

# Understanding your Child's Temperament

Your child's temperament influences how they think, behave and react to situations. Temperament is the building blocks of personality, and describes your child's behavioural style. Understanding your child's temperament therefore enables you to see why they respond in certain ways to situations, and therefore adjust your support to enable them to manage big emotions effectively.

In reviewing your child's temperament please watch the Temperament video on the website [www.sitgap.org](http://www.sitgap.org) on the Understanding your child tab and complete this sheet.

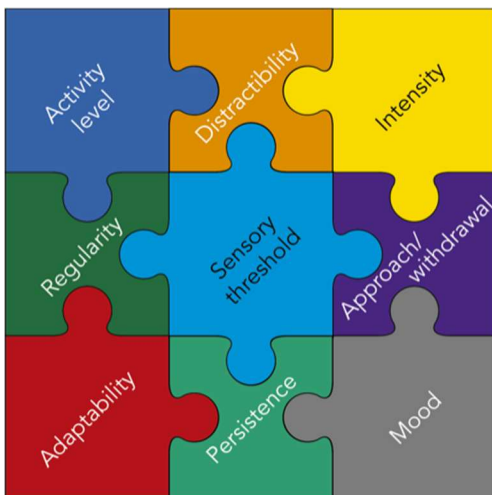
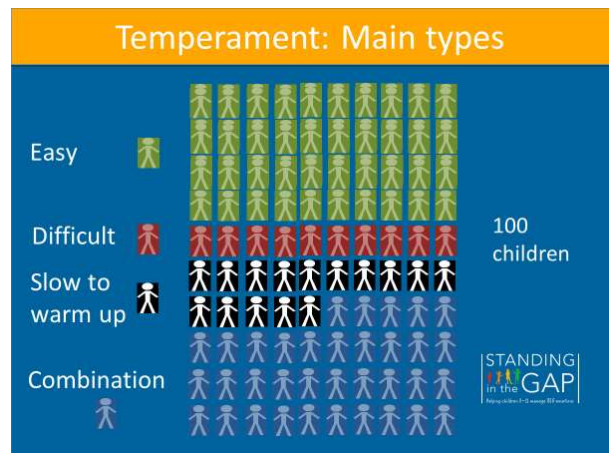
Child's Name: .....

Age: .....

## What is temperament?

Your temperament is made up of three distinct types: easy, difficult and slow to warm up, the types (see right) give an overview, but what we are really interested in are the traits and how children relate within these.

The best way I can explain the difference between types and traits is using the analogy of meals and ingredients: most people eat three meals a day and call them, for example: breakfast, dinner and tea. This is the same as the three main types of temperament. The ingredients within the meals are the parts that make up, in differing amounts, the main meals. This is the same for traits - 9 traits or ingredients make up the 3 types. Ingredients can be switched between meals e.g. you may have eggs, or cheese or potatoes at any of the different meal times during the day. Traits are similar - they make up the types in varying amounts but like the ingredients they can be found in each type (as in each meal).



Therefore, when we review temperament we are mainly interested in the traits (the ingredients), as shown in the jigsaw on the left. There are no right or wrong answers but being aware of how your child thinks, behaves and reacts to situations can be useful when helping them manage BIG feelings.

Work through the following questions relating to the nine traits and circle the number on each scale which represents your child's temperament.



**Activity level:** this relates to your child's 'idle' speed or how active they generally are.

Do they sit and quietly watch or are they always on the go?

Do they enjoy high energy activities or prefer less energetic activities?

How would you rate your child's 'idle' speed and activity level?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

Low

High

(Sit quietly)

(High energy activities)

The World Health Organisation recommends a minimum of 60 minutes moderate to vigorous exercise a day for children. This is over 12,000 steps for girls and over 15,000 steps for boys. Do you build in running around time for your child? Could you walk somewhere instead of jumping in the car?

Physical activity is great at reducing stress. Bouncing on a trampoline uses different brain waves in your brain to sitting and studying, so it can help children to refocus and reframe a thought process, if they are struggling with school work.

If you have a child whose 'Activity' gauge is high on the temperament traits make sure you incorporate exercise into your day. If your child's gauge is lower you may need to give them more encouragement to be active to an appropriate level to keep healthy.



**Distractibility:** this looks at how much attention your child pays to something they aren't particularly interested in.

How side-tracked do they become?

If they are upset can they be soothed by offering an alternative activity?

