

Infancy Visit #12

- PIPE: Each Child is Different



Topics for Next Visit:

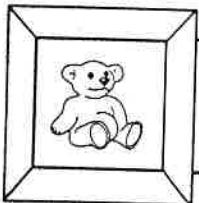
- 5 Month Growth & Development
 - Teething



Each Child Is Different



sh+He



Conceptual Overview

LOVE
TOPIC 2

1. **Understanding is learning and accepting information.** In terms of a relationship between two people, this means learning enough about someone else to know how he or she is different from you as well as the same as you. Understanding means expecting differences and accepting them. When differences are seen in a positive light, all relationships work better. This is part of loving.

Each person has a special unique way of responding to the world he or she lives in. This is called temperament. Temperament is thought to be part of the nervous system. Like hair texture or eye color, temperament is part of you. It is sometimes called personality. Some people believe it has a genetic connection, but much of temperament is also environmental. Temperament is influenced by the people you are with and the situations you experience.

2. **Temperament is often expressed through emotional signals.** Differences in the way we express our emotions can highlight differences in our temperament. Some people are very intense with their emotional reactions, and others keep their emotions bottled up inside. All temperament types have a positive function for getting along in life. It is when temperaments become extreme that they have a negative impact and can unbalance a relationship.
3. **Each baby is different.** Understanding a baby's temperament is crucial to good parenting. Some of the differences in babies that are often labeled "temperament" are really connected to birth weight and developmental age. These characteristics will change with maturation. As a baby grows, many sensitivities and reactive behaviors disappear. It is important not to categorize a baby as a specific temperament type.

A baby's temperament is expressed with emotional signals. Emotional signals are the language of babies. They can tell you they are frightened or sad, tense or happy about what is happening around them. They signal their reactions with body language, or by turning their eyes away, sucking their thumbs, or decreasing activity. This is how they tell you what they are feeling. There are several ways to evaluate or assess a baby's temperament, such as how quickly a baby gets bored with a task or how active, fearful, or shy a baby appears in a strange situation.

4. **Temperament is a force in shaping a relationship.** Each baby will experience the same event differently from others because of temperament. The baby's response will affect the responses of others and the relationship. Even siblings raised in the same household, have different life experiences. Their parents treat them differently because of their age, sex, and temperament, and also because their parents change with experience. Similarities and differences in

LOVE TOPIC 2

temperament between parent and child can either help form a strong relationship or cause difficulties if the "mismatch" is not seen as a strength. It is helpful for parents to examine their own temperamental traits and see how they fit with their baby's temperamental characteristics.

5. **Temperament can be modified by relationships.** When parents understand how their babies respond to stimulation, they can plan ahead and arrange an environment that encourages the positive qualities of temperament. A parent who can read his or her baby's signals will become skilled at helping the child regulate the more reactive displays of temperament. Parents also modify temperament through the ways they express their reactions. For example, parents model control or anxiety. Much of how babies react is learned from their parents.



Indicators of Temperament

Temperament is indicated by behavior.
This is similar for adults as well as children.

1. Activity Level

Some children can spend long periods of time in one place or with one activity. Others move and squirm a lot. Very active children will fuss or cry when their activity is limited; these children need to be changing activities and moving around often. They seem to express anger when limited . . . and joy or interest when they are doing active things. Do you know adults who are this way?

2. Regularity/Rhythmicity

Some children seem to have a built-in alarm clock. They eat, nap, and have bowel movements at regular or predictable times. Others may take a year or more to schedule. Parents can help these children by trying to keep to a schedule for them. Regularity often improves with maturation, but even so is influenced by temperament. Children who are predictable in their physical schedule will express distress or sadness when their schedules are changed; others show physical distress such as vomiting or having diarrhea. Almost all children are more secure when they have some regularity in their lives.

3. Adaptability

This is how well a person responds to change. Children respond differently to new things, such as the first bath, new foods, new people, or new places. Some children like new situations; they will go toward the new experience, always looking at parents and wanting them close, but accepting and enjoying differences. They adapt easily to change. Other children seem fearful and distressed about any change. These children will need a slow, patient pace for change. They often need to be in a parent's arms to feel safe during new events.

4. Approach/Withdrawal

Some children seek out new experiences and new people. They like new things. They like discovery. Others need to be given lots of encouragement and confidence to try something new. They will need a slow warm up. They seem cautious or fearful around new people and experiences and need time to test new things.

5. Sensory Awareness/Sensory Threshold

Stimulation of all kinds affects children differently. Much of this will change with maturation, but each of us remains unique in how sensitive we are to sound, smell, temperature, visual stimulation, and touch. Some children will cry about wet or soiled diapers; others might cry about noise around the house, a draft, or too many people. Some children do not like two stimuli at the same time, for example rocking and talking. Parents who can read "tune out" signals and avoid overstimulation of a child's sensitivities will avoid distress.

continued on next page



Indicators of Temperament, cont.

