



## KIT “Keeping In Touch” September 2011



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### Resource Article



This month’s KIT resource article, written by Carso, Carson, Klee and Jackman-Brown, examined the differences between parents’ self-reported descriptions of parenting behavior and child temperament for their toddlers with and without speech and/or language delay (SLD). The authors suggest that parenting behavior and temperament are closely intertwined when considering a transactional model of child development: a toddler’s delay in communication may negatively impact the interactions with a parent, which may then negatively impact the parent’s ability to confidently interact with the toddler, and so on. Essentially, the ‘goodness of fit’ between a parent and toddler is made more difficult because of the combination of SLD and temperament. The authors sought out to substantiate this notion by examining parents’ perceptions of parenting behavior and child temperament.

Voluntary participation in this study yielded 47 toddlers, between 25-31 months of age, and their parents. Thirty toddlers (16 boys, 14 girls) had typical speech and language; 17 toddlers (10 boys, 7 girls) were considered to have a speech and/or language delay. Parents and toddlers participated in a series of parent interviews, parent-completed measures (Temperament and Atypical Behavior Scale [TABS] and the Parent Behavior Checklist [PBC]), and developmental/speech-language evaluations

(including a 20 minute language sample, in which the child wore a vest with an FM transmitter and microphone for recording purposes). The results and responses were used to classify the children into one of two groups, those with typical language skills and those with a SLD. Results from this study suggest that parents of children with SLD reported feeling less nurturance and were more likely to use physical punishment in discipline than parents with typically developing toddlers. Additionally, toddlers with SLD were viewed having greater detachment and underactive behaviors when compared to the toddlers with typical speech and language.

The transactional model of child development is underscored in these results. Toddlers with SLD were more likely be detached, withdrawn, and have difficulty following parental instructions than those typically developing. Parents of children with SLD appeared less positive and less accepting of their child’s behavior, and they were more likely to respond punitively than those parents of typically developing toddlers. ‘Goodness of fit’ between a parent and toddler appears critically impacted by a child’s temperament, a child’s speech and language delay, and parental perceptions of their own parenting behavior – something to consider in our work with families and children.

Carso, C. K. P., Carson, D. K., Klee, T., & Jackman-Brown, J. (2007, Spring). Self-Reported Parenting Behavior and Child Temperament in Families of Toddlers With and Without Speech-Language Delay. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 28, pp. 155-165.

## On the WWW



The Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, from Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, has developed a tool to help parents and caregivers explore their own temperament traits, as well as those of their child or a child for whom they provide care. Results from using the Infant Toddler Temperament Tool support parents and caregivers in understanding how adult and child similarities and differences in temperament traits may affect "goodness of fit" and provide tips to foster the unique temperament of each child within their care.

The tool can be completed online and upon completion, it generates a snapshot of goodness of fit as well as recommendations. This could be a very helpful resource to review with parents as part of early intervention. The direct link to the online temperament tool is:

<http://www.ecmhc.org/temperament/IT3.php?toddler>

More information on temperament from the Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation can be found at the following link:

<http://www.ecmhc.org/temperament/index.html>

## What Do the Data Say?

**Can a six month old baby be spoiled?**



Child development research suggests that six months olds are too young to be spoiled. Yet, a national survey titled "What grown-ups understand about child development: A national benchmark survey," revealed that 57% of parents of young children believed that six months is not too young to be spoiled. Interestingly, this percentage increased to 64% for grandparent respondents and 62% for future parent respondents. This national survey conducted in 2000 included 3000 adults, 1066 of whom were parents of children newborn through six years of

age. Specially trained interviewers conducted telephonic interviews and each interview lasted about 26 minutes. Following the question of spoiling, respondents were also asked to respond to three scenarios by determining if the scenario behavior was appropriate on the part of parent or caregiver or if it was something that would likely spoil the child if done too often. One of the scenarios was picking up a three month old every time she cries. In response to this scenario, 44% of parents identified this as spoiling and 60% and 63% of grandparents and non-parents respectively identified this as spoiling.

Clearly, there is room for increased awareness about the importance of responding to infant crying. After all, when an infant cries she is trying to tell you that she needs something. Crying is the baby's way of communicating and when she is consistently responded to she learns that you are a reliable and safe source of comfort that she can trust.

The national survey included several additional areas and revealed interesting information about adults knowledge of child development issues. The complete article is available online at:

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED448909.pdf>

What Grown-ups understand about child development: A national benchmark survey. Comprehensive Report. (2000). Zero to Three, Washington, DC.

## 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.***

Happy September! I hope you have had a chance to read some background information about temperament from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension System at <http://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4358e/> and reflect about the temperament of your children that makes them unique.

