

# Sidestepping the Power Struggle

## Practice Book

# I Gotta Be Me!



*LIFE* Seminars

*Dr. Alison Miller & Dr. Allison Rees*

# Temperament

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*Our level of understanding determines our reactions.*

Each child begins life with a unique set of inherited characteristics. A child's temperament is his basic style, the way in which he approaches life. Researchers have found nine characteristics of temperament in which newborn babies differ. Most children continue during later years to show many of the qualities of behaviour which they showed as infants. However, two babies who start out very much alike may develop quite differently, depending on how their parents respond to them. To help your child develop into the best person he can be, you must become aware of his unique temperament, and respond to him as he is, rather than treating all children as if they are the same.

The New York Longitudinal Study, headed by Doctors Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas, began in 1956 to study different behaviour traits in individual children over an extended period of time. A number of researchers went into a maternity ward, and recorded everything possible about the newborn babies there: how often they smiled, how loud they screamed, how much their bodies moved, how often they became hungry, and so on.

They then used statistical techniques to find out which of those behaviours tended to occur together in the same infant. They came up with nine characteristics of temperament, which can be regarded as basic dimensions along which these babies differed. Those children, now men and women, were studied right into adulthood, to see how many of the original characteristics of temperament persist throughout life, and what effect they have on the child's later adjustment and behaviour.



## Nine Basic Traits -Introduction

Activity Level	How active is the child generally, from an early age?
Distractibility	How easily is the child distracted? Can he/she pay attention?
Persistence	Does the child stay with something he/she likes? How persistent or determined is he/she when he/she wants something?
Approach/Withdrawal	Does the child have a positive or negative response to new places, people, foods, clothes, or toys?
Adaptability	How does the child deal with transition and change? How long does it take the child to get used to changes in routine?
Emotional Intensity	How much emotional energy does the child put into his/her responses, whether happy or unhappy?
Bodily Regularity	How predictable is the child in his/her patterns of sleep, appetite, bowel habits?
Sensory Sensitivity	How does the child react to sensory stimuli: noise, bright colors, smells, pain, warm weather, tastes, the texture and feel of clothes? Is he/she easily bothered? Is he/she easily over stimulated?
Mood	What is the child's basic mood? Is the child generally happy or unhappy?



## Activity Level

High Activity Level	Variable	Low Activity Level
<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• moves around a lot, hard on sneakers</li> <li>• can't sit through a meal</li> <li>• staying still is hard work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• depends on the activity and interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• body movements are slower and more selective</li> <li>• will often take a more passive position in a group and just watch</li> <li>• move their eyes more than their feet</li> </ul>

Where is your child on the activity scale?

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How does this challenge you?

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What is the positive side of this trait?

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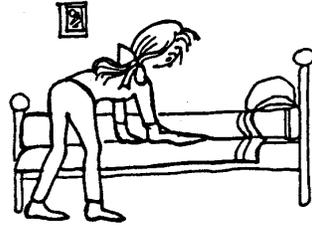
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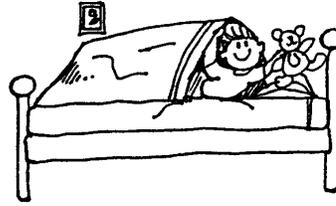
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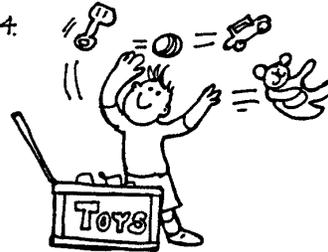
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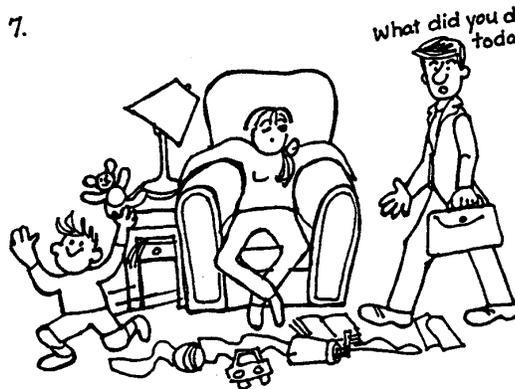
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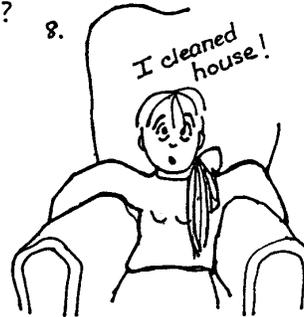


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What did you do today, Dear?

