

Parenting the Spirited Child Labels Activity

Argumentative	Unpredictable	Never stops	Angry	Aggressive	Explosive	Demanding
Stubborn	Manipulative	Extreme	Nosy	Whiny	Loud	Wild
Easily frustrated	Disruptive	Easily bored	Crazy	Obnoxious	Single-minded	Critical
Impatient	Distractible	Picky	Obstinate	Supersensitive	Inconsolable	Draining
High strung	Exhausting	Embarrassing	Rude	Untrustworthy	Inconsiderate	Wimpy
Needy	Frustrating	Irritating	Difficult	Hard to love	Hyperactive	Moody
Bossy	Scatterbrained	Undependable	Slow	Complainer	Destructive	Whiner

1. Think about your child. What labels have you used to describe him or her or maybe just thought in your head? What labels have you heard others use in reference to your child? Circle each one. Add your own if necessary.
2. Think about other children that your child interacts with regularly. What labels have you used to describe them? Box each one.
3. Pick one circled label and one boxed label, write them down. Pretend that a friend, family member, co-worker, or boss used that label on you. How would you feel? Jot down some thoughts.
4. Now think about your two labels and how they might make the child feel. How might these labels affect the child's self image and behavior?
5. Think about your two labels and what core personality traits might have inspired them. What *strengths* are being overlooked? Refer to the temperament categories in the handout for ideas. Now, turn your two negative labels into two positive ones and write them down. (Example: stubborn turns into tenacious)

Labels

It is quite simple to fall into the trap of labeling children, especially spirited children. Their intense and undesirable behaviors beg for labels. But labels can cause serious and lasting damage to a child. Over time, labels are absorbed and then repeatedly fulfilled. Labels can cause us to put kids into “good” and “bad” categories and easily become excuses for their behavior. Labels also cause shame and embarrassment for the parents and can weaken their attachment to their child. By simply altering the words you choose to use you can change how you and others view these children. And, most importantly, you can change how the children view themselves.

To Free Children from Playing Roles

Reproduced from *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*

1. Look for opportunities to show the child a new picture of himself or herself

Example Label: Destructive “You’ve had that toy since you were three and it almost looks like new!”

2. Put children in situations where they can see themselves differently

Example Label: Clumsy/Incapable “Would you take the screwdriver and tighten the knobs on these drawers?”

3. Let children overhear you say something positive about them

Example Label: Whiny/Wimpy [Talking to someone else] “He held his arm steady even though it hurt to clean out the scrape.”

4. Model the behavior you’d like to see

Example Label: Sore Loser/Complainer “It’s hard to lose, but I’ll try and be a good sport about it. Congratulations!”

5. Be a storehouse of your child’s special moments

“I remember a time when...”

6. When the child acts according to the old label, state your feelings and /or your expectations.

Example Label: Bossy “I don’t like it when you talk to me that way. Despite your strong feelings, I expect you to ask politely.”

Parenting the Spirited Child

"Because she is more, she will make you more." Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

The spirited child may also be known as the fussy baby or high need child. The simple definition of the spirited child is simply that she is *more*. These children are more persistent, intense, sensitive, uncomfortable with change, energetic, perceptive, and serious than other children.

Spirited Temperament

It wasn't your pregnancy or complicated birth experience and it isn't your parenting that causes your child's spirited nature. Your child was born spirited. Temperament is a person's first and most natural way of reacting to the world. Each person's temperament is innate and remains fixed, but it can be channeled, shaped, and guided. When you truly accept and know your child, you can set the stage for her spirited traits to blossom to her advantage. With their deep sense of empathy and justice; their passionate intensity and persistence; and their perceptive, creative, and analytical nature spirited children contain the traits necessary to become great entertainers, inventors, caregivers, heroes, and leaders. It is our job as parents to help them get there. The next pages explain the temperamental traits of the spirited child.

Note on Introverted vs. Extroverted: While it might appear at first that all spirited children are extroverted, this is not the case at all. The distinction between extroverted and introverted simply lies in the different ways people gain and lose energy. The introvert gets his energy from time alone or with just one or two special people; he recharges from within and loses energy when forced into overly social situations. The extrovert draws energy from those around him; he recharges from outside his body and loses energy when isolated. Both introverts and extroverts will become agitated, cranky or whiny, and more demanding than usual when they do not have the opportunity to recharge. All children, but especially spirited children, must recharge or their behavior will drastically deteriorate. Identify whether your child is introverted or extroverted, recognize when his energy level is low, and provide him with the opportunity to recharge.

