



Childhood Temperament

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Why Children Behave Like That?

Children show different kinds of attitude as they socialize with other people and explore the world. Childhood temperament, in psychology, involves many aspects of the child's personality that leads to the formation of their attitudes and behavior. Understanding a child's temperament is crucial in parenting and guiding the child throughout his life.

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Nine Behaviors of Children

In order for us to understand childhood temperament, Thomas and Chess identified nine behaviors in children.

1. Activity

This refers to the physical energy of the child. A child may be very active and constantly moving, while another child may be behaved, relaxed and prefers to sit still rather than run around. The first child may be sports-oriented, while the second child may be more on fine motor activities like sketching and reading.

2. Regularity or Rhythmicity

This refers to whether the child has routines or is random in terms of biological functions. If a child always wakes up at 7 am and wants to eat at 11 am, he may want things to be done in a routine manner, whereas a child who wakes up at different times may do things in random.

3. Initial Reaction

The main question here is, “Is the child hesitant in approaching other people or things, or is he bold and faces them as if without thinking?”

4. Adaptability

Here, we ask whether a child is able to adjust to new things or changes in his environment easily, or he resists such changes.

5. Intensity

When assessing for intensity, we ask the question, “Is the child calm during a certain situation, or does he become intense (e.g. excited)?”

6. Mood

This refers to the child’s response to a pleasant or unpleasant event or thing.

7. Distractibility

This refers to the likelihood of the child to be distracted or left undisturbed by other things in his environment.

8. Persistence and Attention Span

When we want to know the child’s level of persistence, we may ask, “Does the child easily lose interest in doing an activity, or is he patient enough to finish it?”

9. Sensitivity

This refers to a child’s tolerance towards changes in his surroundings. For example, a sensitive child may be distracted when his mother turns on the radio, while a less sensitive child is able to continue his task.

Three Types of Children

Looking at the nine behaviors that a child may show, Thomas and Chess were able to identify the three types of children in terms of their childhood temperament.

1. The *easy child* is one who has a routine in his biological functions like waking, sleeping and eating. He has a generally positive attitude, good mood, and adapts to change easily. He may become frustrated at times but he is capable of smiling again after sometime.

2. The *difficult child* is one who has random cycles of waking, sleeping, eating and elimination.

When faced with new things or changes, he shows a negative behavior or approach like crying loudly or throwing tantrums. The need a longer time in order to adapt to new people, food or places.

3. The *slow-to-warm-up child* is one who initially shows a negative approach but of milder intensity than of the difficult child, when he is faced with new food, things, people and events. However, repeated exposure on these changes would lead to the child's acceptance, and he may gradually show a more positive response towards them.

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