

Temperament

Appreciating your child's uniqueness

Children are uniquely different

Observe a group of children playing and you will see the following: some will be moving quickly and with energy, others will be sitting quietly; some will be talking loudly, others will talk slowly and reflectively; some will be in a group, others will be by themselves; some will be bossy, others will be compliant; some will be gentle, others will be strong willed.

Children are born with distinct ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. This inborn genetic 'wiring' is called temperament, and it will have a major impact on your child's emotions, how they eat, sleep, and react to the world around them. By understanding your child's temperament and working with it, you will find parenting more fulfilling and you'll get better results. Understanding builds strong emotional connections with your child. It enables you to appreciate the unique way your child sees their world. When a child feels understood and accepted, they usually want to please the one who understands them.

What is temperament?

Temperament is like a tree seed. If you look at two seeds there isn't a lot of difference between them. But if you were to look at the genetic coding contained within each seed you'd see significant differences. While the difference between a pohutukawa seed and a kauri seed isn't great, contained within each seed is their distinctive blueprint. Each is a variety of tree, but each is organised differently from the beginning. Even when they are seedlings the difference between species is insignificant. But a closer examination always reveals that a pohutukawa tree is always a pohutukawa tree, and not a kauri tree.

Just as a kauri seed will only become a kauri tree, so a child's temperament remains the same from birth. The seasons, or environment never changes the basic make-up of the tree. Kauri's cannot be reorganised to be pohutukawa's. Children, in a similar way, are organised in unique ways that determine their pattern of growth and development.



Recognising difference

For thousand's of years, beginning with Hippocrates in the 5th century BC, people have recognised that while people are uniquely different, they are predictably different. This is because these differences are formed by the interaction of two behavioural dimensions:

Dimension A	Introvert/Extrovert. This dimension identifies where people get their energy. Introverts need quiet time to be energised; extroverts need social time.
Dimension B	Task/Relationship. This dimension identifies where people focus their energy - on a task or on people.

The interaction of these two dimensions forms 4 temperament styles. Hippocrates termed these four styles:

Choleric (Extrovert-Task)	Likes to be boss, high energy, direct, impulsive, impatient, this is the strong willed child!
Melancholic (Introvert - Task)	Like things done correctly, almost demands a routine, likes being by themselves, contemplative.
Phlegmatic (Introvert - Relationships)	Likes cooperating, calm, slow-paced, likes sharing, these children are very easy to parent.
Sanguine (Extrovert - Relationships)	Socially active, energetic, likes being outdoors, highly imaginative, funny and mischievous.



More recent researchers use different labels to categorise temperament:

- ▶ **Social Styles:** Driver, Expressive, Amiable, Analytical
- ▶ **DiSC model:** Dominance, Influencing, Steadiness, Compliance
- ▶ **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator:** SJ/SP/NF/NT
- ▶ **Tracy Hogg:** Angel, Textbook, Touchy, Spirited, Grumpy

Each temperament style is inherently different, but equally valuable. Children may demonstrate some of the behaviours from each of the temperament styles, but if you observe closely you'll see they think, feel, and act in one or two of the styles with greater intensity and frequency, than the others.

CHILDREN'S TEMPERAMENT STYLE CHARACTERISTICS

CHOLERIC STYLE	SANGUINE STYLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Let you know what they want in a hurry ▶ Eat, drink, and move fast ▶ Determine their own bedtime ▶ Tell other children what to do ▶ Play well independently ▶ Ignore the word "no" when possible ▶ Try to walk early ▶ Need to be kept busy "I'm bored" ▶ Make their own rules ▶ Likes Kindy and its competitive activities <p>EXTREME BEHAVIOUR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Become impatient with anything slow ▶ Fight to have their own way ▶ Can become demanding and rude ▶ Can try to control situations and people ▶ Insist on having the best toy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Like to be outdoors ▶ Don't mind getting dirty, wet, or messy ▶ Find creative uses for common items ▶ Show lots of imagination in play ▶ Can be funny and mischievous ▶ Jump quickly from one activity to the next ▶ Love to try new challenges ▶ Need to be able to move and explore ▶ Change the rules in a game ▶ Likes the creative and entertaining aspects of preschool <p>EXTREME BEHAVIOUR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Have a knack for getting into trouble ▶ Do what they want regardless of the rules ▶ Put their own spin on the truth ▶ Push their luck to the limit ▶ Create chaos and confusion for fun
MELANCHOLIC STYLE	PHLEGMATIC STYLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Care about their appearance ▶ Avoid getting messy or dirty ▶ Get into planned routines easily ▶ Ask "Why" often and expect correct answers ▶ Prefer mental games to physical games ▶ Can focus on one toy or activity for a long time ▶ Takes things apart and puts them together ▶ Put themselves on a schedule ▶ Try hard to follow the rules and do what is proper ▶ Likes the structure of preschool and likes to learn <p>EXTREME BEHAVIOUR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Insists on a special place for everything ▶ Can be obsessive about what belongs to them ▶ Gets very upset if a toy is broken ▶ Worry about things that might happen ▶ Dislike their personal space being invaded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Cooperate in helping others ▶ Eat, drink, and move slowly ▶ Go to bed without a fight ▶ Get pleasure from sharing their toys ▶ Play well with other children ▶ Make friends easily ▶ Take their time in trying to walk ▶ Show affection with hugs and kisses ▶ Plays by other's rules ▶ Likes preschool <p>EXTREME BEHAVIOUR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Cry when they are hurt or tired ▶ Let other children boss them around ▶ Whine and beg for what they want ▶ Can be very shy ▶ Clings to people who make them feel safe