Intensity

Loud, dramatic, shrieking with laughter, wailing in tantrum, crying out in pain, yelling in excitement— intense children feel everything powerfully and deeply. For some, the intensity is focused inward instead of outward. These children will intently observe and mull things over.

When channeled well, the intense child gets to experience deep and wonderful emotion. When not in control, intensity can cause damage and hurt others.

Good labels: animated, vivacious, zealous, enthusiastic, motivated, zestful, expressive, full of energy, full of gusto, athletic, leader, performer.

Tips: diffuse intensity with calming activities (books, warm bath, water play, quiet pretend play), teach time-out or time-in as a way to calm down (not as a punishment), use humor and playful parenting, teach child to recognize growing intensity before it becomes overwhelming, take deep breaths.

Perceptiveness

Extremely observant with keen senses, the perceptive child notices everything and is easily distracted and confused. These children quickly process large amounts of information coming from all directions and can point out things that no one else notices.

When channeled well, the perceptive child learns to apply his observation skills to worthy goals. When not in control, the perceptive child will be overwhelmed by information and unable to finish tasks.

Good labels: observant, perceptive, creative, witty, aware, artistic.

Tips: motivate with supportive and loving words, to gain child's attention use a variety of techniques (talking, writing, drawing, demonstrating, touching, eye contact), keep instructions/messages simple and limit to one at a time, tell child what he can do (not what he can't).

Sensitivity

Highly aware, the sensitive child reacts deeply to noises, lights, smells, textures, pain, and fluctuation in mood. Large crowds are overwhelming, scratchy clothes are unwearable, and the emotions of others are quickly absorbed.

When channeled well, the sensitive child will develop deep empathy and learn to teach the world about sensations others may not even notice. When not in control, the sensitive child will be overwhelmed and either act out or stop functioning.

Good labels: tenderhearted, loving, empathetic, selective, creative, artistic, observant, intuitive.

Tips: give the child words to describe sensations and emotions, be aware of stimulation levels and know when to quit, limit TV and movies, teach child to recognize when he is becoming over-stimulated and think of actions he can take to protect himself, teach child to set up safety boundaries both physically and emotionally, teach him to say no to others when needed.

Persistence

Committed to tasks, goal oriented, will not change her mind, does not take no for an answer— persistent children "lock in" and won't let go. Older children are excellent at debating, younger children will demand, neither will give up. It is very difficult to ignore or distract and redirect the persistent child.

When channeled well, the persistent child learns to apply her determination to worthy goals. When not in control, persistence can lead to unsafe behavior and an imbalance where the needs of others are not being met.

Good labels: decisive, determined, persistent, goal-oriented, independent, assertive, capable, committed.

Tips: create a "yes" environment, try "stop" instead of "no," teach negotiation and compromise, make consistent rules with logical consequences, teach child to recognize when she is locked in and help her to discover a way to unlock, listen carefully for the need behind the demand and find a way to meet that need while also respecting the needs of everyone else.

Adaptability

Melting down over changes in routine, clothes, caregivers, and food the slow to adapt child does not handle surprises or transitions well.

When channeled well, the slow to adapt child can learn to handle change and help others to realize the benefits of organization and planning. When not in control, slow adaptability leads to frequent tantrums, ruined vacations, and missed appointments.

Good labels: organized, predictable, consistent, good planner.

Tips: Establish routines and avoid surprises, fully explain what is going to happen beforehand, allow time for closure of an activity and transitions, use imaginative play to ease transitions, when possible limit the number of transitions.

Regularity

About half of spirited children will also be irregular. These children's body rhythms do not follow a schedule. Hunger, the need to sleep, and even bowel movements are completely unpredictable.

When channeled well, the irregular child can learn to fall into an acceptable social schedule and help to show others the benefits of flexibility. When not in control, irregularity can cause the child to feel like the odd one out and make functioning in our highly scheduled world nearly impossible.

Good labels: flexible, full of surprises, spontaneous.

Tips: Explain to the child why his body acts differently and assure him that it is okay, establish routines to ensure the child learns to function on a school schedule and is getting enough sleep and proper nutrition, teach self-help skills right away so that he can tend to his own irregular needs.

First Reaction

About half of spirited children will also have a negative first reaction. These children become upset when faced with new situations, experiencing physical reactions like heightened blood pressure and dilated pupils. New foods, new clothes, and new people are immediately rejected.

When channeled well, the child with a negative first reaction can learn to give himself time to think before reacting, leading to good decision making. When not in control, a child with a negative first reaction may miss out on opportunities and hurt the feelings of others.

Good labels: observant, thinks before acting, good decision maker.

