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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

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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

Kimberly B. Robinson, Ph.D.

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Tier 1 – Standards-Based Classroom  
Learning

# Temperament

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

# 9 Temperamental Dimensions

- **Activity level**
- Rhythmicity (regularity)
- **Approach/withdrawal**
- **Adaptability**
- **Sensory threshold**
- Intensity of reaction
- **Quality of mood**
- Distractibility
- **Attention span/persistence**
- Reactivity/Shyness
- Regulation/ Effortful Control

# 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

# 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

# Activity

1. **Activity Level**- general level of motor activity when one is awake or asleep.

2. **Distractibility**- the ease that someone can be distracted, or level of concentration or focus.

3. **Intensity**- energy level of emotional response, both positive and negative.

4. **Regularity**- predictability of biological functions such as eating, sleeping, etc.

5. **Sensitivity**-sensitivity to physical stimuli such as light, sound, and textures.

6. **Approachability**- initial response to new places or things.

7. **Adaptability**- how easily adjusts to changes and transitions.

8. **Persistence**- length of time to continue in activities in the face of obstacles.

9. **Mood**- tendency to react to the world mainly in a positive or negative way.



# 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

# 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.



Tier 2 – Needs-Based Learning

Tier 1 – Standards-Based Classroom  
Learning

# Child Temperaments

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

# Flexible Child

- Activity level

↑ Rhythmicity (regularity)

- Approach/withdrawal

↑ Adaptability

- Sensory threshold

↓ Intensity of reaction

↑ Quality of mood

- Distractibility

- Attention span/persistence

# Feisty Child

- Activity level
- ↓ Rhythmicity (regularity)
- ↓ Approach/withdrawal
- Adaptability
- ↑ Sensory threshold
- ↑ Intensity of reaction
- Quality of mood
- Distractibility
- Attention span/persistence

# Slow To Warm Up/Fearful Child

↓ Activity level

- Rhythmicity (regularity)

↓ Approach/withdrawal

↓ Adaptability

- Sensory threshold

↑ Intensity of reaction

- Quality of mood
- Distractibility
- Attention span/persistence

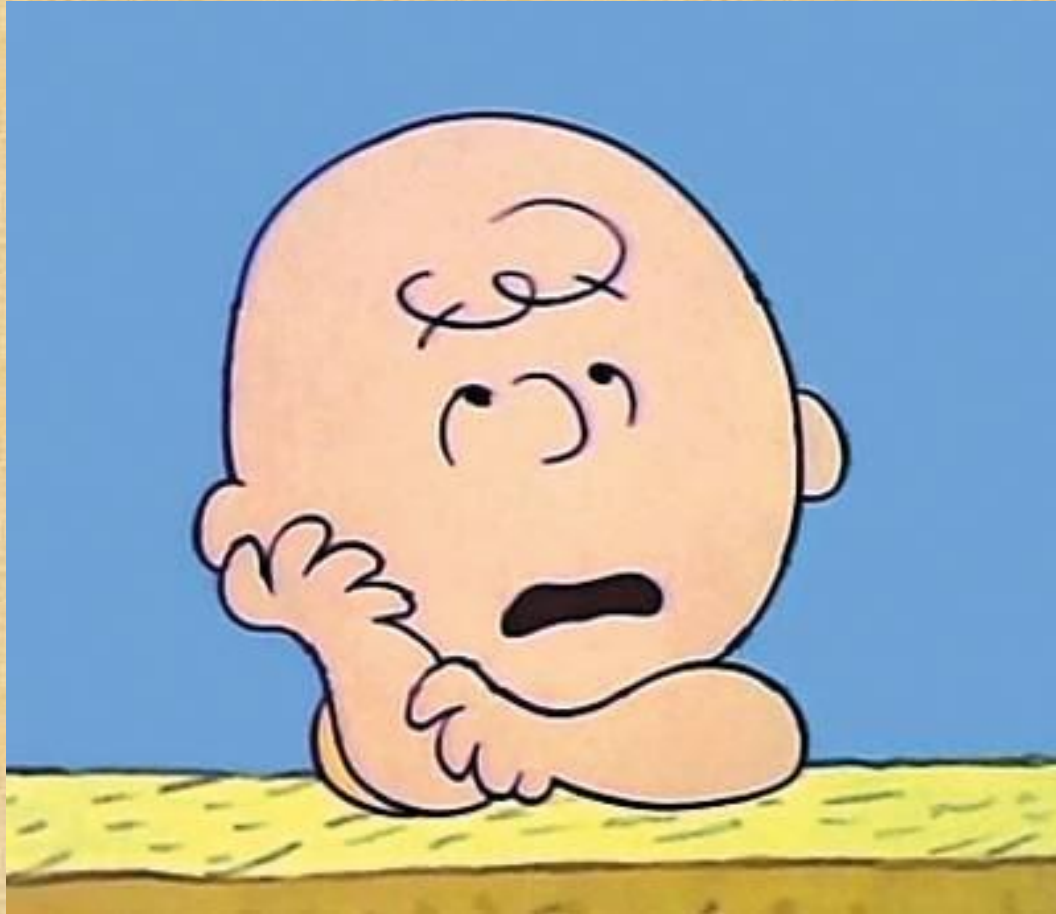
# Tier 2: High Quality Supportive Environments

