Know Your Toddler's Unique Nature

By Sharon Mary @connectingparentandchild

Since you're coming here from THE ULTIMATE TODDLER PARENTING COURSE, I'm sure you know we're talking about your Toddler's Temperament.

In the simplest terms,

a child's temperament is "Who They Are" – 20 to 60% of which is determined by pure genetics!

Can you change it? Well, No.

Will it change over time? Maybe.

Can you influence it? Yes, with your loving support & guidance.

Don't expect any change in your toddler's temperament, but the interaction between your child's temperament and yours, and how others respond to them, determines how comfortably s/he fits in & adapts with the environment and the people around them.

Knowing your child's inherent nature, it's positives & negatives, learning the best way to manage the difficult parts of your child's temperament & gradually empowering your child to do the same – are simple ways in which you can help your child develop the positive aspects of their temperament & confidently manage the not-so-positive aspects as well.

"Children are different from one another, especially in temperament. Some are shy; others are bold; some active; others quiet; some confident; others less so.

Respect for individual differences is in my view the cornerstone of good parent-child relationship."

– Sandra Scarr, American Psychologist & Writer

As we delve deeper, understand that the purpose of this guide, is to help you know your toddler better and understand that each temperament type has it's own positives & negatives. you can do is so you can support him/her in the best way possible.

DO NOT let this guide (knowingly or unknowingly) cause you to LABEL your child as difficult, stubborn, hyperactive & so on. Labelling your child negatively will change your perspective towards them, and will affect how you parent them. Also, as your child hears these negative labels more & more, you can be sure to etch it in their personality even more than it was destined to be. So, PLEASE DO NOT LABEL YOUR CHILD.

This guide must prompt you to:

- ACCEPT & ACKNOWLEDGE your toddler as they are.
- Learn ways to adapt to them & their difficult behaviors (if any) that arise from their natural temperament.
- Support them in the best way possible.

Ready to dive in & know your toddler better!?

What follows are Nine Temperament Traits that you'll see in your child in varying degrees. As you read through, you will:

- Be able to relate to your toddler's behavior & know where it's all coming from.
- Know the positive aspects on your toddler's temperament, no matter how difficult it seems.
- Learn how to best adapt to their temperament & manage difficult situations that arise.

1. Biological Rhythms: It refers to the regularity or predictability of a child's biological functions like eating, sleeping and toileting.

Where do you see your child?



- **Regular Rhythms:** They get up at the same time each day, eat at the same time and sleep at the same time.
- **Irregular Rhythms:** Their bodily functions don't seem to fall into a regular pattern and it's harder for them to stick with rigid routines.

Positives: Toddlers with irregular rhythms tend to handle unpredictable situations or sudden changes in routine better. As adults, they may do well in jobs with erratic hours.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'Irregular Rhythms':

- Do not expect your toddler with irregular rhythms to fit into a rigid routine. Your best bet is to have a consistent flow for the day & adapt as you go.
    - You can serve lunch at the time when the entire family prefers to have lunch – however, if it seems like they're not hungry – you can allow them to indicate when they're hungry & serve lunch then.
      If you don't prefer serving lunch at 4pm – find ways to offer healthy snacks that can make up for the missed lunch.
    - For sleep, have a bedtime routine and vary it to adapt to your child's needs – if they aren't sleepy during your regular bedtime – you can set a reasonable limit that they just need to quietly lie down till they feel ready to sleep.
- Tuning into your child's cues & adapting to it as required, while also setting reasonable limits to protect your own bandwidth & sanity is the balance you'll need to strike with this toddler.

2. Mood: It refers to the overall tone of your child's feelings, interactions and behaviors.

Where do you see your child?



- **Positive mood:** They tend to view the world as a positive place and are generally more optimistic and light-hearted. They respond more cheerfully to you, and are more pleasant to be around.
- **Negative mood:** They have a tendency to respond to the world in a more pessimistic way. They may whine & complain more than others. It is more difficult to receive positive and upbeat responses from them, and this can feel very discouraging for parents.

Positives: They tend to succeed in professions where their seriousness is appreciated, like research and are often the valuable 'black hat' of the group who helps identify the hidden & possible roadblocks or dangers while assessing a new idea or plan.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'Negative Mood':

- Do not punish, label or reprimand your child for his negative, serious or moody nature. It's not their fault, nor is it under their control when they're little.
- Highlight the positives in the them & their behavior, and also talk about the good & positives about the people & world around them. As they grow, this will help them develop a more positive perspective which could equip them to override or manage their natural negative temperament.

3. Sensitivity: It refers to how sensitive your child is to external stimuli like sound, light, touch, smell and taste.

Where do you see your child?



