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# Living With Your Spirited Child



**Parenting**  
the most important job you'll ever have  
*and we're here to help.*

## Living With Your Spirited Child

Spirited children:

- Are normal, just “more”.
- Have stronger reactions to everything going on around them.
- Require a lot of patience and a sense of humour to parent.
- Have traits that we admire in adults but find difficult to deal with in children.

Temperament is defined as an individual’s usual way of responding to the things going on around him. There are nine basic temperament traits and everyone falls somewhere on the continuum of each of these traits. Children are born with these temperament traits.

There have been many books written for parents on how to deal with children who are “more”.

- *The Difficult Child* by Stanley Turecki
- *The Strong Willed Child* by Forehand and Long
- *Temperament Tools* by Neville and Johnson
- *Raising Your Spirited Child* by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka
- *The High Needs Baby* by Sears and Sears

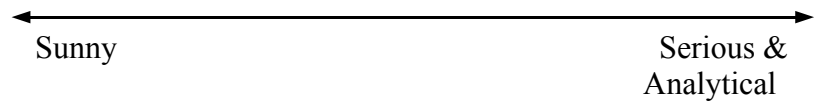
The term “spirited” has been chosen to describe the child who is “more” because it helps parents and caregivers build on the strengths of the child.

**In the following pages each temperament trait will be defined. Basic parenting strategies will also be included.**

**When reading about the nine temperament traits try to see where you and your children fit each continuum.**

## Disposition

The overall way of looking at situations



### **Children who are sunny**

- Tend to be happy most of the time.
- Tend to have a positive outlook.
- Tend to be more trusting.

Parenting Strategies

- Teach these children to consider all sides before making decisions - especially the down side.
- Teach stranger safety.

### **Children who are serious and analytical**

- Tend to be more serious about everything.
- Like to consider all options before making decisions.
- Tend to question before complying to requests.

Parenting Strategies

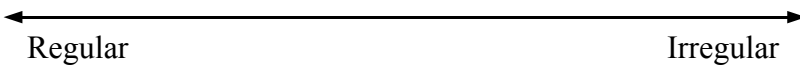
- Teach these children to problem solve in a timely fashion.
- Provide opportunities for fun activities.

## Final Thoughts for Parents

- Both the temperaments of the child and the parent influence the parent-child relationship. There will always be some friction in this relationship. Excessive stress in the relationship may result in behaviour problems.
- To reduce stress in the parent-child relationship
  - Focus on the child’s strengths.
  - Adapt parenting style to fit the child’s temperament.

## Regularity

The regularity of bodily functions



### **Children who are regular**

- Wake up at the same time each day.
- Are hungry at regular time.
- Have bowel movements at the same time each day.
- Tend to misbehave when a meal is late, a nap is missed or bedtime is changed.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Provide routines – predictable mealtimes and bedtimes.
- Provide these children with snacks if meals are going to be late.
- Plan activities around their schedules whenever possible.

### **Children who are irregular**

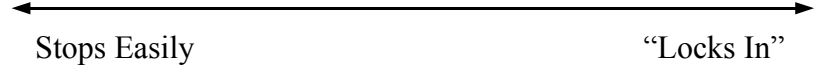
- Wake up at different times each morning.
- Are hungry at different times.
- Have irregular bowel habits.
- Fall asleep at different times each night.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Provide routines – predictable mealtimes and bedtimes.
- Teach these children to remain in their bedrooms until they fall asleep at bedtime.
- Encourage them to play quietly in their rooms at nap time.

## Persistence

The ability to stop an activity



### **Children who stop easily**

- Come when they are called, stop when asked to and are generally more cooperative.
- Tend to give in to children who are more persistent.
- Tend to give up when things are difficult.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Teach these children how to stand up for themselves.
- Encourage these children to continue when things are difficult.

### **Children who “lock in”**

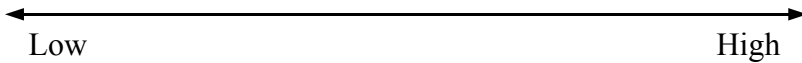
- Like to finish what they are doing.
- Are viewed as stubborn and defiant because they say **no** to most requests.
- Often get into power struggles with parents and other children.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Choose battles carefully with these children.
- Offer choices as often as possible.
- Give them warnings when the activity is going to change.
- To encourage cooperation in preschoolers:
  - Listen to what your children are saying and ask them what is important to them.
  - Say “yes” as often as possible.
  - When “yes” is not an option, ask your children to think of other solutions.

