

Tending To Temperament

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Ever wonder how the laid-back, hippy parents on "Family Ties" could possibly have an uptight, intense son like Alex P. Keaton? It's more common than one might think, and not just in TV Land.

No matter what the parents are like, every child comes into this world with a unique set of traits that makes up his or her temperament. Not to be confused with personality traits, which are a combination of nature and nurture, temperament traits are inborn, genetic tendencies that are directly responsible for a child's energy level, ability to adapt to different situations, tolerance and frustration.

Doctors have uncovered nine temperament differences that play an active role in a child's development:

- Activity: Is the child relaxed or always on the move?
- Regularity: Does the child have an eating and sleeping schedule or go with the flow?
- Approach/withdrawal: Is the child chatty even with strangers, or does he/she shy away from new people?
- Adaptability: Can the child deal with change?
- Intensity: How strongly does the child react? Mellow or extremes?
- Mood: Does the child seem positive, negative or run hot and cold?

- Persistence and attention span: How long does the child stick with an activity?

- Distractibility: Can the child's interest be



- swayed easily? Are they easily soothed?
- Sensory threshold: How does the child respond to lights, noises and colors?

By definition, all variations of these temperament traits are normal, and children with any of these variations can develop in a healthy way. However, problems and frustrations sometimes arise when parents have trouble understanding their child's temperament, or when family temperaments conflict. For instance, a quiet, laid-back parent might be frustrated with an active, intense child. The parent may think there is something wrong, when the child really just exhibits a different temperament.

Many pediatric offices have a comprehensive developmental screening program for children to help parents and children understand temperament and differentiate temperament variations from developmental delays or other problems.

Parents can learn about their child's individual temperament at www.preventiveoz.org.

