



KIT

“Keeping In Touch”

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Resource Article



This month’s KIT resource article is based on a poster presentation by Ramie Cooney and Deborah Holmes. Temperament is known to persist from infancy through childhood and into adulthood. The researchers were interested in whether toddler temperament impacted the kindergarten experience and if so how. To examine this issue, they collected longitudinal data on toddler temperament at age 18 months as well as cognitive and behavioral data at pre- and post-kindergarten. The results suggested that toddler temperament does influence and to some extent predicts kindergarten performance. Toddler temperament was measured at age 18 months using the Toddler Temperament Scale (1984). This scale consists of nine temperament areas:

- threshold of stimulation/physical sensitivity,
- rhythmicity/predictability/regularity,
- activity level,
- distractibility,
- mood,
- response intensity,
- adaptability,
- persistence, and
- approach/withdrawal.

From parent reports, the children were then categorized into one of three categories (*easy*, *intermediate*, and *difficult*) with the following breakdown: 13 infants were considered as having an *easy* temperament, 14 as *intermediate*, and 7 as *difficult*. Cognitive and behavioral skills at the beginning and conclusion of kindergarten were measured using the following: (1) Wechsler Preschool Primary Intelligence Scale (WPPSI), providing an intelligence quotient (IQ) for (a) full scale, (b) performance and (c) verbal; (2) Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), providing a general measure of academic performance; and (3) Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, providing a measure of adaptive/social maturity and frequency of maladaptive behaviors. Fifty six percent of the subjects were male, 44% female. A relatively homogenous sample was used in an effort to factor out additional environmental influences (e.g., first born, living in two parent homes, both parents were college educated, all families were upper middle class and lived in a Midwestern suburb).

Results suggested that *easy* children adapt well to kindergarten, *difficult* children find it more challenging and perform less well, and intermediate children fall somewhere between. *Easy* children experienced gains in overall intelligence and only slight declines in adaptive behavior were noted. In contrast, *difficult* children showed declines in intelligence, smaller gains in academic achievement, and experienced losses in adaptive behavioral

functioning throughout the kindergarten year. the highest, *difficult* children coming in next, followed by *intermediate* children. In summary, toddler temperament was found to have predictive value when considering how well a child adjusts and functions in kindergarten.

Not surprisingly, children with *intermediate* temperament performed less well than the *easy* children and better than the *difficult* ones. *Intermediate* children appeared to adapt well to the classroom experience, increased intellectual achievement throughout the kindergarten year but also showed a losses in adaptive behavioral functioning. The largest gains in full scale IQ were found in children with *easy* temperaments, followed by those children with *intermediate* temperament; children with *difficult* temperament showed losses in this area. The pattern was somewhat different for changes in academic achievement, with *easy* children scoring the highest, *difficult* children coming in next, followed by *intermediate* children. In summary, toddler temperament was found to have predictive value when considering how well a child adjusts and functions in kindergarten.

Early intervention transitions (i.e., from early intervention services to preschool) come to mind when considering the implications of this study. By working closely with parents and caregivers, early interventionists gain first-hand knowledge about a child's temperament. Sharing this information during the transition process may help facilitate the most effective and responsive programming for the child.

Cooney, R. R. & Holmes, D. L. (March 1998). Can toddler temperament characteristics predict later school adaptation? Poster presented at the Biennial Conference on Human Development in Mobile, AL, March. Accessed November 2011 at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED417833.pdf>

On the WWW



The web resource this month is an online training program titled, "Keys to Postpartum Depression" developed by the University of Washington School of Nursing and Washing State First Steps Team. This online program consists of three modules that address the following five learning objectives: 1) increase your understanding of perinatal depression' 2) teach you to recognize the symptoms; 3) help you address diversity by "Joining With"; 4) demonstrate early detection tools; and 5) address treatment options. Included in the online training are various presentations, videos illustrating and reinforcing the training materials, and links to additional information. While the material is quite extensive it can be helpful to understand and help mothers with perinatal depression seek help.

<http://steppingup.washington.edu/keys/default.htm>

What Do the Data Say?

Does culture influence infants and toddlers social-emotional skill development?



The answer is an outstanding yes. Looking back to the work of Vygotsky (1978) we are reminded that children learn as a result of interactions with their parents and others and that these interactions are cultivated by an accumulation of knowledge of society and culture. Culture is intertwined with children's development, which includes the refinement of social-emotional skills. Temperament and attachment also have a cultural basis, as culture influences every aspect of human development.

Cross-cultural research provides a wealth of information on the similarities and differences across cultures concerning childrearing values (i.e., parental aspirations and goals for their children), beliefs (i.e., developmental expectations), and practices (i.e., parent-child interactions). Family values and beliefs guide child-rearing practices and shape how daily routines, such as feeding, sleeping, playing, and diapering/toileting play out. Culture also influences a parent's response to their baby's crying, temper tantrum, illness, or even development delay.

Accordingly, early intervention providers must understand each family's culture to extend the support that is most meaningful and helpful to the family. The following two resources provide further information on young children's social-emotional development and the influence of culture.

http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/rs_screning_assessment.pdf

[http://www.mi.gov/documents/Social Emotional Development in Young Children Guide 88553 7.pdf](http://www.mi.gov/documents/Social_Emotiona_l_Development_in_Young_Children_Guide_88553_7.pdf)

Consultation Corner



From August through January 2012, we are excited and honored to have Jennifer Best from Iowa State University in as the KIT consultation corner expert addressing the topic *Understanding and Temperament in Young Children*.