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The active child is usually more of a problem to his parents than the quiet child. Parents must accept his need to move and to get into things, and not restrict

If you are the parent of an active child, how do you look after your needs?

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## Distractibility

Distractible	Variable	Non-distractible
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>notices and responds to many things at once</li> <li>has difficulty listening because there are so many choices of things to listen to and notice</li> <li>no trouble watching TV because the picture changes all the time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can concentrate if they are into it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the house is on fire and this person is still reading</li> <li>does not notice the ice cream truck outside because they are busy working on lego</li> <li>concentrates hard and does not get sidetracked by potentially distracting events</li> </ul>

Where do you place your child on this scale? \_\_\_\_\_

What kinds of challenges does this present?

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How do you negatively react to this trait (do you nag, get angry)?

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What is the positive side of this particular trait?

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How could you work with the challenging side of your child's trait?

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What kind of messages can you give to your child so that they feel good about this part of themselves?

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Where are you on the distractibility chart?

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If you are strong on either end of the scale, what kind of challenges can you recall from your childhood as a result of this?

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How has this changed now that you are an adult?

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## Persistence

Persistent	Variable	Non-persistent
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• does not give up easily</li><li>• long attention span</li><li>• determined</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• depends on what they are doing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• gives up easily and is easily frustrated</li><li>• short attention span</li><li>• cannot stay at one activity for long</li></ul>

Where is your child at on this scale? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of challenges does this present (if any)?

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What negative habits does your child's trait bring out in your parenting?

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How can you work with these challenges?

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Can you reflect on the positive side of this trait?

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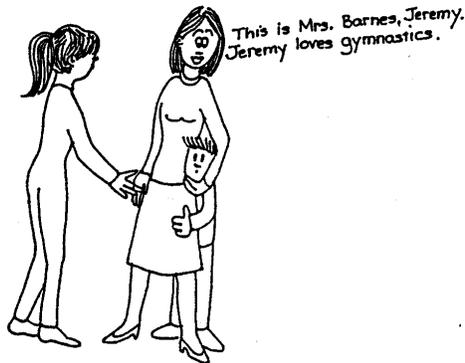
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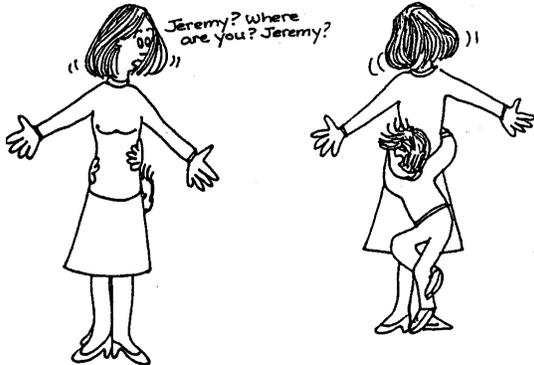
## Approach/Withdrawal

Cautious Approach to New Situations	Variable	Fast Approach to New Situations
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>slow to warm up to new people, places, or activities</li> <li>will get labeled shy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>you guessed it - yes, it depends - they may hang back a bit but then jump in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>they jump into new situations quickly</li> <li>sometimes accused of not thinking before they act</li> <li>they can be impulsive with their actions</li> </ul>



Where is your child at on this chart?

If your child is more cautious and slower to warm up to people and or places and or things what kind of challenges does this present for your child?



What kind of parenting challenges does this trait present?



How can you express yourself supportively to your child without labeling your child “shy” or “fearful”?

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Being sensitive to your child’s needs and encouraging him or her to take a step forward involves a great deal of balance. How can you support your child and help her deal with her stress in this area?

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Some people may be variable with their approach while others may be very fast to warm up to new people or situations. Does your child fall into this category?

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Children with a positive approach to new situations can be very outgoing. When they are young trips out to the store can be hazardous as they take off and explore. As they get older they enroll in a lot of activities and can often take on too much. What kind of tools would be useful for the parent of this child?

