
Temperament and preschool/childcare

Many things influence parents' decisions when selecting childcare or preschool for their child, including quality of care and cost. Something else to consider is your child's temperament. A "good fit" between your child's temperament and the childcare/preschool setting means a more positive experience for your child. What does a good fit mean? It means the demands and expectations of the preschool and caregiver match well with what the child is able to do, given the child's temperament, age, and abilities. For example, children who need more time to adapt to changes may not do well in a rigidly scheduled setting where there is little time for transitions between activities. You can learn about your child's temperament by completing a temperament questionnaire at The Preventive Ounce website www.preventiveoz.org (this service is free). You might want to share information about your child's temperament with the caregiver, to help her better understand your child's behavior, and what strategies work best with your child.



Preparing your child to start preschool

Take your child to visit her new preschool several times before the first day. Let her meet the new teacher, check out the classrooms, and try out the playground equipment. If possible let her meet some of the children who will be in her class. By doing this she will have less to adjust to when she starts. If your child adapts more slowly to changes or new things he may have some mild difficulty separating from you during the first few weeks of preschool. He is not afraid of leaving you, just uncertain about going into a new situation. If your child is low in frustration tolerance, he may have more separation difficulty. Provide plenty of reassurance during this time. Eventually he will learn that the caregiver can be trusted to help him handle frustrations, and separations will become easier.

What kind of preschool fits best with my child's temperament?

Children's temperament differs in both energy level and adjustability. High-energy children may be highly active and/or highly intense. Low adjustability children may be slow to adapt to changes, and/or slow to approach new things, and/or low in ability to tolerate frustration. Let's look at what type of preschool setting works best for children with these four temperament styles:

- High-energy, slow adjusting
- High-energy, fast adjusting
- Low-energy, fast adjusting
- Low-energy, slow adjusting

High-energy, slow adjusting child

- Does best in preschools with flexible structure. Schools that are too structured may not be flexible enough to provide time for adapting to transitions and other changes. Schools that are free form (little structure) may not provide routines to make slow adapters feel comfortable, or provide organized outlets for children's high energy.
- May benefit from a full schedule of preschool, where they can use up their energy, and also learn the "give and take" of playing with other children.
- Does best in groups with children their own age (if intense) or slightly older (if active), and with caregiver/teacher who is also energetic.



High-energy, fast adjusting child

- Does best in preschools with some structure - where there are organized activities that help to appropriately channel children's high energy. May tend to run wild in free form settings.
- May benefit from full schedule of preschool, where they can use up their energy.
- Prefers to play with slightly older children whose skills they would like to learn. Does best if caregiver/teacher is also energetic.

Low-energy, fast adjusting child

- Does well in most preschool settings - structured or free form.
- Prefers playing with children their own age - overwhelmed by more energetic or older children

Low-energy, slow adjusting child

- Does best in preschools with a balance of structure and free time. Some structure helps them get involved in activities, and a routine makes them feel more comfortable. Some free time gives them more control - fewer changes to adapt to.
- Does better in small groups, with children their own age, - overwhelmed by more energetic or older children.