



CLIPPINGS a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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For Immediate Release

Understanding Temperament Helps with Family Relationships

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This week, I am sharing an article written by my colleague, Malisa Rader, Human Sciences Specialist. With summer break starting soon, it is a good reminder about 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.

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