Understanding Temperament Helps With Family Relationships

Contact — Mackenzie DeJong, Human Sciences Specialist

Guest blogger Malisa Rader, Human Sciences Specialist, shares insight on supporting children’s temperament.

Children’s temperament develops early in life and is influenced by genetics and experiences. When parents have an understanding of their child’s unique temperament, they can tailor their approach to best meet their child’s needs. Think about different babies you have held. Some snuggle right in while others are more active in your arms. That’s temperament. The more parents accept their child’s temperament and learn to adapt, the more they create family harmony.

Researchers have found that the main factors contributing to different temperaments include:

- how strongly children react to people and events.
- how easily children approach new people or new situations.
- how well children can control their attention, emotions and behavior.

Parents also must keep in mind their own temperament. For example, if both parents and child react strongly to experiences, a cycle can begin that continues to escalate. But if a parent can remain calm, this will help break that cycle.

Adults can also learn to anticipate issues before they occur and avoid frustrating themselves and the child. For example, if a caregiver knows a child’s temperament struggles with changes to the daily schedule, the caregiver can plan snacks and breaks on days that might not follow usual routines.

Parents need to continually remind themselves that there are no good or bad temperaments, but work to see a child’s strengths and places where they might need more support.

I offer the following suggestions to support children’s temperament:

- Note how your child reacts to new and unfamiliar situations. Allow more time for transitions if needed.
- If a child’s activity level is high, be sure to have extra activities available for times such as waiting at the doctor’s office.
- Give a persistent child permission to step away from a challenging activity and come back to it at a later time.
- For a child who is easily distracted, create a quiet place for completing homework.
- Listen patiently as “high-intensity” children share feelings.
- Check in frequently with “easy-going” children to stay in tune with their needs.

For children whose behavior is challenging, set clear and consistent limits rather than using harsh punishment. Spell out any consequences in advance and make sure that your discipline strategy is fair and is geared to encouraging appropriate behavior.
The new year is upon us and you can hardly turn on the TV, open up a magazine, or visit with a friend without some diet trend surfacing. Whether it be probiotics to boost your gut health or intermittent fasting, everyone seems to be an expert. While there is no shortage of diets, reliable nutrition information can seem scarce at times. So where do you turn when presented with nutrition advice that seems well intentioned, but actually may do more harm than good? Read below for five red flags to look out for when considering diet advice.

Red flags when considering diet advice:

- **Promises rapid weight loss.** Weight loss more rapid than 1-2 pounds per week tends to be regained even faster. Many factors play into our weight status, including genetics and physical activity levels, along with what we eat. Rather than focusing solely on weight, consider if you will be learning new skills that improve your health, like meal prepping or choosing whole grain foods.

- **Cuts out entire food groups.** Removing an entire food group (like dairy, grains, or legumes) without a medical reason to do so (such as a food allergy) is impractical and can cause you to miss out on key nutrients.

- **Detoxes/cleanses/fasts.** Did you know your body comes with built in detoxifiers? That’s right, your kidneys and liver have been doing this since the day you were born! Additionally, there are many concerns regarding following a cleanse diet for an extended period of time, including fatigue due to limited protein, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and dehydration.

- **Requires you to purchase pills/bars/or shakes.** A sustainable (and affordable!) eating pattern is based on food readily available in grocery stores and farmer’s markets.

- **No need to be physically active.** Physical activity is essential for good health and weight management and should be a part of your daily routine.

So what should you be looking for in terms of nutrition advice? First, consider recommendations that focus on your overall meal pattern rather than a specific diet. Your health status is a reflection of what you consume over the course of time, not a diet you follow for a few weeks. A healthy meal pattern encourages balance and moderation, does not exclude any particular food or food group, and emphasizes small changes to improve your health. For healthy meal pattern ideas, visit the Spend Smart, Eat Smart website at [https://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/spendsmart/](https://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/spendsmart/), [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov), and [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

Meal Planning for the Health of It

**Author — Jody Gatewood, Registered Dietitian**

In the article above, Rachel shared five red flags to look out for when considering diet advice. In the article, she mentioned learning new skills that can improve your health, like meal planning, instead of focusing solely on weight. Meal planning is a popular practice; especially at the beginning of the year when people are trying to eat better, save money and be more organized. It can help you check off all three!

Today I’m going to share with you five tips for meal planning with health in mind.

1. Include foods from each of the food groups. This allows you to get a variety of nutrients provided by each of the food groups needed for good health. Our 5-Day Meal Planning Worksheet at [https://iastate.app.box.com/s/nwecdndbm5iqhioz3suu](https://iastate.app.box.com/s/nwecdndbm5iqhioz3suu) has a checklist at the bottom to help you determine if you included something from each food group.

