



Series #3: Caregiver Support

Tips for Tots



Tip #4:

Understanding Caregiver Temperament

Strategies

Did you know?

Understanding temperament is important for caregivers because it allows for adaptation and adjustment in dealing with complex situations and personalities commonly found in providing child-care services. Temperament consists of an assortment of characteristics that we are born with. While we do not choose our temperament, it influences how we react to environments, people and events. There are nine traits related to temperament. They include: activity level, regularity of habits, reactions to new things, ability to adapt to changes, intensity of reaction, mood, ability to focus, persistence of follow through, and sensitivity to the physical environment. Reactions and behaviors associated with each of these traits fall within a large range. For example activity level can range from low to high. It is important for caregivers to realize that the farther behaviors fall from the midpoint of this range, the harder it becomes for an adult or child to adapt and adjust to difficult situations and personalities. The term “goodness of fit” refers to the match between a person’s temperament and that of another person or the match between a person and their environment. Poor ‘goodness of fit’ can easily affect how comfortable someone is in any given situation & can cause stress or conflict. A caregiver’s ability to recognize ‘goodness of fit’ between themselves, their staff, parents, children & their environment (s) will allow them to achieve the best outcomes with the least amount of difficulty.

- Consider your own temperament. Write down your strengths and weaknesses. Do you react differently in different settings? How have you learned to adapt your reactions? A stronger understanding of yourself will allow you to recognize the temperaments of others and better react to them.
- Remember that we do not choose our temperament. It is a part of who we are. When struggling with poor “goodness of fit”, consider how someone else’s temperament can be influenced by their environment and culture. This will provide you with a better understanding of how to avoid stress & conflict in interactions.
- A person’s temperament is neither good nor bad. Adults tend to interpret traits as being negative or positive. Understanding that traits and behaviors fall within a wide range will help to avoid the pitfalls of thinking in black and white.
- The temperaments of children should be approached in a way that works to understand them rather than seek to change them. It is an opportunity to anticipate and understand what a child needs and how they react to different cues and triggers.
- Remember that young children have not learned to adapt how they react. It is up to the adult to adjust to the child’s temperament. Very young children have no control over their temperaments. Supportive experiences can help children moderate or strengthen traits. For example, the slow-to-warm-up child can be encouraged to accept new people and experiences.
- Recognize that while temperament does not excuse a child’s unacceptable behavior, it does provide an understanding and a guide for how caregivers can successfully respond. For example, a child who is slow paced and cranky in the mornings may need extra time to get ready. Understanding what may affect the child’s behavior can help to avoid potential problems.

Resources:

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/infTodd/mod1/1.13.pdf>
<http://www.ecmhc.org/temperament/index.html>
The Emotional Life of the Toddler. Lieberman, A. (1995). New York,

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