

LEARNING TO GROW

CENTER ON THE FAMILY ♥ UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Getting to Know Your Child

Your child's temperament—the unique set of traits that he shows in his activity level, adaptability, and persistence—reveals itself very early on in his young life. These traits influence how he interacts with his environment and approaches learning. They also influence the way you and other adults respond to him. As a parent or caregiver, recognizing and understanding your child's temperament is an important responsibility.

The compatibility between your child's and your temperaments, known as the “goodness of fit,” can affect the quality of your relationship. The more alike your temperaments are, the more likely the two of you will view experiences similarly, and vice versa. However, regardless of whether your temperaments are similar or different, when you understand your child's temperament, you can better predict his typical reaction to situations and adjust your caregiving methods to better support him.

This newsletter will focus on understanding your child's temperament. It provides some age-appropriate activities you can do with your child to get to know his preferences and activity and behavior patterns better.



As you interact with your child, keep the following in mind:

- ♥ Understanding who your child is and what makes him unique is a key in your interactions with your child.
- ♥ The more a young child feels respected and appreciated for who he is, the more motivated and comfortable he becomes in seeking new experiences, knowledge, and skills.
- ♥ A young child's learning is enhanced in a positive environment that matches his temperament and developmental needs.

In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ Age-specific information and suggestions about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ Featured activities for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.



Infants

Infants are born with their own distinct personalities. Discovering the traits that make your child unique and special is one of the most exciting parts of parenting! Even when your child is very young, you can learn about his temperament by observing his behavior and asking yourself questions such as, “Is he very active and intense, or relatively easy-going? Is he cautious when



faced with a new situation, such as tasting a new food or is he eager to explore new things?”

You’ll find clues about his temperament in everything he does. Does he seem to be more alert at certain times of the day? Does he take short or long naps? Does he want to eat at regular times or does this vary from day to day? Paying close attention to these behaviors over time can help you to recognize emerging patterns in his preferences.

The following are some suggestions as you interact with your baby:

- ♥ **Be sensitive to your infant’s natural body rhythms.** Paying attention to these signals can help you figure out how to best respond to him. For example, if he is easily upset by sudden changes, let him know what is going to happen before it takes place and take a little more time to ease into a new situation.
- ♥ **Look for your child’s cues.** Your baby uses cues such as crying, facial expressions, gazes, and gestures (reaching for people, waving his hands and feet, arching his back, etc.) to communicate to you. With time, you will figure out your baby’s unique way of letting you know what he feels or needs.

Activity for Infants: *Who Is That?*

Materials:

Hand held mirror

What to Do:

1. Hold a mirror up so your baby can see his reflection.
2. Point at the baby in the mirror and say his name.
3. Draw attention to different parts of his face or facial expressions. Say, “Look the baby is smiling!”
4. Your baby may not recognize himself in the mirror until he’s around 15 months old. However, gazing at the image in the mirror will help him focus, track, and become familiar with faces. Eventually, it will help him identify himself.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

As your child becomes a toddler, his distinct preferences and personality will become more obvious. As he asserts his growing independence, you will see how his temperament influences his responses to people and situations. For example, your toddler might be more active than ever—running around everywhere, waving at strangers, and letting you know exactly what he wants or doesn't want. Or, your toddler might be very cautious, have a difficult time transitioning to something new, and appear overwhelmed in a noisy and busy setting.

Your toddler is learning new ways to express his needs, desires, and comfort level to you. However, crying may still be the main way he shows strong emotions like anger, frustration, sadness, or feeling overwhelmed. He needs your support to learn other ways to express his feelings. The following are ways to help him:

- ♥ **Use your knowledge of his temperament to tailor learning opportunities to match his comfort level.** Provide opportunities for your child to play, explore, and learn

based on his temperament. Some children are more comfortable than others in large groups and around new people. If your child is in a new setting that makes him

uncomfortable, engage in a familiar and enjoyable activity, for example reading a book together, to ease him into the new situation.

- ♥ **Acknowledge your child's feelings; model using language to express feelings.** This lets him know that you understand him and gives him the language to use to express his feelings. For example, if your child cries when separating from you say, "You don't like it when daddy leaves. I understand. Saying good-bye is hard."



Activity for Toddlers: Thumbprint People

Materials:

Non-permanent, water-based markers of assorted colors
Paper

What to Do:

1. Help your child color the upper part of his thumb with a marker.
2. Make an imprint of his thumb on a sheet of paper by rolling his thumb from side to side.
3. Tell your child to pretend that the thumbprint is his body.
4. Show him how to draw a head, arms, and legs on the thumbprint.
5. Make another thumbprint and ask him to draw in his head, arms, and legs.
6. Next, make one thumbprint for every member in the family, including pets!
7. Print a name under each thumbprint for each person or pet.
8. Talk about each person and ask him to name something special about everyone.
9. Wash with soap and water to remove ink from his thumb.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

In his preschooler years, your child is developing his ability to understand, adapt, and express his feelings (positive and negative) in more socially acceptable ways.