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## Adaptability

Non-Adaptable	Variable	Adaptable
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• has a hard time with transition (moving from one activity or environment to another)</li><li>• doesn't react well to surprises</li><li>• takes a long time to get used to changes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• depends on the activity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• no problem with transitions</li><li>• can skip from one subject, activity, or environment to another without skipping a beat</li></ul>

Children who have difficulty with change present more challenges. They like to know what to expect and they love to be organized. How can you support this child?

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What kind of supportive messages can you express to this child about this trait?

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As children mature, they learn to work with their traits and hopefully understand themselves and their needs. What kind of positives can evolve from this kind of trait?

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## Emotional Intensity

Intense Reactions	Variable	Mild Reactions
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you believe this person when they tell you how they feel</li> <li>• could be described as enthusiastic, loud, expressive or lively</li> <li>• knee-jerk reactors</li> <li>• intense with the positive and the negative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intensity of response depends on the situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can be accused of lacking passion</li> <li>• have to reassure people that they really do like their gift</li> <li>• may seem unemotional but is “laid back” rather than controlled</li> </ul>



Emotionally intense children may be impulsive with their behaviour. They may lash out and feel terrible about themselves afterwards. Younger children will have intense temper tantrums and scare themselves. How can you offer your child reassurance and guidance during these times?

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One parenting pitfall when dealing with an intense child is to react intensely yourself, especially if you are intense. How can you *plan ahead* to deal with emotional outbursts in your family?



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Being intense does not mean being aggressive. How can you allow your child to have strong feelings while setting limits on behaviour?

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Can you accept your child's intensity and not expect her to be different?

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If your child is a mild reactor it is helpful to empower him with assertiveness skills such as speaking up for himself. How can you teach your child to be assertive?

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What is the positive side of being intense?

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What is the positive side of being a mild reactor?

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What kind of positive messages can you give your child about his or her trait?

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With maturity people can learn to control their behaviour and express themselves in a healthy way. What tool has assisted you in controlling your behaviour?

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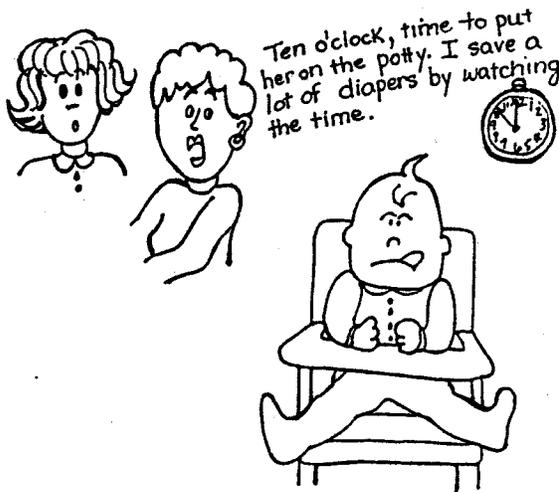
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## Regularity

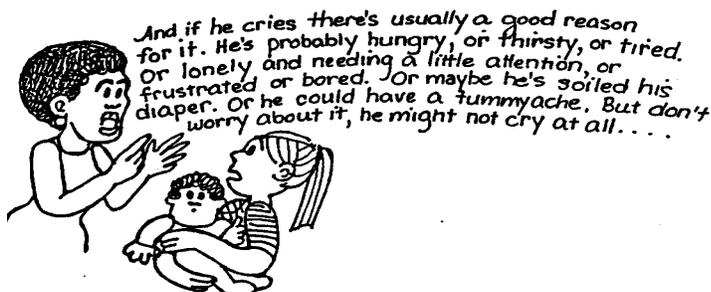
Regular Schedule	Variable	Irregular Scheduled
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get hungry and tired at predictable times and don't take well to a change in schedule.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They are pretty regular but can be flexible when they need to be (i.e. missing a nap won't be a crisis)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rarely get hungry, tired, or sleepy at the same time every day.</li> <li>They can be flexible with their routines</li> </ul>



Where do you place your child on the scale of regularity?

Regular children can be easier to parent when they are younger. They are more predictable and you know what to expect. Irregular children present more challenges around mealtime, toilet training and bedtime. If your child is irregular how does this challenge you?

