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### A Person's a person no matter how small - Understanding the Role of Temperament in Working With Toddlers and Young Children

Robinson B. Kimberly

*DeKalb-Rockdale GNETS*, kbrobinson11@gmail.com

Ann VanBuskirk Dr.

*DeKalb-Rockdale GNETS*, ann\_m\_van\_buskirk@dekalbschoolsga.org

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# A Person's A Person No Matter How Small

Understanding the Role of Temperament in Working With  
Toddlers and Young Children

Ann M. Van Buskirk, Ph.D.  
Kimberly B. Robinson, Ph.D.

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## Temperament

- General style of responding
- Biologically based
- Multi-dimensional
- Provides the foundation for personality traits in older children, youth, and adults

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## 9 Temperamental Dimensions

### Nine Dimensional Model

- Activity level
- Regularity
- Approachability
- Adaptability
- Sensory threshold
- Intensity of reaction
- Quality of mood
- Distractibility
- Persistence

### Two System Construct Model

- Reactivity/Shyness
- Regulation/ Effortful Control

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### Regulating Behavior/Effortful Control

- Defined as “the ability to inhibit a dominant response to perform a subdominant response”
- Two dimensions of temperament:
  - Inhibitory control
  - Attentional focusing

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### Shyness/Reactivity

- Shyness describes an individual’s style of responding to people, items, or events in the environment that are new or unfamiliar
- Reactivity in infancy
  - High-reactive infants
  - Low-reactive infants
- Shyness as a risk factor

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### Child Temperaments

- the “easy”
- the “difficult”
- the “slow to warm up”
- Approximately 65% of children fit one of the patterns.
  - 40% fit the easy pattern
  - 10% fell into the difficult pattern
  - 15% were slow to warm up
- Each category has its own strength and weakness and one is not superior to another.

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### Easy Child

- Activity level
- ↑ Regularity
- Approachability
- ↑ Adaptability
- Sensory threshold
- ↓ Intensity of reaction
- ↑ Quality of mood
- Distractibility
- Persistence

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### Difficult Child

- Activity level
- ↓ Regularity
- ↓ Approachability
- Adaptability
- ↑ Sensory threshold
- ↑ Intensity of reaction
- Quality of mood
- Distractibility
- Persistence

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### Slow To Warm Up Child

- ↓ Activity level
- Regularity
- ↓ Approachability
- ↓ Adaptability
- Sensory threshold
- ↑ Intensity of reaction
- Quality of mood
- Distractibility
- Persistence

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# Activity

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## Who Am I?



• Charlie Brown is a model neurotic. He is prone to depression and anxiety and paralyzing fits of over-analysis. Constantly worrying if he is liked or respected, he has a perpetual, usually dormant crush on the little redheaded girl, taking small joys in her foibles (like biting her pencil) that may make her more attainable.

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## Who Am I?



• Defined by a single word (crabby), Lucy revels in her disagreeableness. Typical portrayals of Lucy feature her bossing around her friends, dominating her little brother, mocking Charlie Brown's self consciousness, and generally being a pain in the butt.

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Who Am I?



- Linus is clearly the brightest of all of the Peanuts gang. Witty and knowledgeable, he is prone to passionate monologues. He has invented his own creation, the Great Pumpkin, and faithfully waits in the pumpkin patches for him every Halloween. Linus has his own idiosyncrasy, an ever-present blue security blanket - but he does not seem particularly sensitive about it; it's who he is.

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Who Am I?



- Snoopy is a typical extravert. Flamboyant, daring, and outgoing to a fault, he tries to join in every activity and conversation. He flies gallant missions against the Red Baron and then brags about his exploits. Snoopy is Joe Cool, the life of the party.

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Who Am I?



- The energetic Tigger wreaks absolute havoc in the Hundred Acre Wood with his spontaneous antics. He is a lot of fun to be around, but little self-control and no attention span whatsoever.

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Who Am I?



- The pessimistic and perpetually sorrowful Eeyore is the epitome of the reclusive, sorrowful melancholic, always expecting the worst from others and from life.

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Who Am I?



- Piglet gets along with everyone, is peaceful, and is Pooh Bear's rock in the storm. But he worries far more than most, and has a tendency to overthink matters.

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Who Am I?



- Christopher Robin consistently exhibits common sense, friendliness, kindness, and wisdom, and is never portrayed doing anything wrong.

