
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Parenting and Child Temperament

Reciprocal Relationships and Temperament

A reciprocal relationship is one in which the individuals influence one another. This reciprocity in relationships also applies to the relationship between parents and their children. Infants are born with a temperament or a personality. Some infants are easy, some are difficult, and some take some time to warm up to people. The child's temperament and the parents' personalities often interact and can sometimes lead to injuries. For example, some parents interact very negatively with their children, like yelling at them, criticizing them, etc. Those parents may have children with many behavior problems. The question remains, did the parents treat the children negatively all along and then the behavior problems developed or did the children have behavior problems that lead to the parents' negative interactions?

Styles of Temperament

Researchers have delineated three broad styles of temperament, as follows:

- Easy children are calm, happy, adaptable, regular in sleeping and eating habits, positive in mood and interested in new experiences.
- Difficult children are often fussy, irregular in feeding and sleeping habits, low in adaptability, fearful of new people and situations, easily upset, high strung, and intense in their reactions.
- Slow to warm up children are relatively inactive, reflective, tend to withdraw or to react negatively to novelty, but their reactions gradually become more positive with experience.

So, I've got a child with a difficult temperament, now what?

It's the mix or the "goodness of fit" between parent and child that matters most. The match or mismatch between a child and parent determines the harmony between them. Temperament, however, is not set in stone. Although temperament has been shown to be consistent over time, family environment and life experiences can make a difference. Parents, who are sensitive to their child's temperamental style and can recognize the child's unique strengths, will make family life smoother. For example, when faced with a new situation, a parent of a slow to warm up child may need to be patient and allow him more time to assess a situation. A difficult child may need advance rehearsal of the expected behavior to help her deal with the new situation.

References

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