

Approaches to Temperament Risk Factors for Depression

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Temperament is considered to be a biologically based coping style. A student's temperament is characterized by such features as activity level, prevailing mood, intensity of response, adaptability to new experiences, and distractibility. Temperament is relatively stable by 3 years of age and persists through school age and adolescence. Characteristic patterns of these behaviors are classified as three basic temperament types: easy, difficult, and slow-to-warm-up. Children classified having an easy temperament typically have a positive mood, low to moderate activity level, moderate persistence, and high tolerance level. They are usually adaptable, sociable, outgoing, and mellow. These characteristics act as protective factors for these children. In contrast, having a difficult or slow-to-warm up temperament can be a risk factor for depression.

DIFFICULT TEMPERAMENT

Students classified as having difficult temperament tend to have a more negative mood, high activity level, and irregular or unpredictable biorhythms. They are typically not readily adaptable, tend to be reactive to new situations, and react with high intensity. They tend to be easily frustrated, with difficulty recognizing their needs and appropriately expressing them. In other words, children with a difficult temperament are considered difficult to interact with, which constitutes the basis of their typically poor social adjustment and vulnerability to depression.

WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DIFFICULT TEMPERAMENT

- Teach alternative behaviors: patience, using words to deal with anger and frustration, temper control.
- Modulate the student's level of stimulation, especially when faced with new students, crowds, exciting events, or new situations.
- Transitions are best tolerated when managed slowly.
- Students with a high activity level need physical outlets on the playground or through athletic or other physical activities.

SLOW-TO-WARM-UP TEMPERAMENT

Children classified as slow to warm up are considered shy. They are slow to approach people, tend to observe others, are socially reticent, and tend to withdraw from social demands and new social situations. These children can be considered "too much work to interact with," at least initially, and may be ignored by peers or become socially withdrawn.

WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH SLOW-TO-WARM-UP TEMPERAMENT

- Avoid criticism, impatience, and pressure for sociability.
- Prepare the student for new situations.
- Allow time for the student to observe others and engage with them at his or her own pace.
- Facilitate the student's expression of needs so that they are not ignored.
- Provide opportunities for the student to have responsibility for a younger student and to experience social leadership.

MATCHING CLASSROOMS TO STUDENT TEMPERAMENT

In relation to temperament, the central issue for the student's success is the fit of his or her behavioral style with the classroom setting and the school social environment. The teacher is the key determinant of this fit in the classroom.

- Poor student–teacher relationships represent a vulnerability for behavior problems and depression.
- Teachers can interrupt the cycle of conflicted relationships with students who have a difficult temperament and intervene constructively with their social and emotional problems, thereby reducing attendant problems in the classroom.
- Teachers are facilitators of students' social interactions, opportunities, and general classroom dynamics and can assist students with a slow-to-warm-up temperament in their interactions with peers.
- In addition to establishing the overall classroom climate and a relationship with the students as a group, the distinct relationships teachers have with individual students are also important.