

Temperament Patterns and Values

Tip – A child's innate temperament traits can either support or hinder your attempts to instill your values in your child.

When you think about teaching values like responsibility or persistence to your children, it helps to look at their temperament traits. A child's inborn qualities can either support and help her acquire the value you wish to instill or they can make it harder to teach, says Dr. Harriet Heath, psychologist, educator, and author of *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire*.

For example, a child who is highly distractible is not going to acquire the value of responsibility easily. Cleaning his room without supervision or reminding will likely take a much longer time to achieve than it will for a child who is very focused and persistent by nature.



On the other hand, that same focused and persistent child will have a hard time acquiring the values of flexibility and adaptability; she may very much resist leaving one activity to go to Grandma's house, or not want to stop playing a game to go to bed, while her distractible brother finds transitions and adapting to new requirements a breeze.

Tools – Temperament traits make some life tasks and skills more difficult to master. "The challenge for parents when temperament patterns hinder your child's development of a value you hold is to find ways to help your child cope," explains Heath. She offers the following list of directions and questions as a way to help parents make their expectations more realistic and their teaching of values more effective.

Describe a situation in your family that needs attention. (For example, your 3-year-old lets siblings and friends take toys away from her.)

Brainstorm – Think of as many ideas as you can to deal with the situation. Plan how to respond to the situation, using ideas that support your values. Guide your choice with the following questions:

Which of your values are involved in this situation? (In the example above, assertiveness is a value that the child is failing to display.)

Which of your ideas for solutions will support your values?

How will your child's basic needs and developmental level affect which ideas you try? (For example, a 3-year-old might need to practice being assertive with those she trusts.)

How will your child's temperament patterns affect which ideas you try? (For example, this child might be very shy, a quality that would undermine the value of assertiveness. She will likely need direction and support from her parents to learn assertiveness.)

Carry out your plan.

Reflect on the outcome. Revise your strategy if necessary.

You'll find more practical tips you can use right now in *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire* by Harriet Heath, Ph.D.