How would you rate your child's distractibility?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

Hard to distract

Very easy to distract

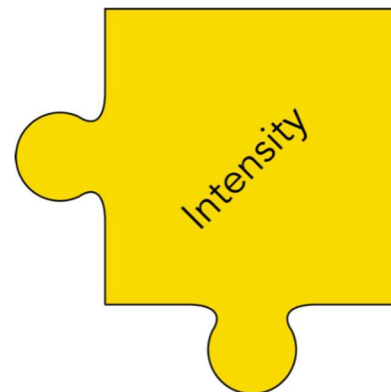
Distractibility does increase with age and time. So, don't worry if your child is very distractible. High distractibility is useful if your child is upset and you want to move on from that feeling "What's that? / look over there / tell me about....." can be helpful.

However, if your child is very distractible and has homework they may require a bit of encouragement: breaking tasks into small parts, using sand timers or buzzers to allocate time. Using positive reinforcement - let's sit and do the [maths] homework and then we can [play a game]. May help them to focus.

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**Intensity:** this looks at the level of response you'd get from your child whether positive or negative.

Does your child show pleasure or upset strongly and dramatically, or do they become quieter when upset?



How would you rate your child's intensity of response?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

Low  
(keeps quiet)

High  
(everyone knows their feelings)

Intensity responses are something that is hardwired into us and is difficult to change. But understanding where your child is, is helpful as a parent and also helpful to explain to teachers and other carers / group leaders etc. If your child tends to keep quiet it's important to understand that them being quiet doesn't mean they are happy with a situation or feel comfortable. Helping a quieter child work out how they express dislike or unhappiness with a situation can be really beneficial in helping them feel heard. Using scales can be really helpful e.g. on a scale of 1 to 10 how happy / sad / cross are you inside?

Also, if your child has a high level of intensity it will mean they make their feelings very clear, but often they may move on from the feelings quickly. E.g. I'm cross, I will shout and tell you then I'm ok. So, using a scale with high intensity children to find out how they feel 'now' can also be useful. As sometimes the feelings may pass quickly. Also knowing how they rate the feeling gives you a handle to express the feelings.

Understanding your child and helping them understand how they feel is really helpful in increasing their emotional intelligence.

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**Regularity:** this looks at how predictable your child is with their biological functions like appetite and sleep.

Do they get hungry and tired at predictable times or are they totally unpredictable?

How would you rate your child's regularity?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

If your child is very regular then make sure they get to sleep at a sensible time and have enough to eat. Moving to secondary school can be a shock as often school starts a bit earlier and lunchtimes may be later. If your child benefits from eating regularly encourage them to pack snacks and drinks to keep them going until lunch. Very regular children will struggle if they are out of routine or patterns e.g. too many late nights and a normally happy child, who is very regular, may become grumpy, angry and sullen as they aren't getting enough sleep to manage effectively.

If your child really isn't very regular and could go all day without eating, if not prompted, or hates going to bed, they will benefit from you thinking for them and prompting them as needed. E.g. Come and have a snack, take this to keep you going, etc and enforcing regular sleep times. They will get hungry and tired if they don't get enough nutrients or sleep but probably won't be able to understand why they feel such a way compared to a very regular child.



**Sensory threshold:** this considers how sensitive your child is to physical stimuli e.g. sound, taste, touch and temperature changes.

- Does your child startle at loud noises?
- Are they a picky eater or will they eat anything?
- How do they respond to the feel of clothing?

How would you rate your child's sensory threshold?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

**Low** (eat anything, wear anything aren't bothered by noise) **High** (are concerned by taste, texture, noises and sensations)

Again, none of these answers are right or wrong, however if you have a child with a high sensitivity to noise they probably won't like loud gatherings or firework displays. A simple compromise if you have to be in that environment can be noise cancelling headphone or ear defenders, which you can now get child sized and fun colours from many providers.

If your child is a picky eater it is always worth trying to increase their repertoire of foods slowly by adding one new ingredient / type of food in with known / liked foods. Research say it takes 14 tastes to get used to a new taste, so don't be put off too early with a "I don't like it." It is worth considering what battles to fight when it comes to food and probably worth seeking appropriate medical advice before making significant changes.

In relation to clothing, if your child is particular on what fabrics they wear, acknowledge this and get them involved when you buy them clothes. There is nothing more frustrating than clothes that don't get worn because your child doesn't like the feel of them.

**Approach / withdrawal:** this asks how your child responds to new situations or strangers.

Do they approach them readily or become hesitant and resistant to new situations, people and things?



How would you rate your child's response to new situations/people?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

Eager or enthusiastic

Hesitant or resistant

Again, neither is right or wrong but it's worth considering if they are very hesitant or resistant child practicing what they would say and encouraging this through basic role play can decrease anxiety for some children. (see the section about Student fears and making friends in the digital video 'Preparing for Secondary school' for further ideas on conversation hooks. On [www.sitgap.org](http://www.sitgap.org) )

Similarly advise caution to enthusiastic communicators, in an age appropriate way, that not everyone they meet may be kind and helpful and they shouldn't just share too much information or be willing to go off with strangers.