Welcome back! It is the "final installment" in our series on temperament. Today is where the rubber meets the road in terms of helping us know what to do to assist families in

understanding how temperament influences their family system.

Let's review what we know:

1. Temperament is "hard wired."
2. Each of the nine temperament traits fall along a continuum from "low" to "high", with most individuals falling somewhere in the middle. Those temperaments that are most extreme are most difficult for us to deal with.
3. Temperament is fairly stable across the lifespan, although as we age, we learned to behave in ways that socially and logistically advantageous for the circumstances.
4. Temperaments interact with each other in groups called clusters. Some clusters may produce a combination of behaviors that is stressful for families to the point of needing intervention and support services.
5. Some people, situations, classrooms, workplaces, careers and relationships are a "good fit" for us because of our temperament. Others are difficult for our temperament. The more incompatible these are with our temperament, the more stress we feel.

When working with families, we want to provide information in ways that is easily understandable and relevant to their life. I find that there are several things that assist me in doing this.

- *Use props.* Temperament is an abstract concept, in that we can't "see it." Therefore, I like to use a "tool kit" of props to help adults associate their innate style with something tangible. These are some ideas to get you started:
 - Activity Level: shoes, jump rope, pillow, remote control
 - Regularity: lock, watch
 - Approach / Withdrawal: hat, sunglasses

- Sensitivity: Ear muffs, cymbal, light bulb, sun, sunglasses, sock, fabric textures
 - Intensity of Reaction: photos
 - Distractibility: clouds, binoculars, microscope, telescope
 - Mood: screen beans, drinking glasses (glass half full/empty)
 - Persistence: toddler puzzle, 1,000 piece puzzle
- *Focus on the “innateness” of temperament.* Parents often feel frustrated, helpless and stressed when their family life is difficult. When parents are “at the end of their rope”, they sometimes feel as if children are being deliberately stubborn, ornery and impossible. Help parents recognize that two-year-olds are not trying to make their parents have a nervous breakdown.
 - *Help parents understand what is typical development at each age.* Sometimes parents feel frustrated about a child more because they don’t understand what is normal for a developmental stage than because their child is doing something wrong. For example, if a parent was upset because their child wouldn’t share and the child is two, we would explain those two year-olds are preoperational thinkers. This means that they can relate to others, but they cannot see their perspective. Because of this, toddlers think everything belongs to them. If they have ever played with that truck it must be theirs. So, even though we have to keep training toddlers to share, we have to expect that they won’t be able to at least for awhile.
 - *Use perspective analogies.* When someone has a different view on a situation than we do, our natural instinct is to assume that our way is “right” and their way is “wrong.” To help families consider that temperament isn’t about right or wrong, it is about understanding perspectives, I like to use

NFL analogies. I usually say something like this:

“Have you ever watched a NFL game where the officials made a call that a player caught the ball, but was out of bounds? What often happens? The other team’s coach challenges the call, right? Then the officials review the play by viewing the instant replay. While the officials are reviewing the play, the sports casters are making their own predictions about what the call will be. They typically play the instant replay from one camera angle in slow motion first. When you watch it, you think to yourself, “He was in bounds! That was totally a bad call. They have to reverse that call!” Then just as your blood pressure is starting to rise because you are sure it was a bad call, the sports announcers switch cameras. Now, you see the “instant replay” in slow motion from a totally different angle. This time, it looks like the player was at least two feet out of bounds. Now you aren’t sure what to think. Which camera angle is showing “the truth”? This is how temperament works. There is no “right” or “wrong.” Everyone has their own idea about things, because they are each seeing it from their own perspective.

- *Support parents during reflection.* One of the most important roles we have in working with families is to help them process their experiences and make meaning out of those situations that are difficult, and sometimes even tragic. This means asking careful questions such as:
 - Is the behavior a temperament trait or a coping mechanism? Why do you think this?
 - Is the behavior developmentally appropriate? Why do you think this?

- Is the behavior a problem in all circumstances or only in some circumstances? What does this tell us?
- We also want to help parents consider:
 - How each child can use their temperament as an asset?
 - How to educate themselves about each child's temperament cluster?
 - Ways to help children find success with their temperament type?
 - How their parenting may be contributing to their difficulties?
- *Empower families.* The bottom line for families who are struggling with temperament issues is this. They have three choices:
 - Accept and move on. I have a friend who says "Is this the hill you want to die on?" This is my reality check to ask myself, "Is this battle really worth it?"
 - Make parenting changes. One piece of advice I tell all my families is: changing yourself is easier and more successful than changing others, and that includes your children.
 - Seek outside resources. Sometimes families truly need professional consultation, psychological assessment, therapy, medication, etc. Having a supportive individual help them through this can make all the difference in the world.

I hope you have enjoyed our temperament journey as much as I have. I believe that as human service providers, understanding ourselves is one of the most important tools we have in helping others. It is my wish that you have learned more about what makes you unique and how your uniqueness interacts with the world around you. Thank you for the work you do to bring support, encouragement and empowerment to families.

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