Tips: Don't push—encourage. Let the child know you are there to support him, help him to understand his feelings, give him time to think and observe so he feels in control, bring up a successful past experience, break it down into manageable parts, step back and try again later. Arrive early for new activities and remind him that it's okay to change his mind.

Energy

About half of spirited children will also have high energy. These children are constantly moving, jumping off furniture, falling out of their chairs, and leaping from task to task until they finally fall asleep. The active body doesn't just want to move, it *needs* to move.

When channeled well, the high energy child can put all that energy to good use. When not in control, high energy can cause annoyances at restaurants, on car rides, and at school as well as safety issues.

Good labels: energetic, athletic, kinesthetic learner, vibrant, passionate.

Tips: Get the child involved in physical activities like sports or dance, plan physical activities into the day, enroll the child in a classroom with an energetic teacher, plan energy recouping breaks for yourself, watch out for overly energetic or aggressive behavior toward others, help redirect the child with touch not just words.

Mood

About half of spirited children will also have a serious mood. These children see the flaws in everything and are quick to point out what they don't like and what they can't do.

When channeled well, the child with a serious mood can use her analytical and decision making skills to find problems and work toward fixing them. When not in control, the serious child may miss the joys in life, feel hopeless, and hurt others' feelings.

Good labels: analytical, observant, serious, good decision maker, critiques well, deep thinker.

Tips: Show the child that others see the world seriously as well, teach her to find solutions to the problems she sees, help her to break down situations to see the good along with the bad and what she can do along with what she can't, teach good manners to protect the feelings of others when sharing a meal or accepting a gift.

Spirited Child Quiz

Reproduced from *Raising Your Spirited Child*

Select the overall number that best describes your child in each of the nine temperamental categories. Add up the total number of points and check the scoring scale at the end of the quiz.

1. INTENSITY

HOW STRONG ARE YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONAL REACTIONS? DOES HE LAUGH AND CRY LOUDLY AND ENERGETICALLY OR SOFTLY AND MILDLY?

1	2	3	4	5
MILD REACTION				INTENSE REACTION
"SQUEAKS" WHEN CRIES				NEVER JUST CRIES—WAILS
IT'S ALMOST A SURPRISE WHEN HE GETS UPSET				A LIVING STAIRCASE OF EMOTION. UP ONE MINUTE DOWN THE NEXT
REACTIONS ARE MILD				EVERY REACTION IS DEEP AND POWERFUL
SMILES WHEN HAPPY				SHOUTS WITH GLEE
USUALLY WORKS THROUGH A PROBLEM WITHOUT BECOMING FRUSTRATED				EASILY FRUSTRATED

3. SENSITIVITY

HOW AWARE IS YOUR CHILD OF SLIGHT NOISES, EMOTIONS, AND DIFFERENCES IN TEMPERATURE, TASTE, AND TEXTURE? DOES HE REACT EASILY TO CERTAIN FOODS, TAGS IN CLOTHING, IRRITATING NOISES, OR YOUR STRESS?

1	2	3	4	5
USUALLY NOT SENSITIVE				VERY SENSITIVE
SLEEPS THROUGH NOISY ROUTINES				HAS TO HAVE QUIET TO SLEEP
ISN'T AFFECTED BY SCRATCHY TEXTURES				HAS TO HAVE A SOCK SEAM LINED UP JUST SO
ISN'T BOTHERED BY FUNNY SMELLS				GAGS EASILY FROM SMELLS
EATS ANYTHING				A PICKY EATER
UNAWARE OF YOUR STRESS				ACTS YOUR STRESS OUT
NOT OVERLY CONCERNED WITH HOW THINGS FEEL				STRONG REACTION TO HOW THINGS FEEL—WHETHER PLEASANT OR UNPLEASANT

2. PERSISTENCE

IF YOUR CHILD IS INVOLVED IN AN ACTIVITY AND YOU TELL HER TO STOP, DOES SHE STOP EASILY OR FIGHT TO CONTINUE?

1	2	3	4	5
EASILY STOPS				"LOCKS IN"
CAN BE REDIRECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN ANOTHER ACTIVITY QUITE EASILY				STICKS TO HER GUNS. DOESN'T EASILY LET GO OF AN IDEA OR ACTIVITY
WILL CRY FOR A FEW MINUTES AND THEN STOP				LOCKS IN. CAN CRY FOR HOURS
ACCEPTS "NO" FOR AN ANSWER				NEVER TAKES "NO" FOR AN ANSWER

4. PERCEPTIVENESS

DOES YOUR CHILD NOTICE PEOPLE, COLORS, NOISES, AND OBJECTS AROUND HER? DOES SHE FREQUENTLY FORGET TO DO WHAT YOU ASKED BECAUSE SOMETHING ELSE HAS CAUGHT HER ATTENTION?

