



## ***Temperament Tip Sheet***

### ***YOU'RE GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BABY***

In these first weeks, you've gotten a chance to see how he or she responds to her new home. She may be quiet and sleepy, or alert and active. Some babies need more physical contact, some less. After a couple of weeks, you're probably beginning to get a pretty good idea of your child's personality.

### ***IT TAKES ALL KINDS***

Human beings come in all shapes, sizes, and flavors. Consider for a moment your own brothers and sisters, if you have any, or maybe your uncles and aunts. Even with very similar genes, kids raised in the same home usually come out different. Based on long-term studies of children's development, scientists are beginning to tell us what experienced parents have always known: that babies are born with different personalities just as they're born to be different sizes and shapes. No two have ever been exactly the same. Our job as parents is to help the child take that personality and build on it to become the best person he can.

**To Do:** Who in your family does the baby most resemble? How is he or she different?

### ***TYPES OF DIFFERENCE***

Each baby is unique, but researchers have identified several categories that might help us understand the differences among them. Here are a few to consider:

*Activity level:* From their first days on earth, babies differ in their activity levels, even within a family. One child might be always "on-the-go", while a brother would prefer to watch what's going on.

*Adaptability:* A new situation presents a challenge for anyone, and a baby's world is full of new situations. While many babies tolerate novelty well, others become easily disturbed, and need more comforting. As they grow older, people refer to the first as "outgoing" and the other as "shy".

*Persistence and Distractibility:* Another word for these characteristics might be "focus". Some children are always open to the world around them. They move from one thing to another, and are easy to distract. Others can more easily tune out their environment, and amuse themselves for long periods.

*Sensitivity:* Some of us just seem to have more nerve endings than others. For a sensitive child, noises seem louder, lights are brighter, and that wool sweater is scratchier. You'll never talk them out of this – it's the way they see and feel the world.

**To Do:** What have you observed already about your child's personality? What have others observed? Does your baby perceive the world differently than you? How do you think you'd know?

### ***PARENTS DIFFER, TOO***

Of course, we were all babies once, too, and it should come as no surprise that we all differ in many of the same ways. Our differences can make us more or less effective as parents. Your baby will naturally be affected by the personal style of each person around her, and it helps to be aware of this interaction.

For example, some parents aren't particularly bothered by noise; for others, the sound of a screaming baby causes an immediate physical response that they just can't ignore. A baby who is more sensitive than most, who cries easily, might get a different reception from one than from the other. Similarly, some parents are easily able to tolerate the chaotic life of a busy parent, while for others it's a constant challenge. An active baby with a need to explore, or one that reacts badly to changes, might fit right in with the first, but could cause considerable anxiety in the second.

**To Do:** How do you feel about noise? About new experiences? About loss of control?

### ***CONCLUSIONS***

Parenting teaches us as much about ourselves as it does about children. If we're aware of our own feelings and responses, we'll be better parents. The first step can be to understand that your child is an individual, different from either parent, with a different way of seeing the world, and his or her own way of responding to it.

Don't worry – most problems with personality sort themselves out given enough time, understanding, and patience. You've got plenty of time to figure this out. So get to know your baby. Let the baby get to know you. And try to enjoy those differences!

**To Do:** Talk about your baby's unique personality with your spouse or others who are important in your child's life.