

a letter to families

Children come with inborn personality traits. Learn your child's temperament style. Find the most comfortable ways to soothe and reassure the fearful child, calm and genuinely enjoy the intense child, and provide tuned-in attention for the curious, easy-going child who seems able to play on her own.

1. Become a careful “noticer” of your baby!

Does he take a long time to warm up when you introduce him to a bath, a stranger, or a bit of new food? Your little one may have cautious traits. He may be slow to warm up and need lots of quiet reassurance and patient time with you before feeling comfortable. Your sensitivity and quiet acceptance of his need for extra time in accepting new experiences will support his feeling that you understand his more cautious personality.

2. Intense babies may squirm a lot during

dressing time and have unpredictable sleeping, feeding, and toileting routines. You may need ingenuity and dexterity to undress your baby for a bath. Try to stay cheerful and calm as you become expert at dressing your ever-on-the-move toddler who prefers to run rather than walk. This child adapts more slowly after a frustrating experience.

3. Be sure to baby-proof your home environ-

ment for a high-energy toddler. Rugs that slip or low tables with sharp corners at a toddler's eye level are a concern. The intense toddler can get into more situations where a tumble or a bruise can

occur. Stay calm, but think about potential dangers in your home environment really carefully in order to prevent mishaps.

4. The irritable child presents more chal-

lenges. This child may respond with intense elation and joy if you take him for a ride on your shoulders, or present him with an interesting new toy.

5. Some babies are easygoing.

They accept new foods, and new experiences, such as a bath, or an unfamiliar adult, with curiosity and interest. They move toward, rather than away from, new experiences. They have low-intensity responses to discomfort and often adapt to new situations fairly rapidly. If this is true of your baby, you'll have an easier time predicting when he will perform daily routines, such as eating, sleeping, and toileting.

As a parent, you will find the task of noticing and responding in nurturing ways to your child's particular temperament traits exhilarating and challenging.

Alice Sterling Honig, Ph.D., a professor emerita of child development at Syracuse University, is the author of many books, including *Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant-Toddler Attachments in Early Care Settings* (NAEYC, 2002; \$15) and, with H. Brophy, *Talking With Your Baby: Family as the First School* (Syracuse University Press, 1996; \$16.95).