

# AD/HD: Is it them or us?

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# **Understanding Variations in the Behavior of Young Children: The New York Longitudinal Study**

- **Motivation to conduct the study - theories of “environmental determinism” - the “mal-de-mere” syndrome**
- **To try to explain clinical observations - the newborn nursery - adults with psychological problems - children with different responses to similar environmental conditions**
- **“Hyperactive”, “inattentive” young children**
- **Definition of temperament - the “how” of behavior, behavioral style.**

# Goodness of Fit

- **The degree to which temperamental characteristics and environmental characteristics are “consonant” or “dissonant”**
- **Consonance contributes to developmental progress**
- **Dissonance contributes to maladaptive functioning**

# **The Study - some details**

- **Data gathering - questionnaires regarding numerous behaviors at various ages to identify behavioral traits, categories**
- **The subjects - 141 children - homogeneous - studied from age 2 months to present**

# Temperamental Traits

- **Activity level**
- **Distractibility**
- **Intensity**
- **Regularity**
- **Persistence**

# Temperamental Traits

- **Sensory Threshold**
- **Approach/withdrawal**
- **Adaptability**
- **Mood**

# Temperamental Subtypes

- **Easy (40%)** - high regularity, positive approach, adaptable to change, mild/positive mood
- **Slow-to-warm-up (15%)** - mild intensity, mild/negative mood, less regular
- **Difficult (10%)** - Irregular, negative/withdrawal, poor adaptability, intensive/negative mood

## **Some Other Findings ...**

- **Consistency of temperament over time**
- **Identical twins are more likely to share temperamental traits than non-identical twins**

# Uses of Temperament Concepts

- **General discussion to increase parental awareness and understanding of individual differences in their child**
- **Identification of temperamental profile**
- **Difficult temperament as “normal” variation in young children**
- **Variations in activity level, attention, persistence are normal**
- **Intervention for behavior problems**

# The Difficult Child

- **The “vicious circle”:** difficult temperament >>> ineffective response >>> exacerbation of behavior problems
- **Wear and tear for the child - poor self-image**
- **Behaviors develop in the context of parent-child interactions**

## **Difficult Temperamental Traits May “Elicit” Ineffective Responses**

- Jumping from one form of discipline to another**
- Using harmful forms of discipline**
- Being inconsistent, perhaps due to exhaustion**
- Parents vary in their own coping styles and skills**
- Abandonment of adult authority**

# **Effective Parenting Strategies**

- **Emphasis on “planned actions” rather than “reactions”**
- **Restoring rules, consequences, structure and routines which may have been abandoned**
- **Planned rewards - not bribes**

# Effective Punishment

- **Staying neutral**
- **Punish for misbehavior only**
- **Punish less, but make it count**
- **Punish “with an attitude”**
- **Punishment should be brief, without negotiation, firm, without too much warning, and practical**

# Managing Temperament

- **Labeling instead of punishing**
- **Preventive time-outs (high activity level)**
- **Preparation for change (poor adaptability)**
- **Predictability (for low regularity)**

# Managing Temperament

- **Establishing eye contact (distractibility)**
- **Ignoring negative mood**
- **Respecting sensory threshold**
- **Avoiding over-explanation (high negative persistence)**

## **Distinguishing Temperamental Variation from AD/HD in Young Children**

- **The answer is...there is no answer**
- **Behavioral variation is the norm in young children**
- **Focus should be on identifying and managing challenging behaviors**
- **AD/HD diagnosis should generally be deferred, except in extreme cases**