

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Parents/Caregivers: Temperament

Here is what we know about temperament:

- Every child is born with a unique personality and temperament.
- Temperament develops early in life and is influenced by both biology (genetics and epigenetics), experiences and relationships. Temperament affects how a child behaves, reacts to situations and gets along with others.
- Some common features of temperament are activity level, emotional intensity, may have a hard time dealing with change or new situations or people, may be easily distracted or frustrated, etc.
- While children are born with certain temperament traits, they can learn to overcome the aspects that are challenging (e.g., fearful, impulsive).

As a parent or caregiver, think about a child's age and developmental abilities, how can you:

- Learn about and understand your child's unique temperament?
A child's temperament will affect how they experience the world. For example, recognizing patterns in behaviour will help you anticipate how they will react to certain situations (change in schedule, meeting a new person, etc.).
- Explore different ways to support your child's temperament?
Some children are more sensitive and have intense feelings. For example, try to stay calm and comfort your child when they are upset.
- Accept your child for who they are?
Instead of focusing on changing your child's temperament, focus on how you can help your child celebrate their unique traits. For example, sensitive or shy children will need extra time and support to adapt to new situations.
- Support and comfort children if they are showing signs of stress or frustration?
By building a trusting relationship with your infant and child, they will learn they can rely on you to help them through difficult times. For example, follow their lead with new experiences, be their advocate with other adults, "It takes time for her/him/them to get comfortable with new people".
- Model ways to manage emotions and reactions to situations?
As a parent, you are the most influential person in your child's life, and they will learn by watching you. For example, share your own stories of trying something new even though it was scary at first.
- How can you match your positive discipline style to your child's temperament?
Discipline your child with respect and try to have consistent routines and limits. For example: give an age appropriate choice, redirect your child's attention and help them learn how to problem-solve.
- Build a support system around you?
Parenting is not always easy. Having support can help you get through challenging moments. For example, reach out to supportive family, friends, community programs and resources.
- Know if your child's development is on track for their age?
It is important to have developmentally appropriate expectations of your child's ability and behaviour. For example, the [Looksee Checklist®](#) (formerly Nipissing District Developmental Screen®-NDDS) and the [Early Years Check-In](#) give activities and examples for each age and stage of development.

Where can you find more information?

- [Zero to three: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health](#)
- [Parents 2 Parents: Temperament](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Temperament](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [Raising Your Spirited Child. Book by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka](#)
- [City of Hamilton: Parenting with LOVE Video - Temperament](#)
- [24-Hour Movement and Activity Guidelines](#)
- [Children See Children Learn](#)
- [Best Start: Frequently Asked Questions about Time-outs](#)

Where can you find support?

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)
- [Mental Health and Substance Use Services and Resources](#)