1	2	3	4	5
HARDLY EVER NOTICES				VERY PERCEPTIVE
STAYS ON TASK, ISN'T WATCHING BIRDS OUTSIDE THE WINDOW				NOTICES THINGS MOST PEOPLE MISS
WALKS PAST THE RAINBOW THAT IS REFLECTED IN THE NEW OIL SPILL				SPENDS FIVE MINUTES WATCHING THE LIGHT IN THE NEW OIL SPILL
CAN REMEMBER AND COMPLETE MULTIPLE DIRECTIONS EASILY				FORGETS MULTIPLE DIRECTIONS

5. ADAPTABILITY

HOW QUICKLY DOES YOUR CHILD ADAPT TO CHANGES IN HIS SCHEDULE OR ROUTINE?
HOW DOES HE COPE WITH SURPRISES?

1	2	3	4	5
ADAPTS QUICKLY				ADAPTS SLOWLY
EASILY STOPS ONE ACTIVITY AND STARTS ANOTHER				CRIES OR FUSSES WHEN ONE ACTIVITY ENDS AND ANOTHER BEGINS
IS FLEXIBLE WITH MEALTIMES AND NAP TIMES				NEEDS A SET SCHEDULE FOR MEALS AND NAPS
IS NOT UPSET BY SURPRISES				MAY BE VERY UPSET BY SURPRISES

6. REGULARITY

IS YOUR CHILD QUITE REGULAR ABOUT EATING TIMES, SLEEPING TIMES, AMOUNT OF SLEEP NEEDED, AND OTHER BODILY FUNCTIONS?

1	2	3	4	5
REGULAR				IRREGULAR
FALLS ASLEEP AT THE SAME TIME ALMOST EVERY DAY				NEVER FALLS ASLEEP AT THE SAME TIME
IS HUNGRY AT REGULAR INTERVALS				IS HUNGRY AT DIFFERENT TIMES EACH DAY
ELIMINATES ON A REGULAR SCHEDULE				ELIMINATES ON AN IRREGULAR SCHEDULE

7. ENERGY

IS YOUR CHILD ALWAYS ON THE MOVE AND BUSY OR QUIET AND QUIESCENT? DOES HE NEED TO RUN, JUMP, AND USE HIS WHOLE BODY IN ORDER TO FEEL GOOD?

1	2	3	4	5
QUIET				VERY ACTIVE
STAYS IN ONE PLACE WHEN SLEEPING				MOVES ALL OVER THE BED WHEN SLEEPING
SITS AND PLAYS QUIETLY FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME				ALWAYS ON THE MOVE; EVEN WHEN SITTING, IS MOVING IN PLACE

8. FIRST REACTION

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD'S FIRST REACTION WHEN SHE IS ASKED TO MEET PEOPLE, TRY A NEW ACTIVITY OR IDEA, OR GO SOMEPLACE NEW?

1	2	3	4	5
JUMPS RIGHT IN				REJECTS AT FIRST OR WATCHES BEFORE JOINING IN
DOESN'T HESITATE IN NEW SITUATIONS				HOLDS BACK BEFORE PARTICIPATING
SEEMS TO LEARN BY DOING				LEARNS BY WATCHING
OPEN TO NEW ACTIVITIES				IS DISTRESSED BY NEW ACTIVITIES OR THINGS
USUALLY COMPLIES WITH A NEW REQUEST WITH LITTLE FUSS				IMMEDIATELY SAYS NO WHEN YOU ASK HER TO DO SOMETHING

9. MOOD

HOW MUCH OF THE TIME DOES YOUR CHILD FEEL HAPPY AND CONTENT COMPARED WITH SERIOUS, ANALYTICAL, OR CRANKY?

1	2	3	4	5
USUALLY POSITIVE				MORE SERIOUS AND ANALYTICAL
USUALLY IN A GOOD MOOD				USUALLY SERIOUS
POSITIVE				SEES THE FLAWS, WHAT NEEDS TO BE FIXED

Scoring

9 - 18	Cool Kid
19 - 28	Spunky Kid
29 - 45	Spirited Kid

Don't have a spirited child?

Your child still may rate highly in one or two of the temperament categories, making these areas challenging for you. And chances are you will encounter a spirited child at some point whether it is a relative, a friend's child, one of your child's classmates, or your next child! Understanding spirit will help you deal with these interactions and help both children come out successful. When we show all children compassion, we pave the way for the next generation to grow into compassionate adults and the closer we come to building a compassionate world.