6. Intensity of Reaction or Response

Some people express emotions intensely. They like to laugh heartily and cry hard. Other people stay quiet about their joy and anger and let it build or smolder. Children also express their emotions with different intensities. Some children will cry hard and for a long time; others stop as soon as they are comforted. Some are volatile and switch emotions quickly.

7. Distractibility

Some people concentrate so hard on what they are thinking about that they are surprised by any distraction. They do not change from one thing to another easily. Some children are like this: they stick to what they are doing regardless of who comes into the room. Others are quickly distracted by almost anything. They quit eating to visit with a new person or to watch Dad answer the phone. Distractable children are often easy to divert from prohibited objects. Some children cry intensely when they must leave one activity for another. They seem angry. They even cry when they wake up as if they did not want to stop sleeping.

8. General Mood

Positive or negative mood can be a temperamental factor, although it is strongly influenced by environment and relationship. Some children seem to be always in a good mood; others cry often, looking sad or anxious much of the time. Parents can have a major effect on their child's mood by sharing positive emotions and by fostering the child's self-confidence and promoting feelings of safety.

9. Persistence/Attention Span

Some children become very absorbed in what they are doing. They gaze at a mobile for long periods of time, practice a task for long periods of time, or continue to go after things that they have been scolded for touching. They show anger at having to stop. Others give up after only a brief try. If things don't go well, they quit. Still other children stop after they have done a task only once. They don't want to practice. When parents understand their child's usual level of stick-to-it-ive-ness, they can work to help focus the child on a task.





Tips to Regulate Temperament

The different ways we react to events and people in our world are caused by many things. For example, suppose we are very shy or afraid of something new. We may be this way because our nervous system sends an extra strong dose of chemicals to our brain to signal fear; or it may be due to watching other people who behave in a fearful way; or it could even be due to a frightening incident that we have experienced in our past.

The important thing about temperament and emotion is to control or regulate the extremes so we can find a balance in the way we behave. In this way, we will be accepted by others and we will like ourselves better. Parents can help their babies learn to regulate extremes of emotions and temperaments and find this balance.

♥ PLAN AHEAD

Active baby or toddler - Have several things to do. Have space for movement. Be prepared for the baby to move in and out of the activity or to climb around while the activity is in progress.

Sensitive/Shy baby or toddler - introduce new things slowly. Plan to hold the child and share in activity or task. Plan only one new activity at a time. Keep it simple. Be prepared to stop early and return another time.

Persistent/Strong-willed child - Let the baby or toddler choose the activity. Plan to explore that one activity completely. Allow time for intense concentration. Allow these children lots of autonomy in play. Persistent babies need time to wind down. Baby may not want to stop. Tell him or her ahead of time when you will be stopping. "After this tower we will put the blocks away." End the game clearly and quickly. Don't give in to fuss, but don't scold. Just go to the next interesting thing.

♥ SHARE POSITIVE MOOD

Most babies or toddlers will adopt the mood of the people around them. If you share positive emotions, you will lessen extremes of temperament except that of overexcitement. Laughter, rhythm, or music will regulate most emotional extremes and encourage good behavior.

♥ REGULATE ... DON'T SCOLD

Fearful child - When a baby or toddler is frightened, scolding makes it worse. Ask yourself, "Why the fear?" Give the baby or toddler protection by touching or holding him or her. Connect emotionally by telling the child that you understand. Go together to solve the problem, or withdraw and come back later. Be positive; show him or her how you are not afraid. Show the child that learning more about something helps fear go away. Be slow; don't push a baby or toddler toward a fearful situation.

Angry baby or toddler - When a baby or toddler is angry, scolding makes it worse. Ask yourself, "Why the anger?" Can you help reduce the frustration by untangling a toy or getting the shoe off? Can you regulate the anger by holding the baby and sharing your calm? Can you distract the child from his or her anger with interest or fun elsewhere? Or does this child need to be left alone in a safe place for a minute to blow off built-up tension?

continued on next page



Tips to Regulate Temperament, cont.

♥ GIVE STRUCTURE AND CLEAR SIGNALS

Sensitive baby or toddler – Following a pattern helps the sensitive or shy baby. The baby or toddler knows what to expect if the same things happen the same way each time. Give clear signals about what will happen next and when an activity will end. Then follow through with what you said. Play within the child's focus of interest and listen for his or her positive signals. Be adaptable rather than over-structured. Let the baby or toddler have some choices and *lead you* some of the time.