Low sensitivity: They are not overly sensitive to physical stimuli like sounds, tastes, touch and temperature changes; they can fall asleep anywhere and try new foods easily.

Since they tend to not react strongly when they are hurt, sick or bothered by something – Make sure you're tuned into your toddler with low sensitivity, so you can meet their physical & emotional needs as & when required.

High sensitivity: They are sensitive to physical (sensory) stimuli – like bright lights, loud noises, tags in clothing, temperature changes, new foods, colours, pain, smells; tend to be picky eaters and have difficulty sleeping in a strange/new bed. These stimuli might seem minor/harmless to you or may be unnoticed by others, yet these toddlers may have very intense reactions to them.

Positives: They can grow up learning how to make the best use of their senses in creative, artistic or scientific ways.

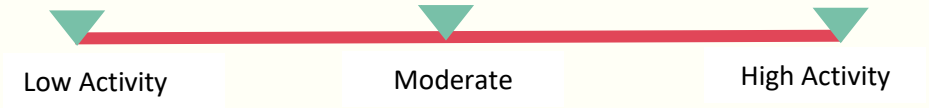
How to best adapt to & support your child with 'High Sensitivity':

- Understanding & accepting your toddler's discomfort is most important, and will require conscious effort from your end.
- Do not belittle their discomfort & inconvenience or try to convince them "It's all ok" when they complain that the tag on their dress hurts them.
- Acknowledge their discomfort
  "I know the traffic noise seems too loud for you." "I see the garbage smells too bad for you."
- Do what you can in the moment to alleviate their discomfort.
- Try to keep a written record of colours, textures, places, things & experiences that are difficult for your toddler.

- Whenever possible, plan in advance if you're aware that certain environments or items might be difficult for your toddler with low-sensory threshold / high sensitivity – eg. avoid clothing with scratchy insides, remove the tags, adjust the lighting, temperature & smells in your house, shop for colours that work for them & so on. You may also need to give them extra time in the morning to get dressed to make sure they find an outfit that is comfortable. Similarly, they may need time and quiet space when you are at a family gathering or a party.

4. Activity Level: It refers to your toddler's level of physical activity, movement, restlessness or fidgety behavior that your toddler demonstrates in daily activities some of which may also affect sleep.

Where do you see your child?



Low Activity: They are naturally calmer & quieter. They seem to slower, prefer to sit more and often choose activities that do not involve a lot of physical effort. They also need more time to complete tasks.

Positives: As adults, these kids would do well in professions that needs one to sit, go slow & take the necessary time to work through the tasks - like in the field of research & related professions.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'Low Activity':

- If your temperament is 'high activity', your child's low activity might bother or embarrass you. But it's in your child's best interest that you accept them the way they are wired.
- Plan ahead, consider buffer time so that you can allow them the time they need to complete tasks.
- When around other kids, do not push your child to engage before they are ready. Rather be on their side & let them be, "I'm here with you. You can join them when you're ready."
- Make sure that your child gets lots of opportunities for quiet or slower activities, like blocks, reading or board games.

High Activity: They tend to quickly switch from one activity to another. They have trouble sitting still & are usually fidgety.

Super High Activity: Watching a tiny tot with this temperament is like watching a video at 2x speed! They cannot sit still, resist being confined to a small space like a car, carseat, highchair or even a cot. They tend to be super-energetic (seeming 'wild' to you & others) and tend to lose control easily.

Positives: When they learn to harness their excessive energy well, these kids grow up to be adults who can get a lot of work done quickly, and still having the energy to do more.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'High Activity':

Regularly provide a lot of opportunities for physical & outdoor play as a vent for their excessive energy.

If they're into unsafe physical activities like jumping on the bed, racing up & down the stairs – keep redirecting them to safer alternatives like jumping on the floor, running around in the house (not the stairs).

Also, take steps to create safe spaces by blocking off spaces with potential danger like the stairs, kitchen.

Invite them for cool-down periods WITH you, where you can sit down with them and involve them in calming activities like blowing bubbles, breathing, hugging, cuddling, soft music – whatever works for your child.

Below, you'll find more ideas on 'Providing Energy Outlets' and 'Relaxation Techniques' that you can choose from for your unique child & situation.

(Source: 'What to Expect – The Toddler Years' – by Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel.)