2. Balance the food groups throughout the day. Aim to have 1-2 food groups at snacks and 3-4 food groups at meals. For example, at breakfast you might have a scrambled egg, slice of whole-wheat toast, an orange, and glass of milk. Then at snack you have celery sticks with peanut butter.

3. Include two servings of fruit and three servings of vegetables. This is a general guide for each person per day. An example would be a banana for breakfast, an apple and broccoli for lunch, and vegetable soup for dinner. To determine the specific amount you need and for information on what counts as a serving, visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov).

4. Include whole grains. Whole grains have more fiber, which is important for health. It is recommended to make half your grains whole grains. Therefore, if your family prefers white pasta, balance that out by including other whole grains in your menu plan like brown rice or whole wheat bread.

Include both plant and animal proteins. Animal proteins are a good source of iron while plant proteins are higher in fiber. If you have chicken at lunch, consider having lentil tacos for supper. Or mix both beans and meat with pasta instead of just meat. If you’re new to meal planning, use our sample meal planning calendar to help get started. We also have a new sample vegetarian meal planning calendar at [https://iastate.app.box.com/s/pwosblp201c43l9uu7htq7ppmm73tg](https://iastate.app.box.com/s/pwosblp201c43l9uu7htq7ppmm73tg).
Have You Reviewed Your Beneficiary List Recently?

Author — Susan Taylor, Families Finance Specialist

Have you reviewed your beneficiary list recently? Why should you do this? Some of the biggest headaches experienced by tax, legal and financial advisers occur when their clients are not current with their beneficiaries.

During a meeting of older adults, I had a woman admit that her mother was her beneficiary. In the same breath, she mentioned that her mother had been dead for 14 years. I highly encouraged her to change her beneficiary as soon as possible.

If you have not left clear and up-to-date instructions, your heirs will face real legal obstacles; sometimes long and expensive legal and family disputes result, often not ending well. Many of these mistakes are so easy to avoid: simply check your beneficiary forms while you are still breathing! Encourage your family members to do the same.

Any big life event – such as a birth, a death, a marriage, a divorce, a remarriage, a new grandchild, or a change in the tax law – is a reason to revisit your beneficiary forms. My brother-in-law had three brothers and all three had been through divorce; there were children and remarriages. In those situations, updating beneficiary forms is critical.

Avoid the headaches. To avoid beneficiary form problems, it is important to name a contingent beneficiary in case the primary beneficiary precedes you in death or chooses to disclaim the benefit.

Take an inventory of all retirement accounts and investment accounts — locate beneficiary forms for each one. After reviewing and updating them now, and adding contingent beneficiaries to each, mark your calendar to review them annually. Keep on file a copy of the most current beneficiary form for all your accounts, and make sure your family members know where to locate them.

Winter Weather—Time to Organize!

Author — Barb Wollan, Families Finance Specialist

In much of Iowa, our recent winter weeks have held lots of days suitable only for staying indoors. We’ve canceled or postponed many plans, and some of our dogs have missed lots of walks because some days were just too cold or windy.

So what can we do with those snow days? I have an idea!
No, it’s not binge-watching your favorite shows or movies, nor does it involve baking. You don’t need ME to suggest those!

My idea is less recreational, but much more valuable in the long term: go through your files!

Cleaning and organizing files is a task we tend to procrastinate. But in an emergency, and even in many non-emergency situations, we sure would like to turn to our files and immediately put our hands on the document(s) we need. When need arises, we’ll be glad we invested some time in getting organized.

Here’s the good news: it’s a task that can be broken up into small doses.

• **If you already have a filing system**, you can just go through one or two files a day, to pull out old materials that are no longer needed, and make sure the most current information is in front.

• **If you do not have a filing system in place**, start with a small stack of papers from wherever you’ve been storing them. Create file folders or envelopes for each category of papers you run across. For example, if the first paper you come to is about your car insurance, then create a car insurance file. Perhaps the next item will be college transcript – if so, create an education file.

Well-organized files have three characteristics: 1) they are clearly labeled; 2) the newest and most important information is in front; and 3) out-of-date and unimportant documents are removed. Determining what is important can be a challenge. **Some tips for starters:**

• Insurance – keep the most recent summary of coverage (declarations page). In addition, keep the full policy booklet if you have one, and any updates you receive about coverage details.

• Mutual fund accounts – keep your quarterly statements until the year-end statement arrives; that should include all activity for the year, so you can discard the quarterly statements. Keep all year-end statements, with the most recent in front. Keep the most recent prospectus. There is no need to keep annual reports.

• Monthly bills – once you get the next statement showing that your payment was received, you can safely discard the previous statement, unless you need it for tax purposes.

• Warranties and purchase records for warranted items – keep as long as you own the item. Keep the purchase information longer if the item affects your taxes.

