



THE CENTER FOR DIVORCE EDUCATION

divorce-education.com

Part I: Tips for Parenting Infants Through Separation or Divorce

Infants (0-18 months) are completely dependent on parents or caregivers. They need to establish trust in their environment.

- Infants attach to their parents at about 6-7 months. It is very important that they interact with both parents if possible, regularly and often. A good rule of thumb for infants who have become attached to both parents is that they have contact with both parents every other day or every third day.
- Parents must be able to get along and control their conflict. If there is a lot of tension and conflict, it can disrupt infants and young children's sense of safety and security. Overnight visits with the non-residential parent may not be a good idea until parental cooperation is improved.
- Emotional sensitivity and responsiveness to the baby are even more important than physical care. Parents should be involved in normal parenting activities. These include feeding, bathing, napping, and play.
- Both homes need to have similar security items like blankets, toys, pacifiers, or other similar items that are comforting to the children. The two households should also have similar daily schedules, like bedtime and feeding. Introducing new things such as solid foods and drinking cups should be done at the same time by both parents.

Infant Temperament Traits*

Temperament is a set of traits we are born with that affect the way children react in different situations, including separation or divorce of their parents. These traits are evident in babies, and can generally be seen into adulthood:

- **Activity:** Is the person always moving and doing something ("hard to sit still") or do they have a more relaxed ("laid back") style?
- **Routine:** Do they have regular eating and sleeping patterns, or are they always changing?
- **Confident vs. Shy:** Do they embrace and enjoy new situations and people, or tend to shy away or avoid new circumstances?
- **Easy-going:** Does the person easily adjust to changes in routines or plans, or react irritably, grouchy, or confused in reaction to changes?
- **Intense or Calm:** Do they have strong reactions to situations, either positive or negative (overly excited, outbursts, etc.), or tend to react in a calm, quiet, patient manner?
- **Mood:** Is there generally a more negative attitude or reaction to daily situations, or more positive, optimistic, "glass-half-full" outlook? Does their mood frequently shift ("mood swings"), or is it usually even-tempered?
- **Drive:** Do they give up quickly when a task becomes difficult or does he/she keep on trying? Do they stick with an activity for long periods, or do they tend to wander?

NEWS

Visit us at: divorce-education.com
Phone: 877-874-1365 Fax: 740-594-2521
E-mail: staff@divorce-education.com





NEWS

Visit us at: divorce-education.com
 Phone: 877-874-1365 Fax: 740-594-2521
 E-mail: staff@divorce-education.com



- **Distractible:** Does the person get easily distracted from an activity or can they shut out distractions and stick with the current activity?
- **Touchy:** Is the person bothered by loud noises, bright lights, or new food textures, or do they tend to ignore them and “go with the flow”?

Based on combinations of these traits, infants tend to take on one of the three following general personality “types”:

Flexible (easy-going, able to adapt):

- The most common type (found in about 40% of the population).
- Generally has regular patterns, positive mood, low intensity, low sensitivity, and is easy-going in changing situations.
- Children in this category may transition well, but might not get their needs met if they do not speak up when they could or should.
- These children often get along in the world without “making waves” because they are so even-tempered and adaptable.

Cautious (slow-to-warm-up, shy, fearful, passive):

- About 15% of the population.
- Tend to withdraw and/or cry, especially during stressful situations.
- May need more time to adapt to changing settings.
- Sometimes too connected to people and places (clingy); but develop these connections slowly. Children in this category do best with:
 - slow transitions, familiar settings, stable routines, objects that help them make a transition through change (holding on to a familiar stuffed animal, blanket, or toy), and a preview or warning of changes before they occur.
- Often have more trouble living in two homes; one caregiver may be easier to manage for these children.
- The more settings to which they are required to adapt (e.g., daycare, preschool, etc.), the more difficult it is for them to stay on an even keel.
- May find it difficult to leave either parent and may act clingy or whiny before, during, or after changes.
- Need routines they can count on as they do not react well to sudden changes. For babies, transitions to new homes and routines should be carefully planned.

Feisty (difficult, fussy, over-active):

- About 10% of the population.
- High intensity, unstable, over-active behavior, distractible, sensitive, and moody. Often described as “a handful.”
- Need calm surroundings, patience, flexibility, and frequent vigorous activity.
- Transitions from setting to setting can be challenging for children with this temperament.
- Need plenty of warning to stop what they are doing before a change occurs, and a “preview” of what is coming, as they do not easily shift gears.
- May “test” parents’ follow-through when it is time to make a transition and may be disobedient or unhappy after moving from one house to another.



NEWS

Visit us at: divorce-education.com
 Phone: 877-874-1365 Fax: 740-594-2521
 E-mail: staff@divorce-education.com

Managing Challenging Behavior

Parents often blame each other for children's challenging behavior – thinking that a child is reacting to something the other parent is not doing or is doing wrong. This assumption can make conflict between parents worse. But a child's reactions may not be the fault of the other parent. Children's behavior is often an effort to have some control over their world. For most children, transitions get easier over time.

Parents often need to adjust their own reactions when they clash with their children's responses to them or the situation. For example, taking deep breaths, pausing before reacting, and using other skills taught through programs like the Children in Between course (e.g., reframing, self-talk, etc.) can be helpful to reduce arguments or worsening of the child's reactions.

Managing Transitions

Helping children manage transitions to changing or new situations is important – through calming them, talking about skills they can use to help themselves (deep breathing, holding on to soothing objects, etc.), and other tools. Further, it is important to remain patient as the child works out how he or she feels (rather than putting down their feelings – “quit your crying” or “get over it!”). Or for over-active children, seeking creative or high-energy activities for children to express or occupy themselves could be helpful. These parental tactics are important, but may not be natural for parents. When parents become more aware of their own temperament as well as the children's, they can be more effective.

It is the parents' job to actively help with changes in children's lives. Using communication skills and activities that consider the children's general style will be most helpful. As children become school age and older, they learn how to better adapt their own styles to fit with the needs of a situation; but this will be most fruitful if parents have helped them do so along the way.

Part II: Tips for Parenting Preschoolers Through Separation or Divorce

For further reading see online.divorce-education.com Parents can take further training on how to reduce conflict and minimize damage to their children during a divorce through the Center for Divorce Education's Children In Between program.

*Sources: Paraphrased from Kline and Deutsch (2014), which was adapted from Alicia Lieberman's Flexible, Fearful or Feisty DVD, developed for the California Department of Education and WestEd (1990).



CDE is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1987

877-874-1365

staff@divorce-education.com