The feisty kid. We all know one. We’ve all seen one acting out in the line at the grocery store, or perhaps in our own living room? Perhaps some of us are lucky enough to have one in our families. And even a few of us have matured into a “feisty adult” and perhaps know personally what it’s like to be a feisty kid.

Feisty kids have a reputation for being the most challenging temperament type to parent. They could easily be described as “button pushers”. Feisty kids are not boring and keep a parent on their toes. Researcher Peter Mangione tells us that 10% of children fall into this temperament type that other researcher may have labeled “difficult”. They have traits that are high including impulsiveness, sensitivity, intensity, distractibility, combined with traits that are on the low side including the decreased ability to adapt to change, trouble calming and self-regulation.

So...how would you describe a feisty child? A feisty child expresses their opinions in a very intense way. Whether they are happy or mad, everyone around them will know how they feel. These children remain active most of the time, and this causes them to be aggressive. Mangione relates
that feisty children often have the tendency to have a “negative persistence” and will go “on and on nagging, whining and negotiating” if there is something they particularly want.

Mangione describes feisty children as being irregular in their napping and feeding times, but conversely they do not adapt well to changes in their routines. They get “used to things and won’t give them up” Anything out of the ordinary could send them into some type of fit. Mangione states that “If these children are not warned of a change, they may react very negatively”. Feisty children also tend to be very sensitive to their surrounding environment. As a result, they may have strong reactions to their surroundings.

How does a parent start? Children with feisty temperaments require extra—extra time, extra guidance, extra patience, extra strategies. But feisty children can be raised to be well adjusted young people with positive self esteem…but it will take some EXTRA parental work. Effective parents will need to develop attitude, discipline strategies and communication skills that can work with—not against their children’s temperament. This isn’t the time for parents to give up. However, research shows that overtime moms tends to withdraw from highly reactive babies, their ignoring increases and they play less with the child. But if they would simply react and approach the child with empathy and understanding the child would feel safe emotionally.

So what can a parent do? Join us this month as we blog about the temperament and strategies to tame the “feisty child”. We will explore ways for parents to help their children develop strategies and skills that can work with rather than against their temperament. We will discuss challenges that parents face in living day to day with a feisty temperament.

As always, we look forward to hearing about your experiences around this topic. Share with us how you have learned to understand your child’s unique temperament traits. Follow the Science of Parenting blog at http://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/scienceofparenting.

-30-

ISU Extension and Outreach Contact:
Lori Hayungs, Human Sciences Specialist, Family Life
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
712-737-4230 office, or (605) 310-6318, lhayungs@iastate.edu