

Temperament & Personality

- **Temperament:** constitutionally based individual differences in emotion, motor, reactivity and self-regulation that demonstrate consistency across situations and over time
- Temperament is biologically based: Heredity, neural, and hormonal factors affect response to the environment.
- Temperament can be modulated by environmental factors; parental response.

Examples of Thomas and Chess's Temperament Dimensions

TABLE 10.2

Examples of Thomas and Chess's Temperament Dimensions at Different Ages

Temperamental Quality	Rating	2 Months	2 Years	10 Years
Activity level	High	Moves often in sleep. Wriggles when diaper is changed.	Climbs furniture. Explores. Gets in and out of bed while being put to sleep.	Plays ball and engages in other sports. Cannot sit still long enough to do homework.
	Low	Does not move when being dressed or during sleep.	Enjoys quiet play with puzzles. Can listen to records for hours.	Likes chess and reading. Eats very slowly.
Rhythmicity	Regular	Has been on four-hour feeding schedule since birth. Regular bowel movement.	Eats a big lunch each day. Always has a snack before bedtime.	Eats only at mealtimes. Sleeps the same amount of time each night.
	Irregular	Awakes at a different time each morning. Size of feedings varies.	Nap time changes from day to day. Toilet training is difficult because bowel movement is unpredictable.	Food intake varies. Falls asleep at a different time each night.
Distractibility	Distractable	Will stop crying for food if rocked. Stops fussing if given pacifier when diaper is being changed.	Will stop tantrum if another activity is suggested.	Needs absolute silence for homework. Has a hard time choosing a shirt in a store because they all appeal to him.
	Not distractible	Will not stop crying when diaper is changed. Fussing after eating, even if rocked.	Screams if refused some desired object. Ignores mother's calling.	Can read a book while television is at high volume. Does chores on schedule.
Approach/withdrawal	Positive	Smiles and licks washcloth. Has always liked bottle.	Slept well the first time he stayed overnight at grandparents' house.	Went to camp happily. Loved to ski the first time.
	Negative	Rejected cereal the first time. Cries when strangers appear.	Avoids strange children in the playground. Whimpers first time at beach. Will not go into water.	Severely homesick at camp during first days. Does not like new activities.

Adapted from Thomas, Chess, and Birch (1970)

Temperament Dimensions (continued)

TABLE 10.2

Examples of Thomas and Chess's Temperament Dimensions at Different Ages

Temperamental Quality	Rating	2 Months	2 Years	10 Years
Adaptability	Adaptive	Was passive during first bath; now enjoys bathing. Smiles at nurse.	Obeys quickly. Stayed contentedly with grandparents for a week.	Likes camp, although homesick during first days. Learns enthusiastically.
	Not adaptive	Still startled by sudden, sharp noise. Resists diapering.	Cries and screams each time hair is cut. Disobeys persistently.	Does not adjust well to new school or new teacher. Comes home late for dinner even when punished.
Attention span and persistence	Long	If soiled, continues to cry until changed. Repeatedly rejects water if he wants milk.	Works on a puzzle until it is completed. Watches when shown how to do something.	Reads for two hours before sleeping. Does homework carefully.
	Short	Cries when awakened but stops almost immediately. Objects only mildly if cereal precedes bottle.	Gives up easily if a toy is hard to use. Asks for help immediately if undressing becomes difficult.	Gets up frequently from homework for a snack. Never finishes a book.
Intensity of reaction	Intense	Cries when diapers are wet. Rejects food vigorously when satisfied.	Yells if he feels excitement or delight. Cries loudly if a toy is taken away.	Tears up an entire page of homework if one mistake is made. Slams door of room when teased by younger brother.
	Mild	Does not cry when diapers are wet. Whimpers instead of crying when hungry.	When another child hit her, she looked surprised, did not hit back.	When a mistake is made in a model airplane, corrects it quietly. Does not comment when reprimanded.
Threshold of responsiveness	Low	Stops sucking on bottle when approached.	Runs to door when father comes home. Must always be tucked tightly into bed.	Rejects fatty foods. Adjusts shower until water is at exactly the right temperature.
	High	Is not startled by loud noises. Takes bottle and breast equally well.	Can be left with anyone. Falls asleep easily on either back or stomach.	Never complains when sick. Eats all foods.
Quality of mood	Positive	Smacks lips when first tasting new food. Smiles at parents.	Plays with sister; laughs and giggles. Smiles when he succeeds in putting shoes on.	Enjoys new accomplishments. Laughs aloud when reading a funny passage.
	Negative	Fusses after nursing. Cries when carriage is rocked.	Cries and squirms when given haircut. Cries when mother leaves.	Cries when he cannot solve a homework problem. Very "weepy" if he does not get enough sleep.

Adapted from Thomas, Chess, and Birch (1970)

Thomas and Chess's Temperament Types

- **Easy babies:** 40% of infants; adjust easily to new situations, quickly establish routines, are generally cheerful and easy to calm.
- **Difficult babies:** 10% of infants; slow to adjust to new experiences, likely to react negatively and intensely to stimuli and events.
- **Slow-to-warm-up babies:** 15% of infants; somewhat difficult at first but become easier over time.

Temperament

Six Dimensions of Infant Temperament (Rothbart & Bates)

- Fearful distress
- Irritable distress
- Attention span and persistence
- Activity level
- Positive affect
- Rhythmicity

Role of Temperament in Social Skills and Adjustment

- Differences in anger/irritability, positive emotion, and ability to regulate emotions are associated with **social competence and adjustment**.
- Children who are negative, impulsive, and unregulated tend to have **poor peer relations** and get in trouble with the law. They are difficult partners and roommates.
- Behaviorally inhibited children are more likely to experience **anxiety, depression, and phobias**.

Temperament and Social Adjustment

- **“Goodness of fit”**: the degree to which an individual’s temperament is compatible with the demands and expectations of his or her social environment
- Parents can **modulate** children’s temperament by their influences on the environment.
 - What is good parenting for a difficult baby/child?
 - What is good parenting for a slow-to-warm-up or inhibited baby/child?