
Combining high-energy and low adjustability

What does a high-energy, low adjustability child look like? High-energy children may be highly active and/or highly intense in their reactions. Low adjustability children may be slow to adapt to change, and/or slow to approach new things, and/or low in ability to tolerate frustration. Many different combinations of high-energy, low adjustability styles are possible.

Relationship between intensity & adaptability

We know that as intensity goes up adaptability goes down. When a child's intensity builds, his ability to adapt to parental requests drops off. The key to increasing a child's ability to comply with requests is to focus on reducing his intensity. For example, soothing/repetitive activities such as rocking and swinging may help keep a child's intensity from climbing.



Parenting the high-energy, low adjustability child

Being a "temperament smart" parent is especially important if your toddler is high in energy and low in adjustability. For instance, children who are intense and low in adaptability like to have control over their world. When parents ask the intense, low adaptability child to do something they may be met with strong resistance, even a temper tantrum. Parents of this child often feel they get no respect and may "polarize" around how to handle their child's behavior, with one parent becoming too firm (no accommodation for temperament) and the other too permissive - letting limits slide. Learning strategies tailored to your child's temperament will help you be more effective - knowing when to be firm and when to accommodate to your child's temperament.

High-energy and Low Adjustability Child



Behaviors:

Mealtime – strongly rejects new foods. Likes same old foods, fixed same old way. Dislikes restrictiveness of high chairs, intrusiveness of bibs, being fed.

Nap or Bedtime - doesn't like to stop playing to get ready for bed. Protests loudly going to bed. May have difficulty relaxing, and making transition to sleep.

Social development - may watch from sidelines at first, but higher energy level then pushes her to participate. Until verbal skills develop may express intense feelings by biting or hitting. Needs time to learn the "give and take" of playing with others.

Learning - learns by watching at first, but then moves in and practices. May resist directions.

Assertiveness – more assertive, likes to be in control. Strongly resists parental requests, may have tantrum if pushed to change behavior too quickly. Tests limits frequently. Often ignores safety rules.

Separations - mild separation difficulties due to uncertainty of new situation. More separation difficulty if low in frustration tolerance.

Toilet training - likes to be in control. "Battles of will" may develop if pushed. May be fearful of toilet. May train later.

Parenting Strategies:

- Channel energy into appropriate and fun activities.
- Set clear, consistent limits.
- Provide rest periods each day.
- Use calming routines to settle down for bedtime - make sure child gets enough sleep.
- Introduce new things many times – repetition.
- Tell child about changes ahead of time.
- Provide plenty of transition time between activities.
- Offer choices to give child some control.
- Notice "signals" of escalating intensity.
- Use soothing activities 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 - when intensity goes up, adaptability goes down.
- Divide new experiences or tasks into smaller parts.
- Give encouragement for each part of a task completed.
- If child tests limits, give "time out" in another room.
- Provide reassurance during separations - never sneak out.