

## JACK'S CORNER

**QUESTION:** As parents, we have really tried hard to raise our children alike, but they seem a different as night and day. It seems like they were born with certain personality characteristics. We always thought a personality was something that was developed as a person grew up. What's going on with our kids?

**ANSWER:** The majority of a person's personality is determined **before** birth. As God "knits" an individual together "in the womb", he instills much of what we think of as personality. Although life experiences and parenting certainly affect how a child grows into adulthood, **temperament is relatively fixed**. This explains the different reactions of children raised alike by the same parents. This is also the cause of much frustration on the part of parents as they try to compare children. God, in the wonder of his creativity, not only fashions each child physically unique, but temperamentally unique too! Understanding the following characteristics of temperament should help you deal with each child individually:

1. **ACTIVITY LEVEL:** This is the need to move about, to stay up late, to fidget, to be constantly occupied or entertained.
2. **RHYTHMICITY:** This is the degree to which there is a need to live within a regular schedule.
3. **APPROACH AND WITHDRAWAL:** This is the intensity of the response to new situations and people.
4. **ADAPTABILITY:** This is the ease of accommodation, the understanding and use of new events, people and things.
5. **INTENSITY:** This is the level of reaction to the events, people and things of life.
6. **THRESHOLD OF RESPONSIVENESS:** This is the degree of intensity a stimulus must have in order to elicit a response.
7. **QUALITY OF MOOD:** This is the tendency for an individual to be generally positive or negative.
8. **DISTRACTIBILITY:** This is the degree to which, and the ease with which, an individual is moved off focus.
9. **ATTENTION SPAN AND PERSISTENCE:** This is the length of time the individual can stay focused.

The unique collection of these characteristics is present when the child is born. Although the individual can learn to control, use, ignore and compensate for the set of temperament characteristics given to him/her by the Creator, at the core personality level, these characteristics don't change. Most people have learned (through experience, punishment, reward, parenting, relationships and prayer) methods of **compensation** and **control** for their

unique set of temperament characteristics. For some, this is quite easy; for others, it is a difficult battle.

As parents, everything we can know about the uniqueness of each child helps us become the best and the most effective parents we can be. As we reward, discipline, live and work with our children, it is critical that we know their individual uniqueness.

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