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### Who Am I?



- Merida is a very brave, bold, daring, courageous, stubborn, rebellious and headstrong girl who does not fit the stereotypical princess role. Rather than being a damsel in distress Merida openly rebels.

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### Impact of Negative Teacher-Student Relationships

- Negative teacher-child relationships:
  - high conflict and dependency
  - low closeness
  - operate as risk factors for children's school success
- More likely to be referred for special services or retained
- Antisocial behavior in school has been related to teacher-child relationships high in conflict and low in closeness

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### Importance of Positive Relationships

- Goodness of fit research



harmonious relationships



fewer behavior problems

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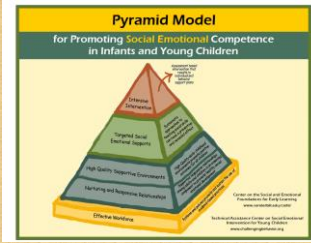
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### Pyramid Model for Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children




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### Tier 1: Nurturing and Responsive Relationships

- Responsive Relationships and High Quality Environments
  - Acknowledging children's efforts
  - Providing praise and encouragement
  - Smiling and warmly interacting
  - Responding to children's vocalizations and communication attempts
  - Frequently using language
  - Using significant amounts of physical closeness
  - Spending time on the floor with children

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### Tier 1: Nurturing and Responsive Relationships

- Reflect on your own temperament and preferences.
- Create partnerships with families to understand a child's temperament.
- Respect and value each child's temperament when individualizing your curriculum.
- All children should receive sufficient density of positive feedback from their caregivers.

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Activity	1. <b>Activity Level</b> - general level of motor activity when one is awake or asleep.
	2. <b>Distractibility</b> - the ease that someone can be distracted, or level of concentration or focus.
	3. <b>Intensity</b> - energy level of emotional response, both positive and negative.
	4. <b>Regularity</b> - predictability of biological functions such as eating, sleeping, etc.
	5. <b>Sensitivity</b> -sensitivity to physical stimuli such as light, sound, and textures.
	6. <b>Approachability</b> - initial response to new places or things.
	7. <b>Adaptability</b> - how easily adjusts to changes and transitions.
	8. <b>Persistence</b> - length of time to continue in activities in the face of obstacles.
	9. <b>Mood</b> - tendency to react to the world mainly in a positive or negative way.

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**Tier 2: High Quality Supportive Environments**

- Respect and value each child's temperament recognizing how quality caregiving practices might be especially important for certain temperament types.
  - **Easy:**
    - check in and initiate communication about emotions
  - **Active/Feisty:**
    - flexible and patient in your interactions
  - **Slow to Warm:**
    - additional preparation and support for new situations or people who become part of the environment.
- Don't forget the other 35%

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**Tier 3: Targeted Social Emotional Supports**

- Focusing on essential social-emotional skills,
- Responsive flexible routines
- Systematic approaches to teaching social-emotional skills
- Peer interaction
  - Understanding who, for how long, and which activities
  - Data can be collected by scanning the classroom every 5 minutes during center time and gathering data
- Friendship skills
  - Observing sharing, turn taking, helping others, organizing play routines, entering into an on-going play
  - Data might be gathered as frequency counts, duration, and type

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### Tier 3: Targeted Social Emotional Supports

- **Recognizing and communicating emotions**
  - Teach ways to recognize their own emotions and the emotions of others and to communicate their emotions in appropriate ways.
  - Monitoring using anecdotal notes or having children identify the potential feelings of others
- **Problem solving**
  - Teach to use a problem solving strategy
  - Monitor using anecdotal notes or noting the level of adult assistance needed
- **Controlling anger and impulse**
  - Teach ways to handle emotions constructively
  - Data might be gathered on the number of outbursts or the number of times a child uses a specific strategy

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### Tier 4: Intensive Intervention

- Individualized plans (Behavior Intervention Plans) are developed based on a comprehensive assessment process including:
  - Family history
  - Significant changes in family composition and/or other relationships
  - A review of the child's developmental and medical history
  - Information and data on the behavior
  - Frequency, intensity, and duration; function of the behavior
  - Antecedents, settings and context of the behavior
  - An assessment of the child's interests, strengths, and development
  - Observations of the child in multiple environments
  - Results from any screenings or other assessment

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### Resources

- Infant Toddler Temperament Tool: <http://ecmhc.org/temperament/>

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