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



Activity

# 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.

# 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.

# 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.

# Who Am I?



- Mike Wheeler was shown to be an optimist. His D&D role as Dungeon Master suggests that he, like his friend Will, is a creative thinker. Out of the four boys, he was the most emotionally open and willing to accept fantastical explanations behind complex situations. Mike's slightly unorthodox approaches lead him to connect some of the dots explaining the mysterious Upside Down.

# Who Am I?



- Lucas Sinclair kept his friend group grounded in the plausible and the pragmatic. Even during fantastical D&D campaigns, Lucas was hesitant when speculating about the more unlikely events and scenarios. His sustained realist approach, even during unfathomable situations, indicated that he took the task of finding his friend Will incredibly seriously, and was determined to find him. Despite sometimes putting on a defensive and reactionary shell, Lucas was ultimately sweet-natured and had good interests at heart.

# 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.

# Who Am I?



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



# 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.

# Who Am I?



- Princess Diana is a warrior of peace hailing from an island of women isolated from the outside world for centuries. Princess Diana is a tender, peace-loving individual with and possesses great wisdom and intelligence. Over the years, she has assisted in the war effort, served as a founding member of the Justice League, and lived a double life as Wonder Woman.

Tier 3 – SST-Driven  
Learning

Tier 2 – Needs-Based Learning

Tier 1 – Standards-Based Classroom  
Learning

# Tier 3: Targeted Social Emotional Supports

- Individualized
- 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

# Tier 3: Targeted Social Emotional Supports

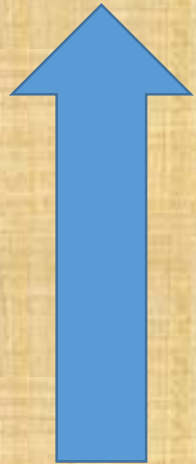
- Recognizing and communicating emotions
  - Teach ways to recognize their own emotions and the emotions of others and to communicate their emotions in appropriate ways.
  - Monitoring using anecdotal notes or having children identify the potential feelings of others
- Problem solving
  - Teach to use 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

