

# Parenting the Spirited Child

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# Defining the Spirited Child

The Nine Temperament Traits

# Defining the Spirited Child

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*Spirited children are more:*

- ▶ Intense
- ▶ Persistent
- ▶ Sensitive
- ▶ Perceptive
- ▶ Maladaptive
- ▶ Irregular
- ▶ Energetic
- ▶ Reactive
- ▶ Moody

# Trait 1: Intensity

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*Experience powerful reactions*

- ▶ Feelings are extreme
- ▶ Loud and dramatic
- OR
- ▶ Quiet and observant

## Trait 2: Persistence

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*Determined and strong. Often get “locked down” in their thinking.*

- ▶ Don't want to be distracted from an activity
- ▶ Often get frustrated when they “can't do something”
- ▶ Can argue a point for hours

## Trait 3: Sensitivity

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*Spirited children feel, see, hear and smell things more deeply than other people.*

- ▶ Easily overwhelmed
- ▶ Stimulated by their environment
- ▶ Emotional

## Trait 4: Perceptive

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*Their alert senses make them easily distractible.*

- ▶ Hear what others do not
- ▶ Make observations that others miss
- ▶ Feel the emotions of those around them
- ▶ Appear to have difficulties following instructions

# Trait 5: Maladaptive

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*Spirited children struggle with transitions.*

- ▶ Difficult for them to switch gears
- ▶ Resistant to change
- ▶ Slow to adapt

## Trait 6: Irregular

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*Many spirited children are unpredictable.*

- ▶ Unpredictable
- ▶ Do not appear to have natural rhythms
- ▶ Difficult to schedule

# Trait 7: Energetic

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*The need to move is strong.*

- ▶ Always on the go
- ▶ Fidgety
- ▶ Cannot sit for long periods of time

## Trait 8: Reactive

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*Often experience strong reactions to new stimuli.*

- ▶ Slow to warm-up
- ▶ Weary of new situations/people
- ▶ Need encouragement to succeed

## Trait 9: Moody

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*Serious and analytical; often seeing only the negative.*

- ▶ Tend to be whiny
- ▶ Overly negative
- ▶ Appear to display poor manners

# Spirited Child Quiz

# Quiz Introduction

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- ▶ Scale from mild to strong or low to high
- ▶ Everyone has a temperament that has both positive and negatives aspects to it
- ▶ The Spirited child tends to fall toward the strong end of the scale

# Parenting Techniques

How to parent the spirited child

# Diffusing Intensity

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- ▶ Pick up on Non-verbal cues
- ▶ Some examples:
  1. Getting louder
  2. Moving quickly between activities
  3. Acting bossy
  4. Increased Impatience

# Diffusing Intensity (cont)

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## Calming Activities:

1. Warm bath
2. Playing in the sink
3. Running water through his fingers

## Sensory Activities

1. Play doh or silly putty
2. Sand trays
3. Back rubs

# Diffusing Intensity (cont)

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- ▶ Reading
  
- ▶ Time-Out (but NOT for punishment)
  1. Talk about “cooling off”
  2. Identify a comfortable spot
  3. Talk soothingly
  4. Rub their back gently

# Handling Persistence

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- ▶ Choose your battles: power struggles
- ▶ Look for opportunities to say “yes”
- ▶ Practice reflective listening
- ▶ Be willing to negotiate
- ▶ Teach problem-solving skills
- ▶ Make sure your rules are clear
- ▶ **BE CONSISTENT!**

# Managing Sensitivity

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- ▶ Check stimulation levels
- ▶ Use words
- ▶ Know when to quit
- ▶ Limit television time

# Addressing Perceptive Traits

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- ▶ Use multiple methods to direct
- ▶ Make eye contact
- ▶ Keep directions simple
- ▶ Tell them what they CAN do

# Dealing with maladaptive behaviors

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- ▶ Establish a routine
- ▶ Time management
- ▶ Forewarn
- ▶ Allow time for closure
- ▶ Limit transitions

# Improving Regularity

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- ▶ Teach self-help skills
- ▶ Work together

# Channeling Energy

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- ▶ Expect energy
- ▶ Direct with touch
- ▶ Stay attentive
- ▶ Practice self-care

# Reducing Reactivity

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- ▶ Encourage vs. push
- ▶ Steps to encouragement:
  1. Support your child
  2. Express understanding
  3. Allow her to move at her own pace
  4. Remind him of past successes
  5. Break down the task
  6. Allow warm-up time

# Reduce Moodiness

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- ▶ Point out the positives
- ▶ Teach good manners
- ▶ Model a positive attitude
- ▶ Ignore negative statements

# Specific Troublesome Behaviors

And how to address your child's needs.

# Tantrums

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- ▶ Stay with or near a child that is having a tantrum
- ▶ Try to identify the cause of the distress
- ▶ Know your child's most difficult times of day
- ▶ Provide a gentle touch
- ▶ Make rules and consequences clear
- ▶ Process the tantrum

# Bedtime

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- ▶ Provide activities and objects that are associated with bedtime
- ▶ Make sure some of the objects are portable
- ▶ Avoid any activities that encourage physical behavior
- ▶ Stay with your child to calm him or her
- ▶ Take turns with your spouse (or other adult)
- ▶ Allow enough time for bedtime preparation
- ▶ Set a firm bedtime

# Meals

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- ▶ Provide healthy foods
- ▶ Make snacks nutritious and easy
- ▶ Explain and model how to refuse food appropriately
- ▶ Allow your child to help plan/prepare meals
- ▶ Make the menu known in advance

# Getting Dressed

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- ▶ Have a specific area for getting dressed
- ▶ Use a thermostat to teach appropriate clothing choices
- ▶ Buy clothes that are easy for your child to put on and take off without assistance

Questions?

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The basis of this presentation is the following book:

*Raising Your Spirited Child*  
by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

Visit my blog at [www.penwellcounseling.com](http://www.penwellcounseling.com) for a copy of these slides.

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