Parenting the
Strong-Willed
Child

Parent Hand-out
Who is the Strong-Willed Child?

- Behavior does not always seem logical.
- Does not respond to discipline methods that seem to work with other children.
- Learns differently than his or her peers.
- Brings out extreme reactions in others.
- Needs a lot of guidance and discipline.
- Strong-willed children are not all alike; each has a unique temperament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Infant</th>
<th>Older Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Activity Level</td>
<td>May have kicked a lot in utero, restless in the crib, kicks off</td>
<td>Very active, restless, fidgety, always into things, makes you tired, “ran before he walked”, easily over stimulated, gets wild or “revved up”, impulsive, loses control, can be aggressive hates to be confined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blankets, squirms a lot making it hard to dress, has to watched</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>carefully to prevent accidents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Intensity</td>
<td>Cries loudly, screams, shrieks with delight</td>
<td>Loud and forceful whether miserable, angry or happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregularity</td>
<td>Unpredictable biological functions, feeding and sleeping are hard to</td>
<td>Unpredictable, can’t tell when she’ll be hungry or tired, has conflicts over meals and bedtime, wakes up at night, moods are changeable, has good or bad days for no obvious reasons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>schedule, may wake a lot during the night, bowel movements may be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>irregular, seems to have no “inner clock.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Sensory Threshold</td>
<td>Easily over stimulated, startles easily and may overreact to light,</td>
<td>“Sensitive” physically, not emotionally; highly aware of color, light, appearance, texture, sound, smell, taste or temperature (not necessarily all of these); “creative,” but with strong and unusual preferences than can be embarrassing; clothes have to feel and look right, making dressing a problem, doesn’t like the way many foods look, smell or taste, picky eater, bothered and over stimulated by bright lights and noisy settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>noise, being touched or to the feel of clothing or the taste of foods,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>very sensitive to a wet or dirty diaper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Withdrawal</td>
<td>Spits out new foods, solid or liquid; protests when first exposed to</td>
<td>Shy, reserved with new people; doesn’t like new situations, holds back or protests by crying or clinging may tantrum if forced to go forward against his or her will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a new experience like a bath, a new carriage a new toy or a stranger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Adaptability</td>
<td>Doesn’t like changes in routine or schedule, protests by fussing,</td>
<td>Has trouble with transition and change of activity or routine; inflexible, very particular, notices minor changes; gets used to things and won’t give them up, has trouble adapting to anything unfamiliar can want the same clothes or foods over and over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>crying or screaming, even after the initial response, takes a long</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time to warm up to new situations or people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Mood</td>
<td>Generally fussy or cranky; not a “happy baby,” whimpers and cries a lot.</td>
<td>Basically serious or cranky; doesn’t show pleasure openly, not a “sunny disposition”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractibility</td>
<td>Trouble concentrating and paying attention, doesn’t listen, tunes you out, daydreams, and forgets instructions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Persistence</td>
<td>Stubborn; whines, negotiates, restless, may have long tantrums, may get locked-in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Nine Traits of Temperament**

from *the New York Longitudinal Study of Personality Types & Temperament Traits*,
conducted by Alexander Thomas, Stella Chess, Herbert G. Birch, 1956.

- INTENSITY
- PERSISTENCE
- SENSITIVITY
- ADAPTABILITY
- DISTRACTABILITY
- REGULARITY
- REACTIVITY
- ENERGY/ ACTIVITY LEVEL
- MOOD/ GENERAL DISPOSITION
What’s Your Parenting Style?
Integrating Your Parenting Style

In the situations below, choose the answer that most closely resembles the way you would respond.

1. Your mother keeps your children while you and your spouse have a night out on the town. She brings popcorn, chips, cookies and ice cream for the kids. You will
   A. Let it go, your kids get to eat junk food whenever she visits
   B. Intercede and lay the law down, NO JUNK FOOD ALLOWED
   C. Negotiate with her and allow one choice
   D. Hover around the kids telling them they will have stomach aches and worry about them eating so many sweets

2. Your 10-year-old daughter wants to watch a horror movie rated PG-13 at a friend’s house during a sleep-over. The friend’s mom wants permission from you. You will
   A. Let her watch the movie
   B. Tell your daughter “no” and insist on a movie rated G only
   C. Rent the movie yourself, preview it and make your decision based on your viewing
   D. Let her watch the movie then go pick her up from the friend’s house when she calls scared and unable to sleep

3. While you were on the phone, your six-year-old son intentionally plays in your toolbox and pours several jars of nails and screws on the floor. You will
   A. Help him clean it up
   B. Get angry and insist he clean it up right now
   C. Tell him to clean it up and explain that he doesn’t get to do anything else until the mess is cleaned
   D. Check his hands and feet for punctures and explain to him how he could have been injured