## Activity Level

The amount of physical movement during sleep, eating, play, dressing, bathing, etc.



### **Low Activity Children**

- Tend to sit quietly during activities - meals, play, family functions.
- Often tend to dawdle.
- Tend to sleep longer and are easier to settle at naps and bedtime.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Provide daily physical activity to prevent obesity.
- Establish routines.
- Give reminders.

### **High Activity Children**

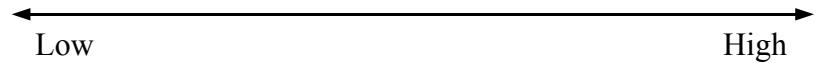
- Tend to be moving all the time even when they are sleeping.
- Are often clumsy.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Provide daily physical activity to help them burn off excess energy.
- Provide interesting quiet activities.

## Sensitivity

The physical response to sights, sounds, textures, tastes, smells and emotions



### **Children with low sensitivity**

- Are not affected by bright lights, loud sounds, textures, and odours.
- Do not always read other peoples' emotions.
- May have difficulty understanding their own emotions.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Teach these children about emotions - theirs and others.

### **Children with high sensitivity**

- Feel emotions, see sights, hear noises, and smell odours that other people do not notice; can be overwhelmed by them.
- Easily tune into the emotions of other people.
- Are more likely to be picky eaters.
- Tend to have difficulty falling asleep.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Find ways to avoid or eliminate the things that bother them. For example:
  - Remove them from the situation.
  - Remove irritating tags from clothes.
  - Lower lights.
  - Turn down the volume on the television or radio.
- Teach them to take a break when they feel overwhelmed.

## Perceptiveness

The awareness of things in the environment



### **Children who are not easily distracted**

- Are able to stay focused in spite of the activity around them.
- May not notice things around them.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Give warnings when activities are going to change.
- Teach these children to look for danger in their environment.

### **Children who are easily distracted**

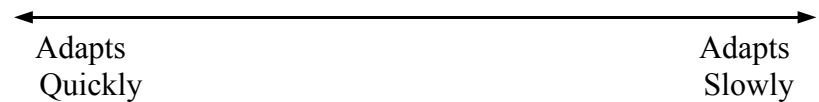
- Notice all of the colours, sounds, people, and activities around them.
- Are easily overstimulated.
- Have difficulty completing a task.
- Can be seen as forgetful and disorganized.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Provide them with a quiet place to read or play.
- Make eye contact and touch them gently before talking.
- Break tasks into simple steps.

## Adaptability

Response to transitions, surprises and changes in plans



### **Children who adapt quickly**

- Are usually cooperative during transitions and when plans change.
- Like surprises.
- Tend to give in to other people's wishes - will say yes to most requests.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Teach children to stand up for the things that are important to them.

### **Children who adapt slowly**

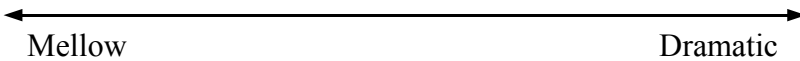
- Are very upset and uncooperative when routines or plans change.
- Hate surprises - even fun ones.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Establish routines and stick to them as much as possible.
- Give warnings when the activities are going to change.
- Have a "Plan B" and share it with these children when planning special activities.
- Allow the child time to adjust to changes in plans and routines.
- Redirect / distract the child to the next activity.

## **Intensity**

The strength of emotional reactions



### **Children who are mellow**

- Tend to be quiet and react less when things do not go their way.
- Appear to be easy going.
- Tend to keep their feelings to themselves.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Teach these children to express their emotions.
- Encourage them to talk about what happened during their day.

### **Children who are dramatic**

- Express their emotions loudly - happy, sad, mad, frustrated.
- Tend to have frequent temper tantrums.
- Use their whole bodies to express emotions.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Give these children words for their emotions.
- Teach them to take a break when they are feeling overwhelmed.

## **First Reaction**

The initial response to new situations



### **Children who jump right in**

- Tend to be very impulsive.
- Tend to get into trouble because they don't think before they act.
- Don't consider the consequences of their behaviour.
- Take more risks which can lead to injuries.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Safety proof home inside and out.
- Teach safety skills.
- Play a "What If" game.

### **Children who wait and watch**

- Are often labelled as being shy.
- Avoid taking risks.
- Need to process what they see, hear or feel before they respond.
- Don't like to try new things.

#### Parenting Strategies

- Provide support and encouragement to try new things.
- Encourage these children to talk about what they are thinking.