# 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

# Importance of Positive Relationships

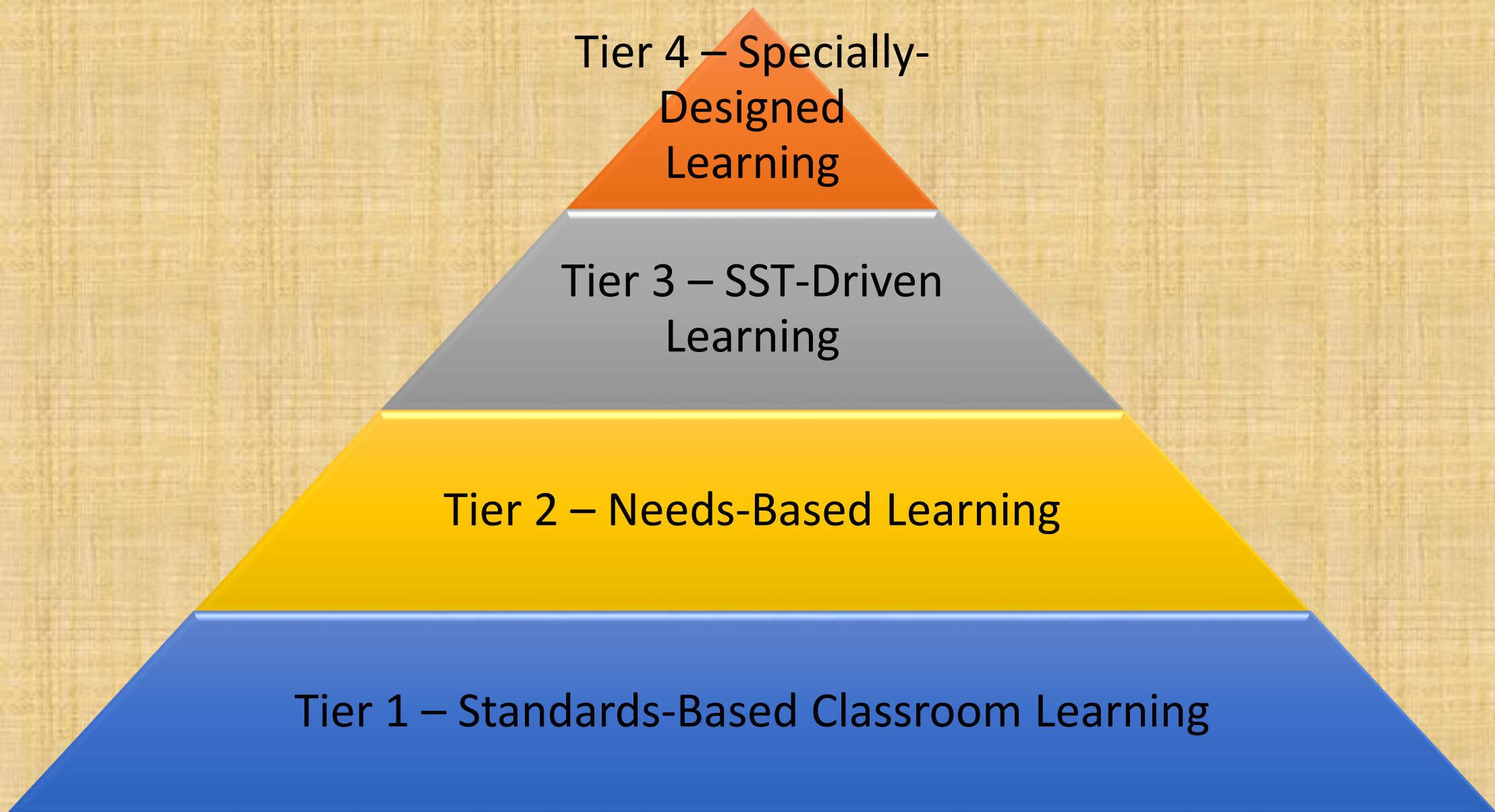
- Goodness of fit research



harmonious  
relationships



behavior  
problems



Tier 4 – Specially-Designed Learning

Tier 3 – SST-Driven Learning

Tier 2 – Needs-Based Learning

Tier 1 – Standards-Based Classroom Learning



# 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

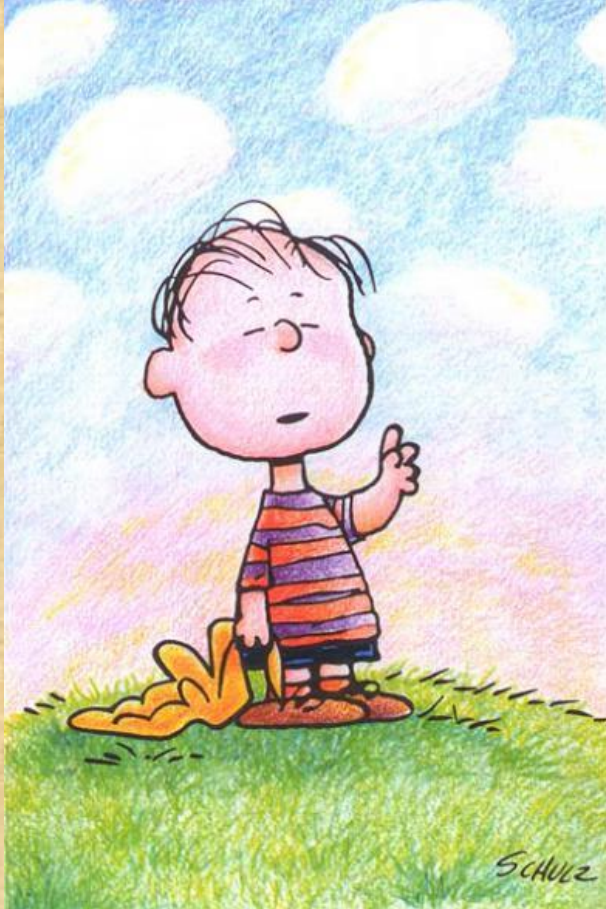
# More Complex Examples of Temperament

# 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.

# 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.

# 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.

# Who Am I?



- Moana, as Gramma Tala describes, "stands out from the crowd". She is adventurous, headstrong, practically fearless, and physically capable. Though she has moments of self-doubt, she has great pride in who she is, and is generally too stubborn to back away from new challenges. Moana approaches new experiences and tasks with the utmost seriousness and will stand her ground to fight for what she values until all is lost. She can present herself as an imposing force despite her size and has bested the most fearsome beasts and impossible obstacles across the seas of Oceania while relying almost solely on her own intelligence.

# Who Am I?



- Belle is a lovely free-thinker who likes to read and go on adventures within her own imagination. She is very compassionate and takes care of those in need. Belle can also be stubborn, but she tries to protect people she truly loves and is very patient towards others.
- Words to describe Belle: imaginative, creative, kind, giving, stubborn, adventurous, intelligent, quirky, different, curious.