4. Playing catch, your kids broke your favorite cookie jar. You will
   A. Tell them that it’s o.k. since you know it was an accident
   B. Punish them both for breaking the vase
   C. Reprimand them for breaking the house rule: No catch in the house. You then ask them to try and fix the cookie jar the best they can with glue
   D. Let them know how worried you are about them since they could have been injured

5. Your seven-year-old child wants to hang out at the mall game room with several older kids. You will
   A. Let your child go because it is so important to him / her
   B. Prohibit your child from going
   C. Suggest an alternative and help them plan it
   D. Let your child go and stay close to them at the game room to make sure they have fun and stay safe
6. Your daughter forgot her homework again. You will
   A. Get in the car and take it to her at school
   B. Punish her and give her extra “homework”
   C. Don’t take it to her but you will help her make a checklist or other alternatives to help her learn to be more responsible
   D. Take it to her at school when she calls you. You leave the teacher a note explaining how tired she has been

7. Your son colors your kitchen wall with crayon. You will
   A. Laugh, tell him to use paper next time, then clean it up
   B. Get angry, wash it off yourself and throw away the crayons
   C. Give him a rag with soap & water and have him clean the wall. You will monitor him the next time he uses crayons
   D. Help him clean the wall while you fuss over him not having enough sleep and not thinking right

8. How many rules do you have at your house?
   A. No explicit rules
   B. Many rules, many consequences
   C. General rules, particularly for safety. Other rules are defined as needed
   D. No obvious rules because you watch your child so closely

9. You are making breakfast for your daughter. You will
   A. Ask her what she wants and meet her request. You will make her something else if she doesn’t like her first choice
   B. Tell her she can have what you already made or nothing
   C. Ask her if she would like pancakes or muffins
   D. Make her a full balanced breakfast and make sure she doesn’t leave the table hungry

10. What are the greatest principles you want to encourage in your child?
    A. Freedom of choice and freedom of speech
    B. Obedience and respect for authority
    C. Respect and negotiation
    D. Concern for others and safe choices

(based on a quiz designed by Marie-Helen Goyetche, Children Today website: Do You Know your Parenting Style? http://childrentoday.com/resources/articles/parent.htm)
Tips for Parenting Children with Challenging Temperaments
from *Raising Your Spirited Child* by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka,

**INTENSE KIDS**

**Kids Need to Hear:**
You are enthusiastic, expressive, and full of energy.
Your intensity can make you a great athlete, leader, performer, etc.
Things can frustrate you easily.
Being intense does not mean being aggressive.

**Teaching Tips:**
Help your child learn to notice his or her growing intensity before the child is overwhelmed.
Provide activities that soothe and calm, such as warm baths, stories, and quiet imaginative play.
Use humor to diffuse intense reactions.
Teach your child that time-out is a way to calm down rather than a punishment.

**If the Parent is Intense Too:**
Do not fear your child’s intensity.
Calm yourself before you step in to help your child.
Talk positively to yourself about your own intensity.

**PERSISTENT KIDS**

**Kids Need to Hear:**
You are committed and decisive.
You are assertive.
You are independent and capable.

**Teaching Tips:**
Teach your child how to find *yes*, to reach a compromise.
Help your child recognize when she is locked in and to come up with a better or different solution.
Make sure your rules are clear and be consistent.

**If the Parent is Persistent Too:**
Allow yourself time to unlock.
Know that good parents say both *yes* and *no*.
Find a balance between over-control and under-control.

**SENSITIVE KIDS**

**Kids Need to Hear:**
You’re tenderhearted and loving.
Noise bothers you.
You are sensitive to other feelings.
You’ll make a wonderful chef, artist, designer, etc.

**Teaching Tips:**
Talk with your child about the rich array of sensation and emotions the child experiences. Give the child words to describe them.
Be sensitive to how much stimulation the child is receiving. Things like noise, certain smells, and bright lights bother sensitive children.
Limit the amount of television the child watches.
Teach your child to recognize when he or she is becoming over-stimulated and to ask for help stopping or reducing the stimulation.

If the Parent is Sensitive Too:
Be aware that what stimulation bothers your child also irritates you.
Reduce stimulation while you still have the energy to help your child and help yourself too.
Reduce your own stress so it doesn’t overwhelm your sensitive child.
Refill your energy bank after being in a stimulating situation.

SLOW-TO-ADAPT KIDS

Kids need to hear:
Change is difficult for you.
You like to be organized and to know what to expect.
You can be flexible.
Teaching Tips:
Establish a routine and explain plans for the day. Avoid surprises by telling your child what’s coming.
Allow time for the child to finish one activity and to transition to the next.
When planning activities, limit the number of times the child changes from one thing to the next.