The Nine Characteristics

One of the most detailed and longest ongoing study of children's temperament is the New York Longitudinal Study, by researcher's Alexander Thomas and Stella Cress. Their research identified nine characteristics where children innately differ. By the time an infant is 2 to 3 months old their temperament individuality is well established. Their research also found that when children's characteristics were clustered together it resulted in three types of children:

▶ **THE EASY CHILD** (40% of the sample). This child is easy to parent because they establish regular routines in infancy, and are generally cheerful and adapt well to new experiences.

▶ **THE DIFFICULT CHILD** (10% of the sample). This child is irregular in routines, is slow to accept new experiences, and tends to react negatively and intensely. They are difficult to parent. The strong willed child fits in this group.

▶ **THE SLOW-TO-WARM-UP CHILD** (15% of the sample). This child is inactive, shows mild, low keyed reactions, is negative in mood, and adjusts slowly to new experiences. Parents often describe this child as shy.

35 per cent of the children in the sample didn't fit within any of the above three categories, but had combinations of the three types. Most parents can quickly identify which one of these three groups their child best fits within.

Read the following nine characteristics and assess how your child responds and reacts for each characteristic. Place an X on the line of the graph to indicate where your child best fits. By reflecting on how your child reacts on these nine characteristics, it will provide you with valuable awareness and insight into how your child thinks, feels and acts. This knowledge will help you become a more intentional parent.

1 Activity Level

Some children are very active. Even before they are born they kick a lot. Once they are born they are always on the go, kicking off their blanket or running around doing many activities. Other children are less active - they snooze serenely, and are able to sit peacefully and listen to a story. Mark on the following line where your child's activity level is.



2 Rhythm Cycle

Some children have regular cycles of activity. They eat, sleep, and go to the toilet on schedule, almost from birth. Other children are less predictable. Indicate where your child's regular cycle is:



3 Approach-Withdrawal

Some kids face the new with curiosity and delight. They readily accept new vegetables, or a new caregiver. Other kids are slower to warm up to change, schedules, caregivers, or food.



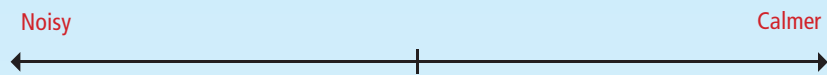
4 Adaptability

Some children adjust quickly to change. Being flexible they adapt fairly easily to new situations. Others are unhappy at every disruption of their normal routine. They find it difficult to adjust.



5 Intensity of Reaction

Some children laugh or cry with great vigour. Others are much calmer, simply responding with a smile or a whimper. Some wake and coo while waiting to nurse, or have their nappies changed. Others wake screaming with hunger. Similarly, some children take a tumble while learning to walk and just pick themselves up and continue. Other toddlers fall over and yell with indignation.



6 Responsiveness

Some children seem to sense every sight, sound and touch. For instance, they waken at the slightest noise, or turn away from a distant light. Others seem unaware even of bright lights, or loud noises.



7 Quality of Mood

Some children seem constantly happy. They smile and laugh a lot. Other children are less expressive and seem constantly unhappy; they are ready to protest at any moment.



8 Distractibility

All children fuss when they are hungry, but some will stop if someone distracts them - gives them a dummy or sings them a song. Others will keep fussing. Some children can easily be distracted from a fascinating, but dangerous object, and diverted to a safer play thing. Others are more single minded, refusing to be distracted.



9 Attention Span

Some children play happily with one toy for a long time. Others quickly drop one activity for another.



Your child is uniquely different. Celebrate that difference.