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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Understanding Your Child's Temperament¹

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When my second child (and son) was born, I immediately knew that everything I thought I'd figured out about parenting had just gone out the window. While my sons come from the same parents and environment, there is little about their personalities that you'd find in common. Learning about their temperaments and how to manage their differences was an adventure.

In fact, all children are born with their own style of interacting with or responding to the world. In a groundbreaking study in the 1950s, researchers identified nine temperament characteristics, or behavior traits, that clinicians and researchers continue to use today. The researchers found that these nine traits were present at birth and continued to influence development throughout life (Child Development Institute., n.d.).

The nine temperament traits include a child's activity level, their rhythm or lack of rhythm in sleeping and eating habits, and approach or withdrawal (for example, does the child shy away from new people or make friends with every stranger)? Three additional temperament traits include adaptability, intensity, and a child's typical mood (Child Development Institute., n.d.).

1. This document is FAR0077, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published March 2009. In the interest of time or clarity, the broadcast version of this script may have been modified. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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A child's persistence and attention span are also examined for temperament, as well as their sensory threshold, or their ability or inability to tolerate external stimuli, such as loud noises or bright lights. The final trait is distractibility: the child's ability to shut out external distractions and stay with an activity (Child Development Institute., n.d.).

As parents understand and embrace their children's temperaments, they can usually also better respond to their children, hopefully making the adventure of parenthood a more pleasant ride.

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