Irregular children won't be tired at the same time every night and as they get older they might be tucking you in. How can you exercise your boundaries while respecting this trait in your child?



## Threshold to Stimuli

Highly Sensitive	Variable	Insensitive
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitive to even very low levels of light, noise and discomfort</li> <li>• may be sensitive to emotions of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sometimes sensitive, or sensitive in one area, but not another</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can tolerate lots of noise, light, etc.</li> <li>• doesn't notice these environmental details</li> </ul>

How sensitive is your child? \_\_\_\_\_



If you have rated your child as sensitive do they complain about the seam in their tube socks and the labels in the back of the t-shirts?

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Do they get over-stimulated or drained at the mall or in the classroom?

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Sensitive children really feel things and if they are intense as well it may sound like they have seriously injured themselves when they get a paper-cut. Can you accept that this is real and know they aren't faking it?

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If you are a sensitive adult your children's noises may be intolerable to you but acceptable to a less sensitive adult. How can you represent your needs as a parent and yet manage reasonable expectations of your children?

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Sensitive people also respond positively to pleasant sights, sounds and touch. What kind of sensory experience is pleasing to your child?

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The positive side to being sensitive is the ability to enjoy nice things. How can you express the positive side of this trait to your child?

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Children with a low sensitivity to sound and light can sleep through a party. Sensitive children can hear a clock ticking from across the house. What strategies can you come up with to keep your sensitive child comfortable?

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## Mood

Negative Mood	Variable	Positive Mood
10	5	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>generally unhappy, miserable</li> <li>sees flaws and what needs to be fixed</li> <li>tend to be somewhat serious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>depends on circumstances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>generally happy</li> <li>positive outlook</li> </ul>

How would you rate your child on this scale? \_\_\_\_\_



Most people come into the world with variable moods so how they feel depends on what they are going through. Some people however are on one end of the scale or the other. Obviously the more difficult end of the scale would be a negative mood. If you child is fairly serious or negative about life experiences how can you deal effectively with their outlook on life?

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## Conclusion

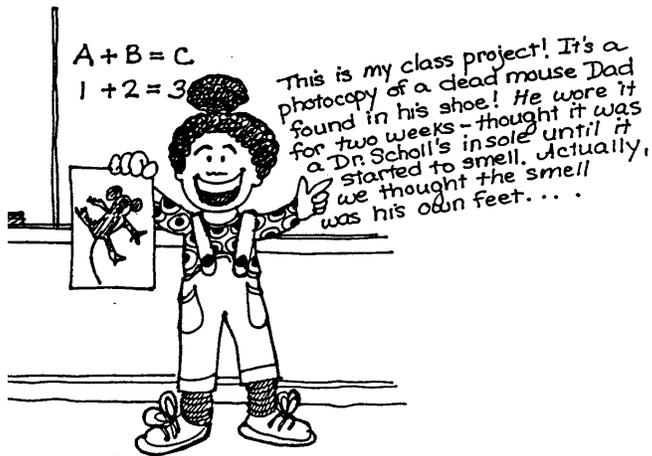
When you look at these nine traits how does that help you see your child as a unique human being?

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The traits that we reviewed can be different in every person. People can be intense and sensitive. They can be distractible and persistent. Sometimes when these traits come together they can put a person on the high end of introversion or extroversion.



An extrovert is:

- warmhearted, personable, and easy to get along with;
- happy-go-lucky, bold and energetic
- adventurous, bold and energetic;
- a person who prefers to be with groups.

An Introvert is:

- more oriented to things and ideas than to people;
- prefers to be alone and to have a smaller number of friends;
- does not enjoy noisy groups;
- does not need as much stimulation, and
- is more self-sufficient.



You may be neither. Some people come out exactly in the middle while others are more extreme. Either way, getting to know yourself and your child can only enhance self-esteem and your relationship.

Can you accept your child as they are and love them unconditionally?

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Do you have a deeper understanding of your family interactions as a result of understanding each person's individual differences and temperament?

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Individual temperaments and personalities of family members interact within the family. Sometimes we have difficulty with those who are different.



How much conflict does differences or similarities in temperament create in your family?

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