9 Temperament Traits

Psychologists studying individual differences in people have identified the following nine traits as parts of temperament (Thomas et al, 1970).

Activity level	Amount of movement and body activity
Biological Regularity	Regularity of biological functions (e.g., sleep-wake cycle, hunger, bowel elimination)
Adaptability	How quickly or slowly the person adapts to a change in routine or overcomes an initial negative response
Approach/Withdrawal	How the person initially reactions to a new person or an unfamiliar situation
Sensitivity Threshold	How sensitive the person is to potentially irritating stimuli (e.g. sound, temperature, crowds, textures, tastes)
Intensity of Emotional Response	How strongly the person reacts to positive and negative situations. The energy level of mood expression, whether positive or negative
Distractibility	How easily the person is distracted by unexpected stimulus.
Quality of Mood	The amount of pleasant and cheerful behavior (positive mood), as contrasted with fussy, sad and unpleasant behavior (negative mood)
Persistence/Attention Span	How long the person will keep at a difficult activity without giving up

3 Temperament Types

Easy* or Flexible (about 40% of most groups of children)**
Typically, the easy child is regular in biological rhythms, adaptable, approachable, and generally positive in mood of mild to medium intensity. Such a child is easy for caregivers. S/he is easily toilet trained, learns to sleep through the night, has regular feeding and nap routines, takes to most new situations and people pleasantly, usually adapts to change quickly, is generally cheerful and expresses her/his distress or frustration mildly. In fact, children with easy temperaments may show very deep feelings with only a single tear rolling down a check.

Difficult* or Feisty (about 10% of children)**
The feisty child is the opposite of the easy child. The child may be hard to get to sleep through the night, her or his feeding and nap schedules may change from day to day, and the child may be difficult to toilet train because of irregular bowel movements. The feisty child typically fusses or even cries loudly at anything new and usually adapts slowly. All too often this type of child expresses an unpleasant or disagreeable mood and, if frustrated, may even have a temper tantrum. In contrast to the easy child's reaction, an intense, noisy reaction by the feisty child may not signify a depth of feeling. Often the best way to handle such outbursts is just to wait them out.

Caregivers who do not understand this type of temperament as normal sometimes feel resentment at the child for being so difficult to manage. They may scold, pressure or appease the child, which only reinforces her or his difficult temperament. Understanding, patience and consistency, on the other hand, will lead to a "goodness of fit," with a final positive adjustment to life's demands.

The Slow-to-Warm-Up* or Fearful Child (about 15% of children)**
Finally, there is a group of children who are often called shy. The child in this group also has discomfort with the new and adapts slowly, but unlike the feisty child, this child's negative mood is often expressed slowly and the child may or may not be irregular in sleep, feeling and bowel elimination. This is the child who typically stands at the edge of the group and clings quietly to her or his parent when taken to a store, a birthday party or a child care program for the first time. If the child is pressured or pushed to join the group, the child's shyness immediately becomes worse. But if allowed to become accustomed to the new surrounds at her or his own pace, this child can gradually become an active, happy member of the group.

* Thomas & Chess, 1990.   ****Lally, Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers (PITC), 1993.**
PITC Trainer's Manual, Module I.@WestEd, The Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers

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