

Child's Temperament

My son sent me the book, *Raising Your Spirited Child* by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, when we were trying to better understand our grandson. I have been interested in the excellent tools she provides for evaluating children. It is very important for parents to be students of their children. The more we observe, the better we are able to respond and train them. So whether your child is calm or intense, I think you will find these excerpts interesting.

For the next few months I am going to draw from this book to aid you in better knowing your own child. This won't fix all the problems or explain everything about your child, but it should help you understand your child's temperament, emphasize his strengths, provide him with the guidance he needs to express himself appropriately, and gently nudge him forward.

The first step is to evaluate your child's temperament. There is no good or bad temperament, yet there are positive and negative aspects of all the temperament traits. For this survey, there are nine different temperamental traits. Each of these traits can be placed on a continuum from a mild reaction to a strong reaction or from high to low. Everyone has their own temperament and unique style. This method is a simple way to see what characteristics go into making up your child's temperament. Choose a number that seems most accurate for your child for each characteristic.

1. Intensity

How strong are your child's emotional reactions? Does he laugh and cry loudly and energetically or softly and mildly?

1 2 3 4 5

Mild Reaction	Intense Reaction
"Squeaks" when cries	Never just cries—wails or explodes
It's almost a surprise when he gets upset	A living staircase of emotion, up one minute, down the next
Reactions are low-key, mild	Every reaction is deep and powerful
Smiles when happy	Shouts with glee
Usually works through a problem without becoming frustrated	Easily frustrated

2. Persistence

If your child is involved in an activity and you tell her to stop, does she stop easily or fight to continue?

1 2 3 4 5

Easily Stops	“Locks in”
Can be redirected to participate in another activity quite easily	Sticks to her guns, doesn’t easily let go of an idea or activity
Will cry for a few minutes and then stop	Locks in, can cry for hours
Accepts no for an answer	Never takes no for an answer

3. Sensitivity

How aware is your child of slight noises, emotions, and differences in temperature, taste, and texture? Does he react easily to certain foods, tags in clothing, irritating noises, or your stress level?

1 2 3 4 5

Usually not sensitive	Very sensitive
sleeps through noisy routines	Has to have quiet to sleep
Isn’t affected by scratchy textiles	Has to have a sock seam lined up just so
Isn’t bothered by funny smells	Complains about lights, noise, and smells, especially in crowds
Eats anything	A “selective” eater
Unaware of your stress	Acts out your stress
Not overly concerned with how things feel	Strong reactions to how things feel, whether pleasant or unpleasant

4. Perceptiveness

Does your child notice people, colors, noises, and objects around her? Does she frequently forget to do what you asked because something else has caught her attention?

1 2 3 4 5

Hardly ever notices	Very perceptive
Stays on task, isn't watching birds outside the window	Notices things most people miss
Walks past the rainbow that is reflected in the new oil spill	Spends five minutes watching the light in the new oil spill
Can remember and complete multiple directions easily	Forgets multiple directions

5. Adaptability

How quickly does your child adapt to changes in his schedule or routine? How does he cope with surprises?

1 2 3 4 5

Adapts Quickly	Adapts Slowly
Easily stops one activity and starts another	Cries or fusses when one activity ends and another begins
Is flexible with changes in the routine	Becomes upset with changes in the routine
Is not upset by surprises	May be very upset by surprises

6. Regularity

Is your child quite regular about eating times, sleeping times, amount of sleep needed, and other bodily functions?

1 2 3 4 5

Regular	Irregular
Falls asleep at the same time almost every day	Never falls asleep at the same time
Is hungry at regular intervals	Is hungry at different times each day or "forgets" to eat
Eliminates on a regular schedule	Eliminates on an irregular schedule

7. Energy

Is your child always on the move and busy or quiet and quiescent? Does he need to run, jump, and use his whole body in order to feel good?

1 2 3 4 5

Quiet	Very Active
Stays in one place when sleeping	When forced to stay in one place seems ready to burst
Sits and plays quietly for extended periods of time	Always on the move, even when sitting, fidgets

8. First Reaction

What is your child's first reaction when she is asked to meet people, try a new activity or idea, or go someplace new?

1 2 3 4 5

Jumps right in	Rejects at first or watches before joining in
Doesn't hesitate in new situations	Holds back before participating
Seems to learn by doing	Learns by watching
Open to new activities	Is distressed by new activities or things
Usually complies with a new request with little fuss	Immediately says no when asked to do something especially something new

9. Mood

How much of the time does your child feel happy and content compared with serious, analytical, or solemn?

1 2 3 4 5

Usually Positive	More serious and analytical
Usually in a good mood	Usually serious
Positive	Sees the flaws, what needs to be fixed

Now go back through all of the temperamental traits and total your responses. Mark your total on the scale below.

Score

9–18	19–28	29–45
Low-key Cool Child	Spunky Child	Spirited Child

Of course this is not a scientific analysis; it is merely a sketch, the initial strokes in the total picture of your child's personality. You can use it as a guide, helping you to understand who your child is and what gifts and challenges your child brings to you. It's like a map, identifying your starting point, helping you to plan the best route to take, and predicting where the trouble spots may be. If your child is temperamentally intense, now you know it. You can expect strong reactions from her and teach her how to diffuse that intensity or to redirect it appropriately. If your child doesn't like new situations, you can predict her reaction, teach her the social skills she needs to express herself respectfully, and learn the techniques that help her feel more comfortable.

Temperament is real. It is inside. It is not the terrible twos, sixes, or thirteens. It doesn't go away. Your child doesn't get to choose his temperament and neither do you, but an understanding of temperament allows you to predict your child's first and most natural reactions and help you to plan for success.

Child's Temperament is excerpted from pages 39-62 of *Raising Your Spirited Child* by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka