
Your preschool-age child's temperament

Your child's temperament may seem different from when he was younger, since how he expresses his temperament changes as his abilities and thinking skills grow. For example, the sensitive infant may cry when over stimulated, while the sensitive preschooler may retreat to a quieter place. Get to know your 3-year-old child's temperament by going to The Preventive Ounce website at www.preventiveoz.org

Complete a temperament questionnaire specific for your child's age group (this service is free). You will immediately receive back:

- a profile of your child's temperament.
- a forecast of behaviors likely-to-occur during the preschool years.
- strategies for handling your child's more challenging behaviors.

Knowing your child's temperament will help you understand what behaviors are normal for your child.



Teaching children about temperament

When children are young, parents are the ones who need to adapt their parenting to provide a good fit with their child's temperament. As you use parenting strategies that work with your child's temperament, you are **modeling** these strategies. The goal is for your child to eventually learn to manage her own temperament. She is still too young at this age to have this understanding or control. But by the time your child starts school you may notice she uses some of the same strategies you have been using with her. For example, the child who takes more time to adapt to changes may ask to visit her new school ahead of time so she'll feel comfortable on the first day. Your intense child may learn to keep his intense emotions under control by finding a place to "cool down."

Siblings and temperament

The reason for sibling rivalry may differ depending on your child's temperament:

For children who are low in adjustability, sibling rivalry is due to fear of losing parents' attention and support. Your slow adjusting child may try to get your attention at the most inconvenient times, such as when you're on the phone. Doing things with your child gives her the attention she needs. For example, involve your child in helping you with household chores, and set aside regular times to read together or play games. Also, provide your child with a special place for her things that is off limits to siblings.

For children who are active and fast adjusting, sibling rivalry is partly due to envy and partly due to their need to find a balance between assertiveness and accommodation to others. Active children envy and want to acquire the skills of their older siblings, so they may pester sibs, follow them around. Older sibs get annoyed and fight back. Sibling rivalry is where active, fast adjusting children learn the "give and take" of things. When things get out of hand, it's time to call a "time out" and send them both to their rooms.



Avoiding blame & guilt

Parents who understand their child's temperament are less likely to blame themselves or their child for their child's challenging behaviors. Research also shows that parents are more likely to agree on how to handle their child's behavior when they find out what strategies work best for their child's temperament.

Books on temperament for parents

Raising Your Spirited Child, by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka (1991).

Temperament Tools: Working with Your Child's Inborn Traits, by Helen Neville and Diane Johnson (1998).

Know Your Child: An Authoritative Guide for Today's Parents, by Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas (1986).

Temperament Talk: A Guide to Understanding Your Child, Lyndall Shick (Ed.) (1995).

The Highly Sensitive Child: Helping Our Children Thrive When the World Overwhelms Them, by Elaine Aron (2002).

Living with the Active, Alert Child, by Linda Budd (1991).