

Assessment: Taking Your Child's Temperament.

In this exercise, you will get acquainted with your child's temperament. The concept is similar to what you did in Chapter 2, but the examples for each trait come from parent descriptions of their children's behavior.

Below are the nine traits, each with (a), (b), and (c) examples of different degrees of expression. **First:** Circle the letter that most closely describes your child's degree of that trait. **Next:** Use the "Make it personal" lines to write your own description of something your child typically does that reflects his expression of that trait.

For example, for trait number 1, Activity Level, you circled (c). Then you write a description of your son: "John doesn't have much get up and go. He typically wakes up, snuggles on the couch, finds the remote, and watches TV until we get the backhoe to lift him into the bathtub. He'd sit all day if we let him."

1. Activity Level: Refers to the amount of physical movement that is typically exerted by the child. How much energy *needs* to be released?

Circle the letter that best describes your child's level of physical activity.

a. Jackson constantly needs to move. School is extremely challenging because it requires too much quiet sitting. At home, even when he's sitting, he isn't still—some part of his body is always in motion. After school he needs to have a great deal of physical activity or he will be too revved up to fall asleep. He has difficulty sitting still long enough to finish homework carefully, and he has never fallen asleep easily.

b. Whenever something with wheels is available, Troy is riding it, chasing it, or playing with it. At school he can sit and work as long as there is a recess or gym break so he can run and play. After school he likes to have some time to ride his bike or play outside, but then he will come in and do his homework straight through. Before bed there is usually some quiet activity and little drama about going to bed.

c. Lucy seems to be more a thinker than a doer. If you bring a toy to her, she gladly plays with it, but would not likely get it on her own. If she doesn't have a toy, she sits and looks around, takes in her surroundings, or finds something nearby to explore. Even after learning to walk, she preferred to be carried and usually gravitated to the sandbox rather than the slides, swings, or jungle gym. It is also rather amazing how long she can sit in a restaurant without getting antsy.

Make it personal: _____

2. Regularity: Refers to the degree of predictability that accompanies the child’s biological functions.

Circle the letter that best describes your child’s level of regularity.

a. Max has always relied on a stable daily rhythm. He’s up early, uses the bathroom three times a day like clockwork, and never stays up much past 11. With some adjustments, he can be flexible, but he seems to be at his best within his schedule. (When he was a baby, other parents envied the predictability of our days and nights.) Even now, at fifteen years old, he is looking for those three meals a day at around the same time. Though he goes to sleep a lot later, he still needs his eight hours or he’s a cranky mess.

b. Bernadette loves to eat. She goes along with the family’s schedule, three meals a day with a midmorning and mid-afternoon snack. Her daily rhythms are fairly regular, but you can’t set your watch by her. Sometimes she’s asleep by 7, sometimes 8.

c. Fulvia greets each day anew. Some days she’s ravenous and can eat throughout the day. Other days she hardly touches a morsel. Nap times and bedtimes are equally different. To have any routine ourselves, we must put her to bed at a certain time and accept that she may stay awake in her room.

Make it personal: _____

3. Initial Response to New Situations: Refers to the child’s response when introduced to a new situation or experience.

Circle the letter that best describes your child’s initial reaction to new situations.

a. We were so unsure how to handle Jason in social situations. He’s bright and likes people, but when we take him to a party or to the playground, he clings to my leg. He stands there watching for what feels like forever, and then (just around the time to leave) tentatively joins in. He’s like that with food, too. We have to offer a new food several times before he’ll try it.

b. Francisco really likes to go places and meet new people, but you wouldn’t always know it. For example, when a friend’s child came running up to him yelling hello while grabbing his hand to show him a game she was excited about, he stopped dead in his tracks and turned to me with a look of desperation on his face. It took a little while for him to warm up to her after that—but he did. The other day we took him to a Japanese restaurant and he had a ball trying the dumplings and tempura dishes. He even tried to use the chopsticks.

c. Melanie has always been a people person. At school, she introduces herself to the new kid or joins the volleyball game on the playground even when she knows no other player. She loves to travel. You could put her in a different bed each night or in a new situation every day and she would be just fine. It's a stark contrast to me, her dad, who feels best staying close to my things and familiar surroundings.