Do you have a highly sensitive child?

Is your child easily overwhelmed by loud noises, strong smells, and large groups? Does he reflect deeply before acting? Is he extremely sensitive to pain? Does he complain about scratchy clothing, tags, or seams? Is he deeply bothered by the distress of others? If you suspect your child is highly sensitive, he will need guidance to learn the skills necessary to flourish and protect himself in our fast paced, loud, and assertive society. Check out *The Highly Sensitive Child* in the resource section for more information.

Do you have a highly intuitive child?

Does your child "see" things before they happen? Does she know how people feel regardless of physical distance? Does she pick up on the tension in a room and act it out? Does she get frequent headaches and stomachaches related to other people's stress? These are just some of the traits of a highly intuitive child. If you suspect your child may be highly intuitive, she will need guidance to develop her gift and learn the skills necessary to protect herself in our less than understanding world. Check out *The Highly Intuitive Child* in the resource section for more information.

How You Feel As a Parent

The spirited child will demand more of you as a parent, stretching you mentally, emotionally, and physically. You may find her difficult to love as you grapple with her unexpected nature and you may have trouble letting go of your idea of having a "dream child." All parents go through a range of emotions while raising their children, especially first time parents. If you are blessed with a spirited child you will experience even more and at first everything may seem negative.

Fear that it's all your fault	Alone	Confused	Exhausted
Resentful	Shame	Embarrassed	Anger
Doubt in your ability to parent	Defensive	Disappointed	Inadequate
Controlled	Critical	Tied Down	Disillusioned
Manipulated	Lost	Worried	Overwhelmed

It is important to remember that these feelings are normal and shared by other parents. As you get to know your child, form your parenting philosophy, and gain coping tools these emotions will change.

Confident	Comfortable	Proud	Vindicated	Connected
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How Attachment Parenting Helps

Spirited children demand a higher level of parenting. They know what they want and they have the persistence to get it. Their needs are higher and last longer. This is why Attachment Parenting works well to help channel the spirited temperament into positive personality traits.

Note on the Helicopter Parent: helicopter parenting is when the parent hovers over the child and responds instantaneously to the child's every whim. This is not attachment parenting as it does not respect the child's independence or help him to develop self-management skills. This type of parenting also does not maintain balance in the family. If you find yourself helicopter parenting, you may need to seek assistance.

Prepare for Pregnancy, Birth, and Parenting

Your mother may warn you of the colicky baby, but no one warns of the spirited baby. While all parents benefit from parenting preparation, it is especially important for the soon to be parents of a spirited child. Taking care of yourself emotionally and physically during your pregnancy and preparing for as peaceful a labor as possible ensures that you and your baby will have the healthiest start and best opportunity for bonding right from his birth. The stronger your bond, the better you will be able to cope with the challenge of raising a spirited child. Familiarize yourself with the idea of temperament; read up on coping skills and discipline strategies; and locate local support groups like API, La Leche League, and meetup so that you have knowledge, tools, and support to draw on when needed.

Feed with Love and Respect

You may find feeding your spirited child might prove quite a challenge. High energy babies may do gymnastics while nursing and overenthusiastically gulp, swallowing air, which causes abdominal pain. Highly distractible babies may pop on and off all day and then catch up with all night nursing. For toddlers and beyond, high energy demands frequent eating, slow adaptability makes transitioning to mealtime difficult, irregularity causes unpredictable hunger, negative first reactions make trying new foods nearly impossible, and high sensitivity creates pickiness when it comes to tastes and textures. It is very important to find ways to feed the spirited child nourishing food while respecting these very real obstacles as well as your own needs.

Breastfeeding the spirited child has many benefits. Spirited babies crave more touch and breastfeeding leads to more frequent nursing sessions with skin to skin contact. It also increases the mother's sensitivity to her baby by honing her ability to read baby's cues and respond quickly. The very act of breastfeeding causes the mother to relax and releases "maternal hormones" like prolactin, which calm the mother and help her feel more attached to her baby. Breast milk contains a sleep inducing protein, which helps soothe the fussy baby and aids in transitioning baby to sleep. Spirited children are more prone to food allergies/sensitivities and breastfeeding eliminates the possibility of milk allergy (elimination diets may be needed to avoid other allergens). Spirited children take longer to wean (usually past the second year) because of their need for the close connection the nursing relationship offers and their slow adaptability. Weaning too early may rob you of your best soothing tool and cause more anger, fussiness, aggression, and mood swings. Introducing solid foods too early may also result in behavior changes due to less nursing and/or possible food allergies. Proceeding at your child's pace will ease these transitions.