If the Parent is Slow-to-Adapt Too:
Allow yourself time to transition.
Recognize that if your day has been filled with transitions, you may need time to re-energize.

DISTRACTABLE KIDS

Kids need to hear:
You notice things other people miss.
Sometimes it is hard for you to hear directions unless the person is talking directly to you.
You are perceptive and creative.
Teaching Tips:
Motivate your child to listen with words of support and love.
Send your message in many different ways including talking, writing, drawing, and demonstrating.
Touch your child lightly to help the child focus on your instructions.
Make sure to get the child’s attention through eye contact.
Keep your message or instructions simple.
Don’t ask a question if there really isn’t a choice.
Tell the child what he or she can do.

If the Parent is Distractible Too:
Make sure you follow through on things with your child.
Give yourself time to finish tasks uninterrupted.
Provide quiet spaces to work and play.
Refill your energy bank after working hard to stay focused.

IRREGULAR KIDS

Kids Need to Hear:
You are full of surprises.
You are really flexible.
You’ll make a great emergency room doctor, D.J., pilot, police officer, or other professional that works crazy hours.
Teaching Tips:
Provide a routine and a schedule that is consistent so your child can gradually adapt to it.
Expect your irregular child to take longer to adjust to a routine, but with patience and consistency, the child can!
Teach your child self-help skills as soon as possible.
If the Parent is Irregular Too:
Be aware that you may be inconsistent with your meal times and bed times. Your child may need more consistency than you are providing.

CAUTIOUS KIDS (First Reaction of Withdrawal)

Kids Need to Hear:
I will support you. You can think about it before you decide.
You like to check things out before you jump in.
New things and situations are difficult for you, but remember last time . . . when you were successful.
Teaching Tips:
Encourage your child but don’t push.
Warn your child about new things that will be happening. Talk about what to expect.
Arrive early or visit a new place ahead of time so that your child has time to observe.
Remind your child of similar situations that the child first rejected but now enjoys.
Allow your child a second chance.
If the Parent is Cautious Too:
Recognize that your first reaction may not be your final one.
Allow yourself to think before responding to your child’s questions.

ENERGETIC KIDS

Kids Need to Hear:
I wish I had your energy!
You need to wiggle and move.
You like to learn by using your body.
You’ll make a great athlete and parent.
Teaching Tips:
Plan for your child’s energy. Provide many opportunities to run, jump, and climb. Avoid activities that require sitting for a long period of time. Recognize that wild activity is often related to the other temperamental traits such as overstimulation and too many transitions.

If the Parent is Energetic Too:
Plan exercise in your day, and enjoy athletic activities with your child. Know that it is difficult for you to cope when you are forced to sit for a long period of time.

SERIOUS & ANALYTICAL KIDS

Kid Needs to Hear:
You are a good at evaluating; I appreciate your suggestions. You think deeply; you will make a good judge, newscaster, etc. You are a serious person; that doesn’t mean you are unhappy. Tell me what you enjoyed. Tell me what you would like to see done differently.

Teaching Tips
Help your child see the positives and what the child can do. Teach good manners. Ask specific questions that require the child to think about the parts of an issue rather than just make one general analytical statement about the entire thing.

If the Parent is Serious & Analytical Too:
Practice looking for the positives in people and situations. Celebrate little successes. Don’t let one problem rob you of the joy of the good moments.

Guidelines for Giving Clear Messages
• Keep the focus on behavior
• Be specific & direct
• Use your normal voice
• Specify the consequence for non-compliance

Stopping Power Struggles
• When kids tune out, check-in
• When kids argue, cut it off
• When kids challenge, give limited choices
• When kids dawdle, use a timer
• Ignore attitude, not misbehavior
• When kids cross the line, hold firm
• When kids get hot, cool them down
• When parents cross the line, apologize
• Don’t personalize the misbehavior
Your emotional reaction depends on how you think about your child’s behavior.

Reframe the Negative to the Positive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Label</th>
<th>New, Positive Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpredictable</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stubborn</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme, dramatic</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflexible</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosive</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picky</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distracted</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoying</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


*Kids are Worth It!* by Barbara Coloroso, William Morrow Paperbacks, 2002.


---

If you enjoyed this class, you might also enjoy these The Parenting Center classes:

- Developing Responsible Children
- Making Rules & Enforcing Consequences
- Needs of Preteens

Please visit our web site at [www.theparentingcenter.org](http://www.theparentingcenter.org) to see a schedule of upcoming classes.