Make it personal: _____

4. Adaptability: Refers to the amount of time/energy it takes for the child to adjust to change. Circle the letter that best describes your child's level of adaptability.

a. Shopping for clothes is supposed to be a fun mother-daughter experience. Not for Alyssa and me. She has such a hard time accepting anything new or different. Whether it's a new coat, a new family car, or even a piece of furniture, each experience is met with anger and upset. She'd much rather wear the old coat she's outgrown. Changes are just hard.

b. Wayne takes a little while to switch gears. When we go to his grandparents' house, he needs me there with him for the first hour or so. Then I can leave and he's fine. If we go back the very next day, he still needs me there for a few minutes before he'll say, "Bye, Ma."

c. Nate is so flexible. What a break. Being the youngest of four children, it really helps that he can go with the flow. When I have to run to school for one of his brothers, or take his grandfather to an appointment, he has to be left at a friend's or with a babysitter. If it's a new sitter or I wake him from his nap to take him, he complains for a few minutes, but then he quickly adjusts, and goes with a smile. Nate came into the world like this. We can't take any credit.

Make it personal: _____

5. Predominant Mood: Refers to the prevalent mood that the child expresses throughout the day—how she views the world in general.

Circle the letter that best describes your child's predominant mood.

a. When my self-esteem was tied to April's responses to me or my attempts to make her smile, I felt quite dejected. Then I stepped back and saw that she responded to everyone and everything similarly. She's very touchy and can be somewhat of a curmudgeon. When other

toddlers laugh, she frowns. From her point of view, the glass is usually half empty. Exuberant, gleeful responses? They're just not her way.

b. Hernan gets upset when he's uncomfortable or frustrated. If he hasn't gotten enough sleep and has lots of schoolwork, he may feel sad and burdened and sound a bit like Eeyore. Usually, though, Hernan is cheerful and upbeat. He loves to joke and make his sisters laugh and can brighten everyone's mood.

c. The word enthusiastic best describes Dean. Since he was in preschool, he's seemed to find the world to be a very exciting and wonderful place. Of course he gets upset at times, but he doesn't stay upset for very long. He laughs aloud a lot, even if he's reading something funny to himself. His whole being smiles.

Note: It may be difficult to judge a teenager's predominant mood because of the mood swings adolescents typically experience. Go back and think about them as younger children.

Make it personal: _____

6. Persistence: Refers to the child's ability to let go of an activity or feeling.

Circle the letter that best describes your child's level of persistence.

a. Willie came into the world singing, "I'll do it my way." After running through the labels Oppositional, Defiant, Unreasonable, and Willful, we've come to realize that Focused, capital "F," best describes Willie. Whether he's trying a new sport or a crossword puzzle, he keeps at it. In fact, trying to get him to stop is excruciatingly difficult. When he sets his mind to something, a certain food or pair of sneakers, it's very hard to get him to accept an alternative or take no for an answer.

b. Brielle can concentrate on her schoolwork when it's interesting OR when she has to prepare for a test. If distracted by a phone call or her brother, she can usually get right back to it. If she doesn't understand something, she tends to ask myself or her teacher to explain it to her rather than to go over it and over it until she gets it. When she gets upset about what her boyfriend said or if I set some limit she doesn't like, it's a little difficult for her to let the feelings go. But she still takes care of her responsibilities and doesn't get completely sidetracked.

c. MaryAnn has no stick-to-it-tiveness. Though she may get engrossed in something, in comes her sister or a friend, and she drops everything to join them. If the puzzle or math question becomes challenging, she gives up quickly. She's certainly smart enough to figure things out if

she would persevere. On the other hand, she's one who can truly "go with the flow." If plans change, or if she has to settle for a different flavor ice cream, whatever it is, she's accepting and moves on quickly.