Strategies such as baby-led weaning, self-service snacks, involving the child in food preparation, establishing an eating routine, teaching table manners, and providing positive messages about food can help the spirited child develop appropriate and healthy eating habits.

Respond with Sensitivity

Continuing to respond to your spirited child with sensitivity even when his behavior eludes your understanding or is frustrating can be very difficult. But, it is exactly your consistent and sensitive response that will help your child shape his spirited traits and learn to manage them effectively. The spirited baby will demand an immediate response, his cries quickly escalating to a deafening level. By attending to his needs quickly, you teach him

that his needs matter, causing his crying to mellow as he learns to trust. As your child grows and new spirited traits emerge you will be challenged in new ways to continually respond sensitively. Really get to know your child and appreciate him as a unique individual; try not to compare him to other children. Comparing can lead to feelings of disappointment and worry that can hinder your ability to remain sensitive to his needs. Your consistent support and positive guidance through the obstacles he faces— and there will be many— are vital to his self-image and his ability to become the successful person he was meant to be.

Use Nurturing Touch

Uncuddly may be one of the first labels your child gained. Spirited babies often do not like to be snuggled or hugged. Some even protest baby carriers and hate to be swaddled. Extreme sensitivity and high energy may account for this trait. Some babies just need to move and others may need help warming up to physical contact. This can be particularly frustrating and hinder bonding. Fortunately, most uncuddly babies become more and more cuddly as they grow older. Infant massage and physical play can help her start to enjoy more contact. Even the uncuddly spirited baby will most likely demand almost constant holding. If your child will tolerate it, baby wearing is an excellent way to quench this intense need while freeing up your hands. It is particularly important to experiment with many kinds of carriers until you find the one that works. You may even discover that you need several carriers for her varying moods. As your child grows older, the need for carrying will decrease, but touch remains an important tool. When intense tantrums rock her body, back scratching, arm stroking, or tight hugging may help her regain control. Touch is also important to help the perceptive child pay attention and change directions. Be aware, however, of when touch is leading to over-stimulation and your child needs more space (this is particularly common with introverts).

Engage in Nighttime Parenting

Sleep is perhaps the biggest problem parents of spirited children face, at least initially. The high need child seems to need more of everything except sleep, which he fights until the end. Slow adaptability makes transitioning to sleep difficult and high awareness of and sensitivity to external stimuli results in an easily disturbed sleeper. Furthermore, spirited children need, on average, about one hour less sleep during the day and two hours less sleep at night than other children their age. After an exhausting day of keeping up with your child all you want is a break and his cries, fidgeting, and other nighttime antics can drive you crazy. It is more tempting than ever to just let him cry it out. You will probably discover quickly, however, that this method is useless with a spirited child as his intensity and persistence will not permit it. Allowing the spirited child to cry it out may result in hours of hysterical crying, vomiting, and no sleep for the entire family. The spirited child demands to be parented at night just as intensely as during the day. Expect to lie next to him or stay in the room to help him calm down. Be sure to take turns with an alternative caregiver whenever possible to build alternative sleep associations and get a much needed break. Co-sleeping often helps high need children to stay asleep, makes frequent night-nursing easier, and allows parents to get more sleep. Establishing a nighttime routine helps ease the transition from day to night. If he is slow to adapt, be sure to help your child bring closure to activities beforehand and do not rush or skip any steps of your routine as this will just extend the entire process. For the persistent child, setting clear limits cuts down on demands for more (books, snacks, water, music, back rubbing, etc.) and you may want to use a timer to prove it's time to stop. If you have a highly sensitive child, be aware of irritating sleep clothes and bedding. You may also need to talk about his feelings surrounding sleep and help him to find creative and imaginative solutions to any sleep issues he has. For the sensitive and perceptive child, a sound machine can minimize distracting noises and black out shades can eliminate bothersome light. For more information on nighttime parenting and additional tips and strategies, please see the Nighttime Parenting handout.