**Adaptability:** this relates to how well your child adapts to transitions and changes.

How do they cope with moving from one activity to another?

Are they happy to change activity or take a long time to become comfortable in new situations?

How would you rate your child's adaptability?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

Low

High

Again, adaptability tends to increase with age. Often very young children really struggle to move from one activity to another, some of that is normal for their age. If your child does struggle then bringing in a countdown can be helpful. This can be verbal: where you say "In 5 mins we will....." then remind again "In 2 mins we will.... And I need you to....." and then at the transition "we will now finish this.... and go and do....."

It can be visual using a sand timer or it can be auditory using an alarm on your phone etc. Knowing what your child responds to can make life much simpler and make things like getting your shoes on or getting into the car more of a game.

When my children were really little we used to play a game called “Can we beat our record” when I needed them to get on and do something without me feeling like I was nagging. Can we beat our record for getting into the car? I’d then use the timer on my phone and lots of encouragement and get them into the car without too much pain!! As I have quite competitive children, this would work really well. It won’t work for all children, but may be worth trying?

**Be careful not to use any technique, all the time, otherwise it gets boring and loses its effectiveness.**



**Persistence:** this is the length of time your child will spend at an activity in the face of obstacles.

Do they continue to work at a puzzle if it’s hard?

Can your child wait to have their needs met?

Do they react strongly to being interrupted?

How would you rate your child’s persistence?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

Low High

Again, this is something that tends to increase with age. If your child struggles to be persistent do use some of the techniques noted under adaptability such as timers or alarms. You need to keep trying to do your maths until..... the alarm goes off or the sand timer runs down. You need to stay in bed until the light turns on (using a light with a timer which you adjust every 3 days can help your child to stay in bed a bit longer on light mornings).

Also, if your child struggles to wait, explaining that you will meet their need when you have completed X or Y can help them understand. E.g. Yes, you can have a biscuit once I’ve finished doing X or Y. You then need to follow this through by allowing them the biscuit when you have finished. This will raise trust and hopefully help them realise that you will meet their needs.

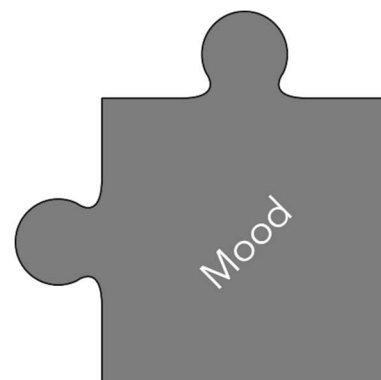
It is worth saying some needs cannot wait, such as I do need the toilet.... As many parents can attest to, sometimes you just need to be creative when needs must!

**Mood** - this is about how your child reacts to the world.

Are they mainly positive or mainly negative?

Does your child see a glass as half full or half empty?

Is your child generally in a happy mood or generally more serious?



How would you rate your child's mood generally?

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10

Negative

Positive

How we view the world is often hardwired into us, but knowing how positive or negative your child naturally is can help you understand them. If your normally happy child is quiet and sullen, something is obviously bothering them.

Naming feelings and then looking at how big they are is all part of understanding emotions. Please do review some of our other talks for more information.

## In Summary

Once you have completed the traits review please move your answers onto the summary sheet, on the next page.

As mentioned there are no right or wrong answers but it should help you understand how your child responds and also what techniques you can use that can be effective in helping them navigate this big world of feelings and emotions.

If you have more than one child please complete this exercise with each child. Seeing how they differ in temperament traits can help explain why some techniques work with some children, but not with others.

A key thing when helping children with BIG feelings and emotions is seeing the situation from the child's perspective and understanding what those feelings are like.

We hope you've found this resource useful. You can find lots more helpful resources at [www.sitgap.org](http://www.sitgap.org)

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# Summary of Temperament Traits

Childs Name: .....

Date Completed:.....

	Activity Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Low</b> (Sit quietly)									<b>High</b> (High energy activities)	
	Distractibility	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Hard to distract</b>									<b>Very easy to distract</b>	
	Intensity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Low</b> (keeps quiet)									<b>High</b> (everyone knows their feelings)	
	Regularity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Very regular</b>									<b>Totally irregular</b>	
	Sensory Threshold	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Low</b> (eat anything, wear anything aren't bothered by noise)									<b>High</b> (are concerned by taste, texture, noises or sensations)	
	Approach/withdrawal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Eager or enthusiastic</b>									<b>Hesitant or resistant</b>	
	Adaptability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Low</b>									<b>High</b>	
	Persistence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Low</b>									<b>High</b>	
	Mood	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
		<b>Negative</b>									<b>Positive</b>	