Energy Outlets For Your Toddler

Indoor Outlets of Energy	**Outdoor Outlets of Energy**
Punching a pillow	Free play – running, jumping, climbing
Drumming on pots or vessels	Playground play – swings, slides
Pounding or hammering toys	Ball kicking and throwing
Pounding clay / playdoh	Rolling an oversized ball
Dancing to lively music	Pedalling or cycling
Splashing in the tub	Splashing in a pool
Pillow fights in a safe space	Splashing in puddles
Tumbling or rough play on a carpet or bed, safely	Pulling out weeds from the garden
Lively circle games & action songs	Circle games
Running around in the house	
'How high can you jump?'	
'How far can you jump?'	
Kiddie aerobics – toe-touches, jumping jacks, head-shoulder-knees-toes, clapping	

Relaxation Techniques For Your Toddler

Hugging, cuddling or massage	Baking or cooking (with supervision)
Soft music with or without lyrics	Water play
A relaxing story	Watching fish in a fishtank, or watching nature from the window
A warm bath (with supervision)	Petting a gentle pet
Playing simple puzzles (only if your toddler doesn't seem to be frustrated by them)	Doodling, painting with fingers/brush/earbuds
Interaction with a calm parent or caregiver	Clay Play

5. Distractibility: It refers to how easily, or not so easily, things going on around your children disrupt their thought processes and attention.

Where do you see your child?



Low distractibility: They are not easily distracted by sounds & sights, they may often be unaware of their surroundings. They may be able to be hyper focused on the task at hand, but may find it difficult to move on when they are upset about something; they may tend to stay focused on those negative feelings.

Positives: this is a great trait to possess that helps your child focus on chores, schoolwork & other tasks, even in a busy environment.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'Low Distractibility':

When your toddler is highly emotional, avoid resorting to distraction as a tool to help them feel better. Rather empower them with healthy coping mechanisms by modeling through co-regulation.

High distractibility: In general, toddlers have very short attention spans. Toddlers who are highly distractible find it extra-hard to focus on a task even for a minute (even more, if the task does not interest them). They are easily distracted by sights, sounds & activities around them, and find it hard to focus in class & often struggle to pay attention to instructions.

Positives: With the right support & guidance, these kids can grow up to be adults with varied interests.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'High Distractibility':

Whenever possible, provide a space with minimum distractions (sights, sounds, toys, etc.) to help your toddler stay focused on the assigned task.

Choose & involve them in tasks that interest them (blocks, magnetic tiles, puzzles, cooking with you), so that over time, their ability to concentrate & stay focused can gradually increase & improve.

Do not force your child to concentrate on tasks or learning for longer than s/he is able to – rather schedule learning / activity time for very short periods spanning only a few minutes. Gradually, as their interest & ability develops, they will be able to stay focused for longer.

Remember, your child is not intentionally being rude or disobedient when he fails to pay attention to / follow your instructions. Thanks to their temperament, they just can't.

So, before instructing, ensure you have your child's attention – by moving in, drawing their attention to you with a gentle touch or rub on the back & making eye contact.

6. Persistence: It refers to how long your child is able and willing to stick to a task, even when it is challenging.

Where do you see your child?



High Persistence: They tend to work hard to figure out exactly how that puzzle piece fits in, even if it is challenging. They will work very hard to finish something they have started and are likely to practice something they want to master, like riding a bike, playing an instrument. They may also be more persistent in their demands, which could manifest as intense tantrums.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'High Persistence':

- Once in a while, encourage their "Can-Do-Will-Do" spirit by descriptively praising their effort & persistence. "Wow, it's amazing to see how hard you tried to get this puzzle together." "It's great to see you practice the piano daily. You're learning so well."
- When they persist hard in their demands, chalk out clear limits where necessary & stick with them (You'll learn HOW in The Ultimate Toddler Parenting Course)

Low Persistence: They then to feel overwhelmed & frustrated when they struggle with something difficult. They may ask an adult to do it for them or tend to leave the challenging task & move onto something else. They may also persist & insist less when they demand for something.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'Low Persistence':

- Try breaking down a difficult task into smaller parts to encourage them to persist a little harder.
- Provide help when they seek, & avoid pushing / shaming / labelling them for not trying hard enough.
- Descriptively praise their little achievements, compare them to their past abilities rather than to others or your expectations. "Wow, last time you couldn't do this puzzle fully, this time you put half of it together on your own! Awesome!"

7. Approach / Withdrawal: It refers to your child's first and usual reactions to new things, experiences, places, ideas or people.

Where do you see your child?



Approaching: Toddlers with an initial approach response tend to embrace new activities and enjoy meeting new people and trying new things like foods and clothes.

In general, toddlers have low impulse control, and are developmentally not yet capable of planning ahead or considering the consequences of their actions. Toddlers who are quick to approach tend to even more impulsive & would need more guidance & support in this area.

Positives: They tend to grow into adults who are enterprising & approachable.

How to best adapt to & support your child with an 'Initial Approach' response:

While it's best to encourage your toddler's natural 'approaching' temperament, it's important to ensure their safety through diligent supervision – so that they don't run into dangerous situations / potentially harmful strangers.

Withdrawing: When faced with new people, place or experience; they withdraw, become clingy, meltdown or are slow-to-warm up to the novelty.