♥ LIMIT DISTRACTIONS

Distractible baby or toddler – Plan ahead to have a quiet place to play with your baby or toddler. Limit the distraction and the child will be able to focus more on the activity you share. This will not only lessen the distractibility of the child but also strengthen your relationship. Plan a “quiet-time” activity to share each day. Positive emotions help keep a baby or toddler focused.

♥ DON'T INTERRUPT

Persistent baby or toddler – When a baby or toddler is involved in a task, interrupting can make the baby very angry or sad. Just as with an adult, it is best to give information ahead of time. For example, “Jorge, it’s almost time to go. Where do you want to keep the blocks?” Babies and toddlers might take a long time to change their concentration. Sometimes they are still thinking about the last thing they were doing when *you* have already gone on to the next thing. Move slowly. Be patient with babies and toddlers.

♥ WATCH FOR OVERSTIMULATION OR SIGNS OF TIRING

With all babies and toddlers, many extremes of emotion occur when a child is getting too tired or too wound up. This can happen quickly. Concentrated play can be very tiring. Know the early signals of overstimulation and be prepared to quit early. When babies and toddlers are exhausted or over-stimulated, it takes a long time to settle them down. Parents will need to hold their child close and share calm, safe, quiet signals.

Any time emotions go out of control for a baby, stay calm yourself. Take a “Big Breath,” and ask, “Why?” “How can I help my baby or toddler regulate these emotions?”



Parenting Each Child According to Their Uniqueness



What is temperament?

Temperament is the make-up of behaviors of how we respond to the world and each other.

This means we have patterns in the ways we respond to our environments, how we adapt to change, and how we express our emotions. Temperament is shaped by our experiences and interactions we have with others, particularly early in life.

Why is temperament important?

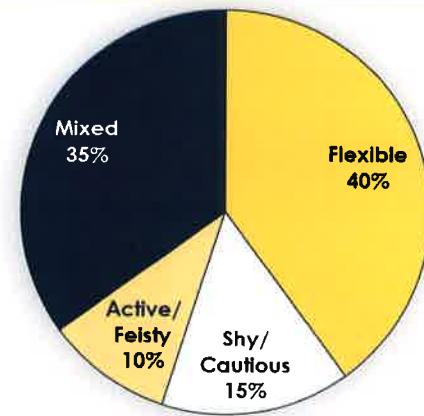


Temperament includes qualities that babies are born with, and it changes as children grow and develop. Each of your children have unique temperaments. Each child will experience the same event differently because of their own temperament.

Understanding your children's temperaments can help you respond to each of your children's individual needs and honor their uniqueness!

Types of Temperament

Nine different characteristics make up temperament for each person. Using these characteristics, many (not all) children may fit into three general categories.



Temperament Characteristic	Flexible Child (40%)	Cautious/Shy (15%)	Active, Feisty (10%)
Activity level - Level of physical activity	Can vary	Can vary	High
Daily Rhythms - Daily activities of eating, sleeping, toileting	Regular	Can vary	Irregular
Sensitivity - To sound, light, touch, smell, and taste	Low sensitivity	Can vary	High sensitivity
Intensity of Reaction - How emotions are expressed	Mild to moderate	Mild	Strong
Adaptability - Adjusting to change or new situations	Adapts easily and quickly	Adapts slowly	Difficulty adapting
Approach/Withdrawal - How new people and situations are approached	Willing to explore	Withdraw	Can vary
Persistence - How long are they able to willingly stick to a task	High persistence	Can vary	Low persistence
Distractibility - Attention staying focused or shifting	Focused	Can vary	Shifts attention
Mood - Overall emotions	Positive	Mixed	Negative

Parenting Each Child According to Their Uniqueness

You can work with your nurse to further explore your children's temperaments.



What do you enjoy most about each of your children?

What do you find challenging about each of your children?

Parenting Styles for your Children's Unique Temperaments

Understanding your children's temperament will help you have appropriate expectations for them. It also helps you offer support for their typical moods and behaviors. Consider a parenting style that is flexible to meet the needs of each child.

Here are some additional tips:

- **Change your perspective:** Try to avoid categorizing certain temperament qualities as "good" or "bad." Your child is their unique self, and that is something to celebrate!
- **Do some self-reflection:** Keep in mind your child's temperament may differ from yours. Take some time to examine your own traits, so you can be sensitive to any "mismatch" between you and your child.
- **Observe, not compare:**
Occasionally making comparisons between children is natural and normal, but try to avoid judgement or competition such as "I wish Aiden was more outgoing like Mario."
- **Recognize change can occur:**
While many believe temperament has genetic components, change in temperament can occur as the child matures or as they learn skills to manage various situations.