Make it personal: _____

7. Perceptiveness / Distractibility: Refers to the degree the child's focus is interrupted by outside stimuli such as sound, smell, movement, etc.

Circle the letter that best describes your child's focus.

a. Farrell is drawn to everything around him. As he eats his chicken nuggets at the dinner table, he is reaching over to grab his brother's fries. In a flash he might jump up from the table to look for the ambulance he hears down the street. Ask him to go inside and get his shoes, and ten minutes later you see him completing a puzzle on the table in the hallway. On the other hand, there's little he misses. He reads the annoyed expression on your face and responds before you say a word; he knows his mother's approaching from the smell of her perfume and can identify most birds from their song.

b. Harris loves to get immersed in a puzzle or play with his cars and trucks. If he's engrossed in something, there is not much that distracts him. When his interest wanes, he'll leave his cars to see what cartoon his sister is watching or follow the smell of cookies baking in the kitchen. Most of the time he reads his sister or me well enough to know when to back off.

c. May is a whiz at taking care of business. She gets home from school, does her homework, then her chores, and can enjoy her TV program before bed. If you ask her to get something done, you can usually be assured that she'll do it, regardless of what's going on around her. Being so focused on a task to the exclusion of all else means she's not paying attention to the subtleties around her, such as a needy friend or a colorful sky.

Make it personal: _____

8. Intensity: Refers to the child's depth of emotional reaction. What passion and energy does he bring?

Circle the letter that best describes your child's intensity.

a. It was great to hear my daughter’s kindergarten teacher tell me, with loving appreciation, “I’ve never met a child who feels her feelings as strongly as Abigail.” The intensity of her tears when we separated was only equal to her gleeful laughter when she played with a puppy, or her overwhelming frustration when she couldn’t tie her shoe. She reacts passionately to most of life.

b. Maggie is a bubbly child. Her laugh is contagious. For the most part, she is even-tempered and without much drama, although you have to know her well to read some of her moods. When she’s sad or afraid she will get quiet, but make her angry and she’ll stomp off with great fanfare, loudly declaring she needs to be alone.

c. Richie is so smart and curious, even at eight years old. His sense of humor is intelligent and somewhat low key, and it’s often hard to read his feelings because his reactions are so subtle. His friends appreciate his good ideas for games to play, and he’s never competitive with them. For his last birthday, he said he really wanted a stapler for his gift—one of those little red ones with the small staples. When he opened his present, he smiled and said “Thanks!” and went off to do some stapling.

Make it personal: _____

9. Sensitivity: Refers to the degree of awareness and reaction a child has to differences in sensory stimuli—The Princess and the Pea syndrome.

Circle the letter that best describes your child’s sensitivity level.

a. Michael will only wear cotton shirts with an open neck, nothing too tight, and he changes his clothing at least twice a day. His diet is limited to meat and potatoes—more specifically, hamburgers, fried chicken, and french fries. The only green thing he’ll consume is string beans. It drives him crazy if there’s a hint of static on the radio or if the lights are too glaring, and he can smell things the dog barely notices. What a kid. With his sensitivity, he really can appreciate a beautiful piece of music and the smell of freshly cut grass much more than most of us.

b. Jane is aware of sights and sounds around her but can tune things out when she needs to. She loves visitors, so when she hears the dog bark downstairs she comes running to see who is at the door. If she’s playing with her girlfriend, the phone can ring and ring but she ignores it. She likes soft blankets and appreciates the smell of clean towels, but won’t fuss if she has to wear her wool jacket that’s a bit scratchy. She can’t sleep with the light on and she hates to have the sun in her eyes.

c. We were amazed when Ariel slept through the blasting of the cinder block wall on the back of our house. She could sleep through anything. As a first child, it was great that she didn’t mind

noise or lights or changes in her surroundings, since we often took her visiting family and friends on the weekends. These things just don't seem to faze her.

Make it personal: _____

Note: All of the above examples came from real parents and their real children. If you go to Appendix 1, page 231, you can read the specific strategies each parent used to accommodate their children's behavioral traits and challenges.