caregiver-child interactions. For example, infants with “easy” temperaments react more positively to the environment and interactions with people, while infants with more “difficult” temperaments react in a more negative manner. The “goodness-of-fit” between a child’s temperament and his caregiver’s values and expectations is a major factor in how well the child develops emotionally and socially.

Influences on How Caregivers Interact with Children
Landy (2002, p.62) lists traits which influence interactions with children. They are listed in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Characteristic</th>
<th>Effect on Caregiving and Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gets angry easily</td>
<td>Has a short fuse and may lose temper easily with the child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tends to be introverted</td>
<td>May not expose child to necessary social experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to criticism</td>
<td>May overreact to child’s negativism or temper tantrums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractible</td>
<td>May find it difficult to be firm and to follow through on limits and directives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very anxious</td>
<td>May be very anxious and overprotective about child’s behavior and find it difficult to relax and be positive and optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionist</td>
<td>May have very high expectations for child’s behavior and achievements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Influences:
😊 A child’s temperament influences how the caregiver reacts to him.
😊 A child’s reactions influence the responses of people in the environment (Wachs, 1987).
😊 If caregivers do not have an understanding of child development and appropriate guidance techniques, the child might develop disciplinary problems making it difficult for the caregiver to assist the child in his development.
Caregivers with negative or distorted perceptions of their young children, tend to have negative interactions with them which in turn impact the children’s attachment to the caregiver. Some of these distortions develop from the caregivers’ experience of being cared for and their reactions to their own attachment experience.

Caregivers have strengths and weaknesses which are a result of their own parenting, temperament, and biological characteristics. As a result, caregivers feel confident in dealing with their children in some situations and have difficulties with dealing with others.

**Strategies Caregivers Can Use**

Landy (2002, p. 42) suggests a number of strategies caregivers can use to encourage their children’s development.

1. Spend time observing the child and relate his behavior to what you know about his developmental level.
2. Set up the environment and the child’s schedule to accommodate the child’s developmental characteristics.
3. Try to learn about the child’s temperament characteristics and any physical characteristics that may be contributing to his behavioral style.
4. Spend time changing negative labels into positive ones that reflect the child’s developmental stage and temperament type.
5. Identify behaviors that trigger anger and anxiety in yourself and see how you are affected by your own temperament characteristics.
6. Identify and adopt strategies that can help you adapt to the child’s special temperament characteristics.

**Interaction Impact on Development**

Early interactions between caregivers and children, particularly the affective tone of those interactions, have a profound effect on children’s development. A caregivers’ behavior towards a child influences his temperament. Adults help children learn how to control their behaviors and communicate their emotions. When caregivers are responsive to a child’s emotional needs, the child tends to develop better social and emotional interactions with others. It is important for caregivers to react to a child’s emotional upsets by comforting the child and acknowledging her distress instead of negating it. These interactions with caregivers teach children how to interact positively with others. When children have good relationships with adults they tend to develop good relationships with other children.


Social and emotional readiness is important for helping a child make a successful transition to kindergarten, be successful in the early grades, and do well later in life. Children are more likely to succeed in school if they are socially competent and emotionally ready. In other words, if the children understand their own emotions and those of others, can interpret and make known their feelings, take the perspective of others, and cooperate well with other children and adults, they will do better in school.

Common characteristics of young children:

😊 Four-year-old children are comfortable interacting in new situations when they have good relationships with familiar adults whom they trust.

😊 Children are more likely to obey directions given by familiar adults and are much more willing to have conversations with them.

😊 When children have good interpersonal relationships with adults in their lives, they tend to feel secure. Their sense of security leads to confidence they will be able to learn new things.

😊 Four-year-old children are learning how to interact with others.

😊 They are developing skills such as listening to others, asking questions, and having conversations with peers and adults.

😊 A child’s social-emotional development is very strongly connected to his/her self-concept and self-control.

Self-concept is a child’s evaluation of him or herself. Children tend to begin school with a positive self-concept; they believe they have good personal traits and others will like them. Some children need assistance in developing a more positive self-concept. Four-year-old children with a positive self-concept are confident in their interactions with others in the classroom. They like to participate in activities and feel free to indicate their preferences. These children enjoy exploration and like new toys and materials (Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Standards, 2008).

Most children have developed self-control by the time they enter prekindergarten. Preschoolers and kindergarteners are most successful when they have established routines. They like to have clear rules that are followed consistently. These routines and rules make it easier for children to maintain their self-control.