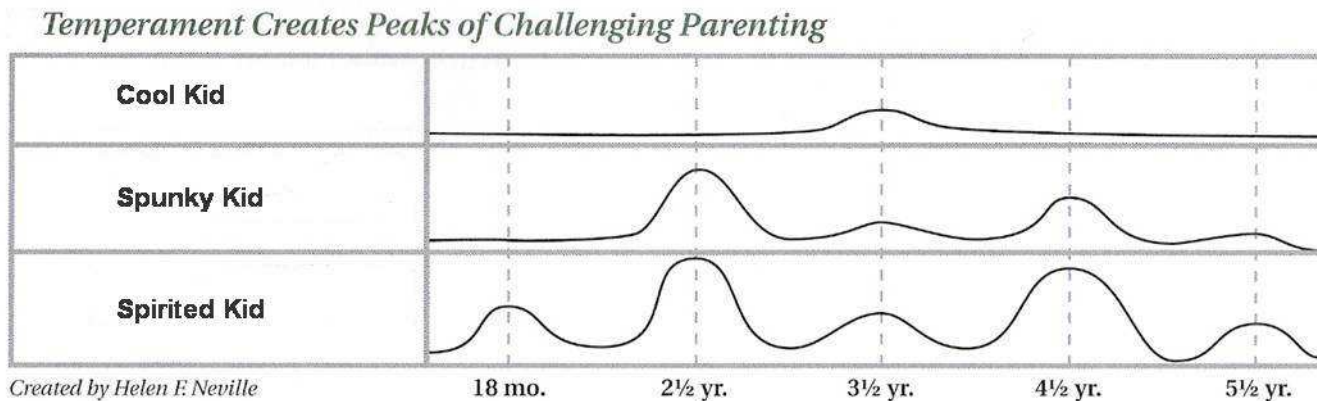
Provide Consistent and Loving Care

There will come a time when your spirited child will be left in the hands of someone else. Returning to work, appointments, date night, or some much needed time alone all require an alternative caregiver and when it's time for school, the teacher will be in charge. Leaving your child with someone else is always difficult, but leaving your spirited child with someone requires lots of preparation. It is vital that the spirited child receive the attention and guidance they need from their other caregivers. You may need to educate potential caregivers (even your mother!) about temperament, your discipline philosophy, food allergies, and your expectations regarding sleep. At first you may discover that you cannot find a

caregiver for your highly sensitive and separation anxious child. You may go through multiple caregivers who could not handle your high intensity and high energy child. Often you will find the best caregivers among like-minded parents at local support groups like API and LLL. Picking a school for your spirited child poses yet another challenge. Spirited children learn differently and are especially challenging in a group dynamic. How your child is accepted by his teacher and how he performs in school greatly affect his self-image. For your child to be successful, the teacher needs to recognize and work with his temperament. Observe the classroom ahead of time to see how the teacher handles conflicts and the children displaying spirited traits similar to your child's. When you find a good fit, request that particular teacher well in advance. Use your child as a barometer for how well his alternative care situation is working. If you see concerning changes in mood or behavior, step in and make a change.

Practice Positive Discipline

Being spirited is “not an excuse for bad behavior. It is not an exemption from the rules,” (Kurcinka). Having a spirited child does mean, however, that discipline will be more challenging and that traditional punishment based techniques will be wholly ineffective. Transitions lead to tantrums for the slow to adapt child and persistence and intensity make these tantrums explosive and enduring. Bringing closure to activities, giving warnings about upcoming change, and allowing your child time to recharge can help prevent meltdowns. It is difficult for the intense child to pick up on social boundaries so she is unaware that her voice is too loud, her body is too close, or her hug is too strong. It can be quite painful to watch your spirited child struggle to get along with others at playgroups and in school. Anger and frustration in the intense and high energy child often leads to hitting, kicking, pinching, and biting. It is vital to help diffuse intensity before it leads to aggressive behavior by teaching her how to relax her body and use words to express her feelings. The perceptive child may pick up on vulnerability and use verbal abuse such as teasing. She must be taught when good natured teasing has crossed social lines to abuse. Sharing is particularly hard for the highly sensitive and introverted child. Have her put away prized possession when friends come over, slowly teach her that sharing is an important part of any relationship, and recognize successful sharing when it happens. Social skills must be learned and they take practice. Spirited children often have the most difficult time interacting with children their own age. It can be helpful for the spirited child to spend time with younger children to learn nurturing skills and with older children to learn self-management skills. It is essential to instill internal motivation in the spirited child, foster her empathy and respect for others, and help her develop impulse management and conflict resolution skills. Please see the separate Discipline handout for much more information on gentle discipline techniques. Below is a figure illustrating when children with different temperaments will go through phases where parenting will be even more of a challenge. Anticipate and prepare for the peaks; enjoy the valleys and recharge for the next challenge!



