



## The “how” of behavior

Each baby has her own unique temperament or style of behavior. Your baby’s temperament shows up in **how** she reacts to her world - for example, how actively baby moves, how regular she is in her hunger and sleep patterns, or how strongly she reacts to being bathed. Temperament does not tell us about what baby can do (abilities) or why baby does something (motivations).

## What traits make up a baby’s temperament?

Baby’s temperament is a combination of seven different traits:

1. **Sensitivity** – how much stimulation (sounds, lights, touch, smells) it takes to get a reaction from baby. Does baby wake up whenever the phone rings?
2. **Activity level** – the amount of movement. Are baby’s arms and legs always waving about?
3. **Intensity** – the strength or loudness of baby’s reaction. When baby is hungry or tired does he cry loudly or just fuss?
4. **Regularity** – how regular baby is in all his biological functions, such as eating and sleeping. Does baby wake up at the same time each morning?
5. **Adaptability** – the ease with which baby adapts to new things and changes of any kind, such as transitions (shifts from one activity to another), or intrusions (like being picked up or getting water in his face).
6. **Persistence or frustration tolerance** – the amount of time your baby will stick with an activity.
7. **Soothability or distractibility** – how easy it is to distract and soothe baby when he is fussing or crying.

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## *Variety of temperaments*

Each temperament trait ranges from high to low. For example, a baby might be highly sensitive and intense, but low in activity level and frustration tolerance. Many different combinations of temperament traits are possible. All temperament styles are normal, although some are more challenging for parents to handle. Now is a good time to start thinking about the kind of parenting you want to use with your child. Children need parents who both (1) set limits and (2) are sensitive and responsive to them as unique individuals.

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## *What is your baby's temperament?*

You have been observing your baby for several months now. You may have learned that if baby wiggles when you change her diaper, putting a toy nearby can easily distract her. Or you may have found that your baby adapts easily to going new places. Now is a good time to get a clear picture of your baby's temperament. You can do this by going to **The Preventive Ounce** website: <[www.preventiveoz.org](http://www.preventiveoz.org)>. If you don't have access to the Internet at home, you can use the computer at your local library. A librarian can help you.



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## *Using the website*

Once you get to the website, click on **Image of Your Child**. You can fill out a temperament questionnaire (this service is free) on your 4-month-old baby and immediately receive back:

- a temperament profile that shows your baby's temperament.
- a forecast of likely-to-occur behaviors. You learn what behaviors are **normal** for your baby's temperament, and what behaviors are more likely to occur in the next 12 months.
- strategies for handling likely to occur behaviors - tailored to your child's temperament.

Research shows that parents who understand their baby's temperament feel better about their child and have an easier time handling behaviors that are challenging, but normal for their child.