

## Temperament

(by Tereza Škubalová)

In personality psychology, temperament refers to a system of psychological qualities that manifest in how individuals react, behave, and experience emotions. It includes factors such as the ease with which emotions arise, their intensity, and their outward expression, as well as the speed of emotional changes. Temperament is considered an innate component of personality dynamics. As McCormick et al. (2015) noted, while these dispositions, related to activity, affectivity, attention, and self-regulation, have innate aspects, they are also influenced by development, experiences, and situational demands. Over one's lifetime, temperament features may partially overlap with character traits. Character is a facet of personality that forms through education and self-improvement within a society. Unlike character, temperament is more easily observable through external behaviors.

As Keogh (2007) suggests, "Temperament can be considered an important and useful concept for understanding the developmental and adaptation problems of children" (p. 27). When observing the adaptation of a child with a particular temperament, it's essential to consider the influence of culture and its social evaluation criteria. Different cultures have specific social evaluation criteria regarding preferred personality traits for their members. Consequently, a child's temperamental dispositions may be more adaptive in one culture and less so in another. For instance, in some cultures, active, hot-tempered, and persistent children are highly appreciated, while in others, these traits may be considered problematic. In China, for example, shy children are often leaders among their peers (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995). The gender aspect also plays a role in how temperamental manifestations are evaluated.

In practice, the biological concept of temperament is often divided into four types: melancholic, phlegmatic, choleric, and sanguine, as conceptualized by Hans Jurgen Eysenck. However, non-expert awareness tends to focus critically on distinct properties of the choleric temperament (explosiveness) or phlegmatic temperament (passivity), and may overestimate the properties of the sanguine temperament (friendliness) while underestimating its negative attributes (inconsistency and superficiality).

Since the 1950s, experts have shown interest in the concept of "goodness of fit" developed by Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess, which emphasizes the suitable constellation of behavioral characteristics for successful adjustment to the environment. This concept stands in contrast to "poorness of fit" or mismatch. The constellation includes settings and responses within the child's environment, from caregivers to the wider society, and is less emphasized in biologizing approaches.

Thomas and Chess distinguish the following temperament categories in young children (from the age of 12 weeks):

1. Activity level (management of energy)
2. Rhythmicity/regularity (predictability of biological functions)
3. Approach or withdrawal (positive or negative responses to new situations, people, and requirements)
4. Adaptability (ease or difficulty in adapting to change)

5. Threshold of responsiveness (the stimulus intensity needed for a child to respond, e.g., parental nervousness)
6. Quality of mood (the prevailing mood's quality)
7. Intensity of reaction (expression of mood)
8. Distractibility
9. Attention span and persistence.

Chess and Thomas identify three functionally significant temperament types:

1. Easy babies (approximately 40% of infants): They have regular biological functions, exhibit positive initial reactions, adapt easily, and generally maintain a positive mood.
2. Slow-to-warm-up babies (around 15% of infants): These infants show a moderate negative initial reaction and adapt slowly with repeated exposure.
3. Difficult babies (about 10% of infants): This type is characterized by irregular biological functions, a negative response to new people and situations, a sullen mood, and excessive reactions to stimuli. In this case, it is recommended to provide a "goodness of fit" through extraordinary patience, consistency, and objectivity from caregivers to encourage cooperation. McCormick et al. (2014) suggest different term for this category and that is "children with high maintenance temperaments."

It's worth noting that an educator, such as a teacher, who cannot regulate their own emotions and behavior may hinder the emotional regulation development of the child.

#### References:

Chen, X., Rubin, K.H., & Li, B. (1995). Social and school adjustment of shy and aggressive children in China. *Development and Psychopathology*, 7, 337-349.

Keogh, B. (2007). *Temperament ve třídě*. Praha: Grada.

McCormick, M., O'Connor, E. E., Cappella E., McClowry, S., (2014). Getting a good start in school: Effects of INSIGHTS on children with high maintenance temperaments. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. Volume 30, Part A, 1st Quarter 2015, 128–139.