I want to start with a story. A friend of mine has a four-year-old daughter with quite a personality. She can be a charmer, but she also has a mind of her own. Within the past couple of months, this adorable girl has started collecting random rocks and pebbles from everywhere they go – filling her pockets with treasures. One day my friend saw her carefully sorting her rocks into various piles and then licking them. When my friend asked her what she was doing and why, she responded with, “It’s just in my nature, Mom!”

While rock licking is not exactly a temperament type, my friend’s daughter captured the essence of temperament well: it is what is “just in our nature.” Most researchers recognize nine different temperament scales that work in concert to create the biology of who we are. It is important to recognize that these temperament scales are not an “either-or” situation. Rather, they each fall along a continuum from “low” to “high” with most people falling someplace in the middle. In addition, there is no “right” or “wrong” temperament. Quite literally, it is what it is.

Consider the following temperament scales:

1. **Activity level:** High activity temperaments get restless easily. They need to move and like action. Low activity temperaments move more slowly and are comfortable sitting quietly for long periods of time.
2. **Regularity:** Temperaments high in regularity like to eat and sleep at the same time every day. They thrive on routines. Other temperaments are more irregular. It is hard for them to stick to routines and their daily patterns vary a great deal.
3. **Adaptability:** High adaptability temperaments adjust easily to changes and can be very

accommodating to others. Low adaptability temperaments are often cautious and can take time to change and accept something new.

4. **Approach/Withdrawal:** Approach temperaments are comfortable meeting new people and can be spontaneous, or even impulsive. Withdrawal temperaments may be shy or hesitant in new situations and around new people.

5. **Physical Sensitivity:** Temperaments high in sensitivity are bothered by differences in noise, temperature, taste or texture. People who are low in sensitivity don’t notice such things.

6. **Intensity of Reaction:** High intensity temperaments have strong reactions to things. When they are happy, they are very happy. When they are upset, they are very upset. Low intensity temperaments have mild reactions and don’t get excited or distressed about much of anything.

7. **Distractibility:** Temperaments high in distractibility are easily startled, and have trouble staying focused on a task. Temperaments low in distractibility can concentrate on issues despite noises, conversations or activities around them.

8. **Mood:** Mood temperaments can be positive, smiling and laughing openly and easily; they can also be negative, tending to keep pleasure or happiness to oneself.

9. **Persistence:** Temperaments high in persistence become easily absorbed in a task and do not give up easily. People with temperaments that are low in persistence tend to give up and move on to something else if they perceive the task to be too difficult.

As I mentioned last month, I like to describe temperament as our “hard wiring.” It is sort of like when you say your computer has a dual processor with 4GB of RAM and a 1 Terabyte hard drive with a 24 inch monitor. This information doesn’t tell you what a computer will and won’t do, (that is the software part of things), but it does give you

information about what situations it is best created for and what some of its limitations might be. Researchers Neubauer and Neubauer say that genetics of this type are not a blueprint for development, but they do establish a range of possible variations. When babies are born, genetics accounts for nearly 100% of who they are, and environment for almost zero. However, by adulthood, genetics accounts for about 60% of who we are, with environment being responsible for about 40%.

Sometimes parents will ask me if temperament changes. My short answer is “not exactly.” As we grow older and gain experience, skills and knowledge we realize that sometimes we have to behave differently than what we would prefer in certain situations because that is what the situation calls for. For example, suppose I generally have a high “initial withdrawal” temperament, but I am meeting my significant others’ family for the first time. He/she has warned me that they are a very loud, outgoing family and to expect them to want me to fit right in. I know I am going to have to behave in such a way that is not necessarily in alignment with my temperament. It is going to feel a little uncomfortable and it is going to be tiring, but I can do it because I am an adult. With my maturity level, I can “turn it up” or “turn it down” to accommodate the situation.

So, from the standpoint that as children get older, they do learn what is considered socially appropriate and/or helpful in a given situation and can behave in ways that align with those things, then it might appear that temperament has changed. However, that doesn’t mean that the child has really changed the essence of who they are. It really just means that they have learned to act in ways that are advantageous in a given situation. It is important to recognize that family members often get “the real us” after we have “turned it down” all day to keep from getting in trouble. As a result, family members often get the brunt of any extreme behavior children have to dish out.

This month, think of a child you know well. Consider how you might place them along each of the nine temperament scales. What evidence do you have to show that this is the “true essence” of that child? Next month, we will discuss the interaction between temperament traits that is often called “temperament clusters” and how these can impact life in a family.

### 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](http://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  
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