



KIT "Keeping In Touch" August 2011



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Resource Article

This month's KIT article is entitled, "Clinical Implications of Temperamental Characteristics in Young Children with Developmental Disabilities." The author, Dr. Hepburn suggests that the role of temperament in young children with developmental disabilities should be closely examined and integrated into the practices of early intervention with families. Because children with developmental disabilities are at equal or greater risk for developing behavioral problems than children without disabilities, the need for capturing the behavioral style of a child is necessary. The author notes that descriptions of temperament are often absent from evaluations, that there is a lack of agreed upon vocabulary to illustrate temperament, and that when described temperament may be viewed as behavior less associated with neurobiological predisposition and more attributed to the intentionality of a child. The response of a parent/caregiver to a child's behavior when



viewed as intentional versus unintentional can be significantly different (e.g. a

punitive response versus an instructional one) and can lead to significantly different outcomes for the child. The author proposes: including descriptions of temperament in evaluations and ongoing work with families; assembling a core vocabulary to describe behaviors associated with temperament; and discussing a child's temperament with parents to help them better understand possible causes and responses to a child's temperament.

Two relevant measures of temperament referenced are the Carey Temperament Scales (Carey & McDevitt, 1996) and the Temperament and Atypical Behavior Scales [TABS] (Neisworth, Bagnato, Salvia, & Hunt, 1999). Both measures aim to capture a child's behavior across many different situations and rely on parent report.

Several different temperaments are described in terms of children with different disabilities/diagnoses and a brief discussion of clinical implications is provided for the following:

- Low in Adaptability
- Low in Persistence

- Low in Distractibility
- Activity Level (Low & High)
- Rhythmicity (e.g., self-regulation)
- Approach/Withdrawal (e.g., avoidant or engaging)
- Emotional Intensity
- Mood (e.g., irritable)
- Threshold of Responsiveness

For example, children who demonstrate low in distractibility tend to shift attention within activities and engage in social activities rather than the task at hand. Children with this temperament are amongst the most challenging to parent and teach. Strategies such as building your relationship with the child (e.g., building a repertoire of highly motivating activities), using sensory-social routines to initiate interaction, keeping verbal interaction at a minimum when introducing yourself into an activity, and providing more one to one instruction and less group instruction are all strategies that could be shared with families and child care providers. This information seems especially useful to include for children who are transitioning out of early intervention and into other settings (e.g., preschool services for children with disabilities, different early intervention programs, etc.) By regularly including descriptions of temperament in the work of early intervention, a child's behavioral style is better understood. By discussing a child's temperament with a family, they may better understand how to help their child grow and learn.

Hepburn, S. L. (2003). Clinical implications of temperamental characteristics in young children with developmental disabilities. *Infants and Young Children*, 16(1), 59-76.

On the WWW



The web resource this month comes from The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL). It is a "What Works Brief" on Understanding Temperament in Infants and Toddlers. The brief addresses what temperament is, why understanding a child's temperament is important, and how to capitalize on a child's temperament to promote social-emotional development and behavior. Also included is a temperament continuum that can be completed with parents to begin a discussion about temperament and the similarities and differences between a child and parent.

This resource is available online at <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/wwb/wwb23.html>

What Do the Data Say?

What are behaviors that parents find most difficult when it comes to childrearing?



This question was part of a larger survey conducted with parents of children birth to three years of age. The research was conducted by Hart Research Associates in 2009 and included 1615 respondents. The full report is available online at the Zero To Three website – see the direct link below.

http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/parenting-resources/final_survey_report_3-11-2010.pdf

The question extrapolated from the full report for inclusion in this KIT was about challenging behaviors. At the top of the list of childrearing challenges reported by parents was temper tantrums (34%), followed by controlling emotions (15%), biting/fighting/hitting (14%), not listening (13%), sleep/bedtime issues (11%), potty training (9%), attitude/talking back (9%), and eating/food issues (8%). Interesting was that mothers and fathers responded somewhat differently. With regard to temper tantrums, 40% of mothers and nearly half as many fathers (21%) reported this as a top challenge. With regard to sleep/bedtime issues, 17% of fathers and nearly half as many mothers (8%) rated this as a top challenge.

This list of top rated childrearing challenges includes many of the challenges families share with early interventionists as concerns and priorities for intervention. In addressing such challenges with parents, it is important to keep in mind that a child's temperament influences his/her behavior and interactions with others. Hence, helping parents understand their child's temperament can lead to parents developing a "goodness of fit" to meet the needs of the child.



Consultation Corner

From August through January 2012, we are excited and honored to have Jennifer Best from Iowa State University as the KIT Consultation



Corner expert addressing the topic *Understanding Temperament in Young Children*. Following is an introduction and greeting from Jennifer.

Hello! I am thrilled to be participating in the next *Consultation Corner* series. My name is Jennifer Best. I am a Certified Family Life Educator and youth development educator for Iowa State University, Scott County Extension. I have been in this role for almost thirteen years, working with children, youth, families, human service professionals, schools and organizations helping our citizens learn and grow in their full potential. My undergraduate degree is from the University of Northern Iowa in psychology and family services. My graduate degree is from Western Illinois University in education and interdisciplinary studies. I am also an adjunct faculty member for Scott Community College and Upper Iowa University, teaching in the early childhood, education and student development departments. This summer I will finish a post-graduate certificate program called "Excellence in College Teaching." I have been married for thirteen years and have one nine-year-old son.

Temperament is a topic very near and dear to my heart because it is common to all of us, no matter our age, ethnicity, place of residence, language or religion. Essentially,

our temperament is the part of our personality that we are born with. I like to explain it as our “hard wiring.” As we get older, we can learn to work around some of our hard wiring (especially in situations where our temperament doesn’t fit well with our environment) but at our core, our temperament is really the essence of who we are. Understanding our own temperament and that of those around us can help us make relationship and parenting decisions that make sense for everyone (hopefully without raising our blood pressure!).

We will start talking about the important elements of temperament next month. To help us on our journey, spend some time this month thinking about your child(ren)’s temperament. Were they noisy and wiggly when they were born or were they quiet and liked to be held? Do they like to be on a specific eating, sleeping and playing schedule or are they more “go with the flow”? Do they jump head-long into new situations, or do they like to hold back and check things out for awhile first? Do they like challenges and keep at them until they have figured them out or do they give up and move on to the next thing? Your reflection about these questions, and others that we will discuss in this series, will help you celebrate your child for their unique place in the world and help you help support the families you work with.

To get a headstart, read more about temperament from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension System at

<http://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4358e/>

Continuing Education for KIT Readers



The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on *Understanding Temperament in Young Children*, readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (August through December 2011) and completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

If you are interested, take the exam online at www.edis.army.mil and upon successful completion, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

Please send your Consultation Corner questions and KIT ideas via email to ediscspd@amedd.army.mil

