
The high-energy child

What does a high-energy child look like? Children who are high energy may be highly active or very intense in their reactions (or both active and intense).

The highly active child always seems to be on the move. He runs more often than walks, and doesn't like to stop to eat, rest, or get his diaper changed. If your child has a high activity level you may find this a challenge unless you also have a high activity level.

The high intensity child reacts strongly to things, sometimes bouncing with excitement and sometimes having temper tantrums. This dramatic toddler lets you know how she feels! If both you and your child are high in intensity, this may make it more challenging for you to "keep your cool" while handling your child's strong reactions (especially negative reactions).

While parenting the high-energy child can be a challenge, high-energy children who are also fast adapting (adapt quickly to changes and new things) usually adjust fairly easily to the limits that parents set.



Temperament and ADHD or hyperactivity

What is the difference between being high-energy and hyperactive or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)? High activity level and/or high intensity are normal temperament differences. Hyperactivity or ADHD are medical, diagnostic labels for a certain pattern of child behaviors, which includes being highly active, and also an inability to stay focused on an activity. Most diagnoses of hyperactivity or ADHD occur after children start school, where a high energy level doesn't "fit" as well. Understanding temperament helps parents learn to manage their child's high energy at an earlier age, and helps children learn how to handle appropriately their own energy.

High-energy and Fast Adapting Child



Behaviors:

Mealtime - prefers to eat on the run, snacks often. Parent can't predict when child will be hungry or how much he will eat. Dislikes restrictiveness of high chairs.

Nap or Bedtime - doesn't like to stop playing, and settle down to rest or sleep. If intense, may have difficulty relaxing.

Social development - enjoys playing with other children, may overwhelm less active children. Looks forward to new experiences, like preschool. Until verbal skills develop may express intense feelings (excitement or anger) by biting or hitting.

Learning - Develops large motor skills earlier. Learns by doing.

Assertiveness - likes to practice new skills, but doesn't want to slow down and stop. Shows little fear of danger. May ignore safety warnings in eagerness to enjoy life. If intense, may react strongly at first to limits.

Separations - easily separates from parents to go to childcare or preschool.

Toilet training - likes to acquire new skills, be like "big kids," so trains more easily. If intense, may react strongly if pushed.

Parenting Strategies:

- Channel energy into appropriate and fun activities.
- Childproof the house from child's point of view.
- Set clear, consistent limits.
- Provide nutritious snacks for refueling. Don't expect child to sit for too long at mealtime.
- Provide rest periods during the day, even if doesn't sleep.
- Make sure child gets enough sleep at night.
- Don't rough house at bedtime. Use calming routines to settle down (reading stories).
- Place in groups with slightly older (or active) children.

If also intense:

- Notice "signals" of escalating intensity.
- Use soothing activities (swinging, rocking) or distractions to reduce intensity.
- Provide place for child to "cool down" to let off steam.
- Teach what is allowed in expressing intensity - teach "words" to use.
- Keep your voice and manner calm.