



Your Baby's Temperament

Consider these two babies, both from the same family, both boys:

- **The first infant** is calm and quiet, happy to play by himself. He watches everything that happens around him, but rarely demands attention himself. Left on his own, he sleeps for long periods and eats infrequently.
- **The second baby** is fussy and startles easily. He thrashes his arms and legs, moving almost constantly whether awake or asleep. While most newborns sleep (</English/healthy-living/sleep/Pages/healthy-sleep-habits-how-many-hours-does-your-child-need.aspx>) 14 hours a day, he sleeps only 10, and wakes up whenever there's the slightest activity nearby. He seems in a hurry to do everything at once and even eats in a rush, gulping his feedings and swallowing so much air that he needs frequent burping.



Both these babies are absolutely normal and healthy. One is no "better" than the other, but because their personalities (</English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Emotional-and-Social-Development-4-7-Months.aspx>) are so far apart, the two will be treated very differently, right from birth.

Discovering unique personality traits

Your baby will show many unique personality traits from the earliest weeks after birth. Discovering these traits is one of the most exciting parts of having a new baby. Are they very active and intense, or relatively slow-going? Are they timid when faced with a new situation, such as the first bath (</English/ages-stages/baby/bathing-skin-care/Pages/Bathing-Your-Newborn.aspx>), or do they enjoy it?

You'll find clues to their personality in everything they do, from falling asleep to crying (</English/ages-stages/baby/crying-colic/pages/Responding-to-Your-Babys-Cries.aspx>). The more you pay attention and respond appropriately to their unique personality, the calmer and more predictable your life will be in the months to come.

Preemies & low birth weight babies

While most of these early character traits are built into the newborn's hereditary makeup, their appearance may be delayed if your baby is born quite prematurely.

Premature babies (</English/ages-stages/baby/preemie/Pages/default.aspx>) don't express their needs—such as hunger, fatigue, or discomfort—as clearly as other newborns. They may be extra sensitive to light (</English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Your-Baby%27s-Vision-1-Month.aspx>), sound and touch, and these stimuli may cause them to become fussy and look away. When this happens, it's up to the parent to stop and wait until the baby is alert and ready for more attention. Eventually most of these early reactions will fade away, and the baby's own natural character traits will become more evident.

Babies who are less than 5.5 pounds or 2.5 kg at birth (low birth weight), even if they're full term, also may be less responsive than other newborns. At first they may be very sleepy and not seem very alert. After a few weeks they seem to wake up, eating eagerly but still remaining irritable and hypersensitive to stimulation between feedings. This irritability may last until they grow and mature further.

Responding to your baby's individuality

From the very beginning, your baby's temperamental traits will influence the way you treat them and feel about them. If you have specific ideas about child rearing, reevaluate them now to see if they're really in tune with your baby's character. The same goes for expert advice—from books, articles, and especially from well-meaning relatives and

friends—about the "right way (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/A-Perfect-Parent.aspx)" to raise a child. [Back to Top](#)

The truth is, there is no right way that works for every child. You have to create your own guidelines based on your child's unique personality, your own beliefs, and the circumstances of your family life (/english/family-life/Pages/default.aspx).

The important thing is to remain responsive to your baby's individuality. Don't try to box them into some previously set mold or pattern. Your baby's uniqueness is their strength, and respecting that strength from the start will help lay the best possible foundation for their self-esteem (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Helping-Your-Child-Develop-A-Healthy-Sense-of-Self-Esteem.aspx) and for loving relationships with others.

More information

- [Creating Positive Experiences for Your Infant \(/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Creating-Positive-Experiences-for-Your-Infant.aspx\)](#)

Last Updated 12/31/2021

Source Adapted from Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5 7th Edition (Copyright © 2019 American Academy of Pediatrics)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.