For example, your child may be upset that he has to put away his toys, but he is able to understand that throwing a tantrum is not okay. He is learning to monitor his own behavior, and while he may still cry or shout to express strong feelings, he is learning other ways to communicate what he is feeling.

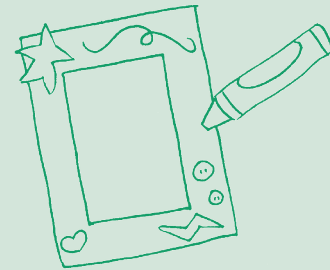
Learning to manage emotions is a critical accomplishment for young preschoolers and temperament will affect how easily a child is able to do this. For example, a child who is more cautious with others may have a hard time confronting someone that upset him. A child who has a high activity level may show excitement by running around and shouting; this may not be appropriate behavior depending on the setting.

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Activities for Preschoolers: *Picture Frames*

Materials:

- Photo of your child or your family or a drawing that your child did
- Cardboard or a thick piece of paper that is larger than the photo
- Jumbo crayons or washable markers
- Scissors (for adult use only)
- White glue
- Small decorative items such as shells, seeds, buttons, stickers, colored tissue paper



What to Do:

1. Talk with your child about what's special about him and why you chose this photo.
2. Center the photo on the cardboard or paper and trace a line around its edge.
3. Take the photo away and draw a second line about two inches out from the first line to form a border.
4. Cut away the extra paper around the outside line.
5. Have your child decorate the border area between the two lines with crayons or makers or gluing on the decorative items.
6. Talk about the different shapes, colors and textures of the items.
7. Glue the photo onto the cardboard or paper.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development.

Physical Development

- ♥ Learn to use his body with intention
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Recognize himself as separate from others
- ♥ Learn to interact with others

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and his attention span
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop early math skills like quantifying, comparing, sorting, grouping, and ordering
- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem-solving skills



Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you do this recipe with your child, show him how to safely handle the items and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before and after preparing any food.

Sweet Potato Palau (Hawaiian Pudding)

from <http://hawaiiifoods.hawaii.edu/recipes>

Ingredients:

- 3 large Okinawan sweet potatoes (approximately 9 cups)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ¼ cup coconut milk
- ¼ cup skim milk



Instructions:

1. Boil whole sweet potatoes for 1 hour, or until tender. Rinse the potatoes under cold water, let them drain, and set them aside until they are cool to the touch.
2. Talk about the parts of the potato (color, texture, taste), while you peel the skin from the sweet potatoes.
3. Cut the potatoes into cubes and put them into a medium-sized bowl. Have your child help mash the potatoes with a fork or potato masher until smooth.
4. Gently fold in sugar, coconut milk, and skim milk into the mashed potatoes. Whip the mixture until fluffy.
5. Chill in the refrigerator and serve *palau* when it is cool.

Preschoolers (continued from page 4)

The following are ways that you can support your child.

- ♥ **Present acceptable alternatives for expressing feelings.** Let your child know that it is okay to have strong emotions. Show him different ways he can control what he does and says when he feels these emotions. Talk about how to play in different environments—when to use an “inside voice” and “outside voice,” and how to treat others (playing nicely, sharing, taking turns).
- ♥ **Talk about your child’s strengths.** Avoid labeling your child by his characteristics, e.g., “shy,” “hyper.” Instead, have conversations with him about the characteristics that make him special and unique. Talking about things he likes and what he’s good at lets him know that he is valued for who he is.

Community Resources

Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation <http://ecmhc.org/temperament/index.html>

Features temperament resources including a short online survey that allows parents and care providers of infants and toddlers recognize and explore their own temperament traits and those of a child for which they provide care.

PATCH classes <http://www.patchhawaii.org/providers/training>

PATCH offers free child care workshops to parents and care providers statewide. Register for classes on topics such as emotional development (including temperament), discipline, and language.

Suggested Books

Recommended by Read to Me International www.readtomeintl.org.
For more books, visit the public library www.librarieshawaii.org.



Infants and Toddlers

Llama Llama Red Pajama by Anna Dewdney

The rhyme, rhythm, and repetition will appeal to your infants and toddlers as Baby Llama turns from whimpering to hollering to wailing for Mama Llama’s attention. Discover how Mama Llama deals with her little llama and his drama.

My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss

Here is a book on feelings and moods that will appeal to Dr. Seuss fans of all ages.

Preschoolers

Crazy Hair Day by Barney Saltzberg

If you’ve ever been embarrassed because you felt completely out of place, then you will sympathize with Stanley Birdbaum, who comes to school excited, ready to celebrate Crazy Hair Day at school – only to discover that Crazy Hair Day is next week, and today is School Picture Day.

Unlovable by Dan Yaccarino

What’s a dog to do when a cat, a parrot, and the neighborhood dogs call Alfred unlovable and criticize his looks? Read this charming story about Alfred, a little pug, who learns that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder – and learns about true friendship in the process.

Learning to Grow is a project of the Center on the Family at the University of Hawai‘i, College of Tropical Agriculture & Human Resources, with funding from the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services. www.learningtogrowhawaii.org