

INFANT TEMPERAMENT



It is difficult to say exactly what "normal" infant behavior or temperament is. As with adults, there is a wide variety of what is considered "normal" behavior in infants. Infants have needs, wants, and behaviors that can differ greatly from one another. Because there is such a wide variety in infant behavior, many parents of infants need to be reassured that their infant's behavior falls within the "normal" range.

There are three broad categories of infant temperament that are often used as guidelines for determining "normal" infant behavior. Babies who fall into any of these categories are considered "normal." In fact, some babies will display characteristics from more than one category. This, too, is perfectly normal.

Categories of Infant Temperament

Please keep in mind that the categories discussed below are **guidelines**. Not

every baby will fit neatly into one category or another. Parents shouldn't worry if their children display characteristics from more than one of these categories. Babies are unique individuals, and these variations are normal, too. The three categories of infant temperament are easy, slow-to-warm-up, and difficult.

Easy Temperament

Most babies have easy temperaments, and they are usually in good moods. They adjust easily and quickly to new situations and changes in routine. Babies in this category usually eat on a regular schedule. When they are hungry or are experiencing some other form of discomfort, they usually react mildly. When babies with easy temperaments are fussy, they are usually able to find ways to soothe or calm themselves down. Babies with easy temperaments are generally even-tempered.

Tips for Parents with Easy Babies

Parenting babies with easy temperaments is usually very easy. It is also a very rewarding experience. Some easy babies may be so undemanding that their parents think their babies don't need them. Because of this, some parents may spend less time stimulating their babies and

relating to them. Parents with babies who have easy temperaments should keep in mind that their babies need lots of parental time and attention, even if they are very undemanding.

Slow-to-Warm-Up Temperament

Babies that have slow-to-warm-up temperaments generally seem shy. These babies need more time than easy babies to warm up to new people and experiences. Slow-to-warm-up babies may even reject or withdraw from anything or anybody new. They approach life cautiously. Instead of being very active physically, slow-to-warm-up babies are more likely to carefully watch what is going on around them. Babies with this temperament may quickly become overstimulated. When this happens, they will retreat by looking or turning away. Slow-to-warm-up babies also respond slowly and quietly to hunger and other discomforts. This may make it difficult for parents to know when their babies are hungry or uncomfortable.

Tips for Parents with Slow-to-Warm-Up Babies

Parents with slow-to-warm-up babies must be very patient. Parents should try to introduce their babies to new situations often, but should do so

calmly and slowly. Slow-to-warm-up babies will gradually adapt to new situations, but they must be given as much time as they need, with no pressure. Parents should try to be aware of their babies' signs of overstimulation and should know when to remove their babies from a situation when this occurs.

Difficult Temperament

Babies with difficult temperaments engage in almost constant physical activity. Children with this temperament may seem restless at times, and they are usually easily distracted. Difficult babies respond vigorously to hunger and other discomforts. Their crying is often loud and intense. At times, difficult babies are very hard to soothe when they're fussy. They also have difficulty soothing themselves. They are usually very light sleepers, and they demand a great deal of attention from parents.

Tips for Parents with Difficult Babies

Parents of babies with difficult temperaments often feel guilty, mistakenly believing that they are somehow at fault for their babies' temperament. These feelings of guilt can often lead to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. Parents with babies who have difficult

temperaments must not blame themselves for their babies' temperament. Instead, they should try to focus on protecting their children from events and situations that are upsetting. **Consistency** is very important, so a daily routine should be established and adhered to. Parents with babies who have difficult temperaments should try to remain as calm and as patient as possible, and they should try not to place too-high expectations on their babies. These parents should know, too, that their babies won't always have difficult temperaments. As babies approach one year of age, many characteristics of difficult temperaments disappear or diminish.

Finally...

Parents should observe their babies carefully to determine what kind of temperament they have. They should take note of eating and sleeping patterns, how their babies handle new situations, and their general mood. Parents may find that their babies easily fit into one of these categories. On the other hand, babies may express characteristics of more than one general category. Whether their children's temperaments are or are not easily defined, parents should keep in mind that babies are individuals. There is a wide range of what is considered to

be normal infant behavior. Parents should try not to be surprised or disappointed with their babies' temperament style. Instead, parents should accept their children for the individuals they are, and learn their likes and dislikes. This will help parents develop the best relationship possible with their children.



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