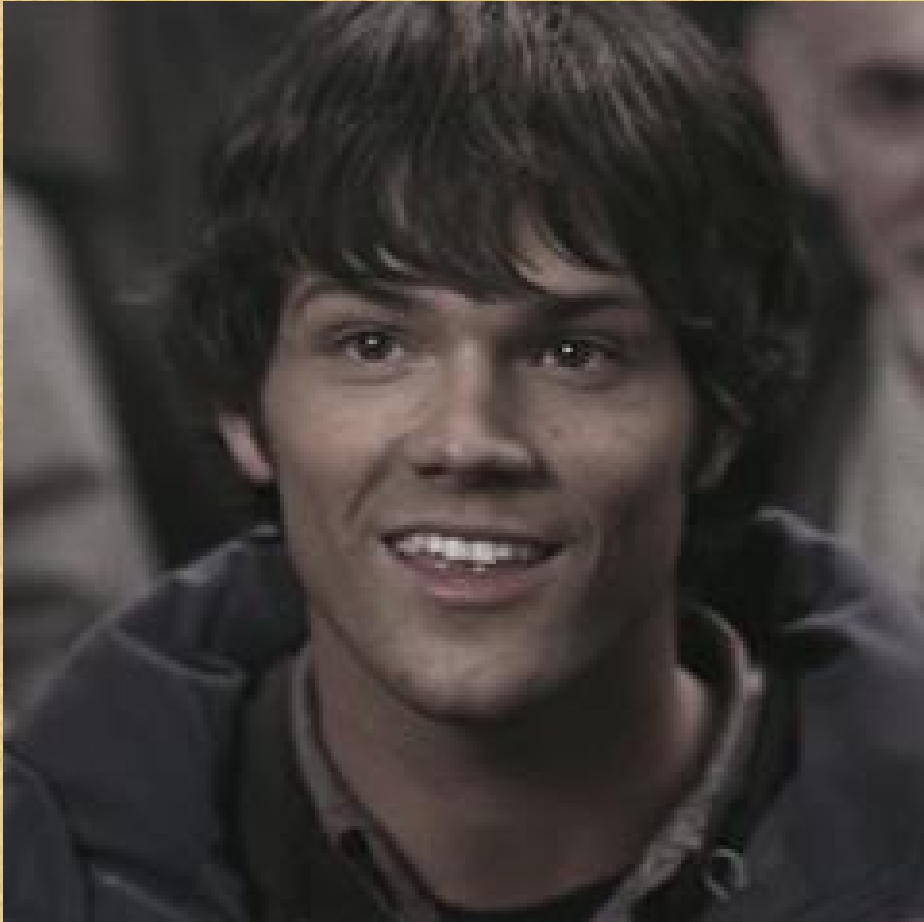
# Who Am I?



- Jane Ives-Hopper “Eleven” was timid, socially withdrawn and extremely cautious of other people. She was a quick learner and came up with creative ways of explaining concepts despite her limited vocabulary. She was also protective and loyal towards those who cared for her.



# Who Am I?



- Sam Winchester is usually kind, empathetic, intelligent and independent. He is often the exasperated voice of reason in his relationship with his older brother. Because of his intelligence, Sam is usually assigned the role of researching information for hunts; he is the "brain", whilst his brother is the "muscle". He normally remembers details that his brother overlooks and is prone to make connections quicker than his brother.

# Who Am I?



- Castiel is a strong, determined, impulsive, competitive and naive celestial being. Like most angels, Castiel expresses little to no emotion, which creates flaws and complexities in his persona. His lack of emotion and understanding of human behavior such as sarcasm has led to several humorous situations, and has occasionally gotten him into trouble.

# Who Am I?



- Randall Pearson was adopted at birth. At age nine, Randall's teacher informed his parents that he was a gifted child who was not being challenged enough at his current school. Randall suffers from anxiety and breakdowns under stressful situations. His favorite holiday is Thanksgiving because it reminds him of the Thanksgivings he had as a child.

# Who Am I?



- Kate Pearson is an aspiring singer. She struggles with her eating habits and body image, and has struggled with issues of self-esteem her entire life, which she greatly attributes to her strained relationship with her mother and the death of her father. She uses Post-It notes throughout her apartment as discipline aids to remind herself of her dietary actions. Kate is an ardent Pittsburgh Steelers fan and has a routine, where she watches the games with her dad's ashes.

# Who Am I?



- Kevin Pearson has always struggled with worrying about what people think of him, which caused him to have a strained relationship with his brother growing up. Kevin is visibly envious of his brother, who has always excelled in everything and receives more attention from their parents, but he doesn't realize that Randall has longed for the same attention from him.