Adapted from *Is This a Phase? Child Development & Parent Strategies, Birth to 6 Years*

Strive for Balance in Personal and Family Life

It is especially easy to fall out of balance when parenting a spirited child. You must take good care of yourself in order to take good care of your child. If you do not allow yourself to recharge, you will not have the energy or the patience to keep up with your highly intense and energetic child. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, easily annoyed, angry, depressed, severely fatigued, or resentful you may be experiencing burn out. It is paramount that you seek help and surround yourself with positive, supportive friends. Look to like-minded groups like API and LLL for support meetings and playgroups or form your own spirited child group. Especially seek out other parents of spirited children who share your parenting philosophy. Set up play dates and childcare exchanges. Find ways to recharge with your baby like taking a walk, enrolling in a Mommy and Me class, meditating, laying down or reading a book while baby sleeps, taking a bath, or practicing yoga. When you're ready for small amounts of separation from your child, hire a mother's helper and get some satisfying work done around the house or hire a babysitter and get out of the house. Involve your significant other in the parenting as much as possible so you can take a break. Work on your expectations and attitude. Parenting creates a day full of unmet expectations from the dishes in the sink to unreturned phone calls to your child's disappointing and exasperating behavior. Prioritizing your daily duties and letting the less important things go can help you slow down and relax. Breathe deeply. Pay attention to your feelings and if you feel resentment, change whatever is causing it or change your attitude. Be gentle and forgiving with yourself and this will allow you to be gentle and forgiving with your child. Once you begin to feel in balance again, start to nurture your relationship with your significant other and the family as a whole. Set up date nights and family outings. Celebrate the little successes and remember that what your child needs most are happy, loving parents.

Resources

The Explosive Child: a new approach for understanding and parenting easily frustrated, chronically inflexible children, Ross W. Greene: Can your child scream for hours only stopping when he loses his voice? Check out this book for comfort, encouragement, and tips for working with children that feel intensely and express it vehemently.

The Fussy Baby: How To Bring Out the Best In Your High Need Child, William Sears, M.D.: Published by the La Leche League, this version of the Sears' *Fussy Baby Book* includes photographs, quotes from parents, and more detail in some of the sections (like feeding), but less detail in others and little information about older children.

The Highly Intuitive Child: a guide to understanding and parenting unusually sensitive and empathic children, Catherine Crawford, MFT, ATR: This book includes 20 questions to ask yourself to determine if your child is highly intuitive. The remainder of the book offers many illustrative anecdotes as well as tips and strategies for helping intuitive children develop their gifts and protect themselves in our less than understanding culture.

The Highly Sensitive Child: helping our children thrive when the world overwhelms them, Elaine Aron: This book includes 23 questions to ask yourself to determine if your child is highly sensitive as well as a 22 question quiz to determine if you are sensitive as well. The rest of the book outlines tips and strategies for building self esteem, combating common challenges, and helping highly sensitive children flourish through different stages in development.

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish: An excellent gentle discipline book, which explains the dangers of over praising, punishment, and labels. This book is full of relatable examples and helpful illustrations.

Keys to Calming the Fussy Baby, William Sears, M.D.: Part of Barron's Educational Series, this version of the Sears' *Fussy Baby Book* includes just the "need to know" highlights, no illustrations and no anecdotes.

Is This A Phase? Child Development & Parent Strategies, Birth to 6 Years, Helen F. Neville, B.S, R.N.: A great resource for child development and what to expect at different ages and stages covering everything from motor skills to emotions to more specific topics like death, divorce, and diversity. Special attention is given to different temperaments and how they will affect development.

Parenting the Fussy Baby and High-Need Child: Everything You Need to Know- From Birth to Age Five, William Sears, M.D. and Martha Sears, R.N.: Broken into three parts, this book covers fussy babies and high need toddlers/preschoolers and includes many stories that are encouraging and relatable to parents of high need children. This book features illustrations and tips for soothing, feeding, sleeping, discipline, and achieving balance.

The Preventive Ounce Website (www.preventiveoz.org): This site contains information on temperament, surveys for different ages to get an “image of your child,” and parenting resources.

Raising Your Spirited Child: a guide for parents whose child is more intense, sensitive, perceptive, persistent, energetic, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka: This book starts by defining temperament and the term spirited and includes a “quiz” to see if you and your child are spirited. The rest of the book offers numerous tips and gentle discipline strategies for working with spirited children to help successfully channel their behavior toward positive traits. Many comforting and encouraging anecdotes are also included.

Your Two-Year-Old: Terrible or Tender, Louise Bates Ames, PhD and Frances L. Ilg, M.D.: This is the second book in the series that covers child development through age fourteen put out by the Gesell Institute of Human Development. While parts of the book are a little outdated, it does include many insights, shedding light on why our children do what they do when they do it. It also includes tips for working with your child through different phases (tantrums, eating, sleeping, transitioning, etc.) and suggestions for age appropriate toys and books.