Positives: They tend to be more cautious, and hence more careful. Such a child could grow up to be an adult who carefully analyses situations before making decisions.

How to best adapt to & support your child with an 'Initial Withdrawal' response:

- Do not push your toddler into uncomfortable situations with new, unfamiliar people - if they don't feel ready. Allow them to take their time, with you – to feel SAFE before they choose to venture.
- Do not label your child as shy, rather provide them with the emotional support they need in new & challenging situations. You'll find more tips in

the section on “Stranger Anxiety / Shyness” in the “All the Small yet Big Stuff” module.

- If you know that a large crowd of unfamiliar people distresses your toddler, then avoid such gatherings unless absolutely necessary. Consider inviting a small group of familiar faces to help your toddler feel comfortable in his/her own birthday party.
- Prep your toddler in advance with all the necessary details to help make what’s unfamiliar – familiar, that could help your toddler approach the upcoming situation with more ease.

8. Intensity of Reaction: It refers to how strongly your child reacts to situations, positively or negatively.

Where do you see your child?



Low Intensity: They tend to have a low-key response (like a simple smile) to exciting news or surprises or

Positives: In difficult situations, they have less intense tantrums / meltdown and they tend to be easily consoled.

High Intensity: They tend to have very strong positive / negative reactions & are often loud. In case of a positive news/event, when they feel overjoyed or playful – they tend to react intensely by jumping up and down or running around the house. Similarly, when they are angry / frustrated, they tend to have intense, massive meltdowns.

Positives: They are highly expressive and could grow into adults who communicate openly. With the right guidance, they can learn to express themselves & their emotions appropriately, without hurting or causing inconvenience to others.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'High Intensity':

- The first step would be to train yourself to become comfortable with their intense reactions.
- When they have intense meltdowns, model healthy coping mechanisms through co-regulation. You'll learn more about this in the 'Managing Tantrums Module'.
- Calmly & consistently redirect them to appropriate ways of expressing themselves, as the situation demands. For eg, if they scream when they're playful or overjoyed, you can calmly redirect them to using their indoor voice & other acceptable outlets for their energy. You'll find more tips on how to manage your toddler's screaming in 'All the Small yet Big Stuff' Module.

9. Adaptability: It tells how easily your child can adjust to change or new situations.

Where do you see your child?



High Adaptability: They are very flexible and are able to progress smoothly and quickly after they encounter a change in schedule or routine. They tend to enjoy the novelty of new schedules, activities and ideas.

Positives: They can sail through changes in routine or big changes like new school / nanny / location with much ease with little prior preparation.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'High Adaptibility':

Do not take this trait for granted, ensure you have a predictable routine & that you provide your child enough information and preparation prior to any small or big changes.

Low Adaptability: They are slow-to-adapt to any new small or big changes. Given a choice, they would prefer to wear the same clothes, have the same food in the same plate everyday. They feel most comfortable in predictable routines, and find transitions & changes very disturbing & unsettling. Also, once they settle into the change, they tend to cling to the new situation fiercely.

Positives: They often grow up to be adults with the (rare) ability to stick with a chosen subject or task.

How to best adapt to & support your child with 'Low Adaptibility':

Maintain a predictable flow & routine in your daily schedule & avoid any changes unless absolutely necessary.

Provide your toddler enough time to feel ready for the upcoming change.

Prepare your toddler for transitions well in advance & provide them with enough time to feel ready for the upcoming change. The C-A-L-M Prep Tool &/ or Timers Tool that you'll learn in The Ultimate Toddler Parenting Course will come in handy for you.

For bigger changes like a new school, new location – provide them with the necessary details and prep them well in advance with role plays, books & videos.

With clothing, instead of buying a varied collection – stick to the colours or styles that your toddler feels comfortable with.

If your toddler prefers to wear the same outfit everyday, you can consider buying clothing in duplicates (or more). Similarly with foods they prefer.

Do not worry about making your toddler more adaptable & Do not push them to be so – they are bound by their natural temperament. As you keep introducing small changes by prepping them well in advance, they will slowly learn to adapt to changes better & faster over time.

Now, you know your Toddler's TRUE NATURE!

Use this knowledge to first **ACCEPT** your child, as they are,

Then **ADAPT** your ways to suit & guide their natural temperament,

& finally, over the years, **EMPOWER** your child to manage the NEGATIVES & shine the POSITIVES within them.

----------x----------

Created by Sharon Mary

Only For Parents Enrolled in The Ultimate Toddler Parenting Course

References

- Based on the work of Thomas & Chess on 9 Temperament Traits
- Book: What To Expect – The Toddler Years by Heidi Murkoff & Sharon Mazel
- Article by Michigan State University
- Article by Greatschools.org