• Taxes – after six years, they can be discarded.

Personally, my biggest filing problem is old folders with labels that have fallen off — I need to go through and re-label files. Which filing task most needs your attention?
It's Seed Selection Season
Author — Marlene Geiger, Answerline Specialist

A delicious or beautiful summer garden of vegetables and/or flowers, starts with planning and picking out seeds and plants now. Whether you shop for seeds or plants from a catalog, online, or garden center, it can be an overwhelming task deciding what to plant. Here are a few tips that I use to keep my seed or plant orders manageable and not let my eyes and imagination get bigger than the time and space I have to plant.

It's not necessary to plant everything from seed. The annual plants in my garden come from a mix of seeds, plants purchased at plant sales and garden centers once spring arrives, and plants shared by friends. The seeds I purchase and start are usually a variety that intrigue me or that I don’t think I will be able to find locally. Many of the seed catalogs also offer plant offerings so if only one or two plants are desired, it might be more economical to purchase the plant than the seed.

Plant what you will eat and/or preserve in the vegetable garden. While I would encourage anyone to broaden their vegetable and fruit palate, planting vegetables and herbs that are not favorites is not in your best interest. Be sure to consider space considerations; some plants like pumpkins and squash require a lot of space. And remember, it doesn’t take too many plants of anything to fill your needs.

Try something new. Each year, we save space to experiment with a new edible or flowering plant or a different variety of something familiar just to broaden our experience, knowledge and palate, if edible.

Include some pollinators. Adding a few beneficial flowers to the vegetable garden will boost your edible yields and may also provide some natural pest control. My personal favorites are zinnias as both bees and hummingbirds love them, they are so easy to seed and grow, and they make great cut flowers. The choices in zinnia varieties seems to be every expanding, too.

Care for unused seeds. Seed packets may contain more seeds that needed. Most seeds can be stored for one or two years and still produce great results in your garden. The key is to store them properly. Seed Savers Exchange offers some great tips for storing seeds at http://blog.seedsavers.org/blog/how-to-store-seeds. Another alternative is to share them with friends.

If you would like to receive some seed catalogs or are looking for something specific (organic, heirloom, etc.), here are some online sources to help you as well as some other ideas to get you started with your spring planting:
https://www.thespruce.com/free-seed-catalogs-1357756
https://www.betterhensandgardens.com/free-garden-seed-catalogs/?fbclid=IwAR2NzlyXpn25Dw8l5dY-l4lUxgXY3pPfChcEZ3sums-eF1e06cu4JzT2kU
http://www.birdsandblooms.com/gardening/gardening-basics/10-seed-catalogs/?1

Rediscovering Sunday Night Suppers
Author — Marlene Geiger, Answerline Specialist

Somehow I missed it! January was National Sunday Night Supper Month! Unbeknown to me, the movement began in 2016 as a time to begin Sunday night family meal time. The second Sunday of January is designated as the Sunday to celebrate it by starting family Sunday night suppers if it is not already part of your family tradition. Noting that family time on Sunday nights had become a waning tradition, Isabel Laessig, a mother of four, is credited as the founder of the Sunday Supper Movement. The Sunday Supper Movement’s mission is to “create a better future for families, by partnering with brands and services that help families feel good, eat better and interact with each other.”

As a kid growing up in a large family, Sunday night supper was always a special time for my family. We ate together at the table, talked, and after the meal played games or cards; usually we were at home, but at least once a month, we shared this time with either my maternal grandmother or paternal grandparents. I have no recollection of what we ate as I’m sure it was whatever my mother fixed or warmed up. The important thing was that we were together after a week of many farm family activities.

With our fast-paced lifestyles and technology changing all aspects of family life and communication, perhaps it is important that we rediscover shared family time with a meal and set aside a month to remind us or get us started. January may well be a good time for observance, too, as it comes with a “starting a new” mindset or a time for resolutions to make positive changes.

If having to come up with a family meal at home is overwhelming or an unwanted chore as one wraps up weekend chores and activities and prepares for the week ahead, reduce the pressure by ordering out, have a potluck if extended family is involved, rotate meal responsibilities, make or reheat soup, make a pizza together or bake a frozen one, or simply go with what it is in the refrigerator.

The Sunday Supper Movement’s website at https://sundaysuppermovement.com/ offers a recipe index, cookbooks and reviews, contests and giveaways, and a community section to help anyone get started. The food doesn’t matter as much as the time together as a family and carrying on traditions that we had as kids with our kids and/or grandkids. Regardless of where or how the meal and time takes place, the best advice is to do it without technology at the table, too. So gather your family or friends and have a meal together. Savor each other’s company around the supper table. And just maybe, if January (or March since January and February are nearly past) Sunday night suppers go well, they may become a way of life for your family.