Understanding Temperament in Infant & Toddlers

Social and Emotional Development

- Children need the ability to experience, manage and express emotions in a healthy way.
- Children also need the ability to explore and engage with the environment around them.
- The ability to form and sustain positive relationships.
- Children are not born with social and emotional skills. They develop over time based on experiences and interactions.

Exploring Brain Development

- Brain connections are linkages of one nerve cell to other nerve cells so chemicals and messages travel through the brain.
- New brain connections are formed and modified through verbal and physical interactions. The more positive social experiences a baby has in the first three years of life, the more positive connections are made in the brain.
- The brain develops gradually in response to experience and to the environment.

Key terms in this issue:

Temperament: describes the way in which a child approaches and reacts to the world.

Brain Stem: controls things like reflexes, breathing, circulation, sleeping, swallowing, and vision.

Cerebral Cortex: the part of the brain that contains the frontal lobe.

Frontal Lobe: area of the brain associated with reasoning, planning, problem solving, emotional control and parts of movement and speech.
Three Primary Temperament Types

- **Easy or Flexible** - Children with this temperament seldom make a fuss. They also want attention from teacher, but may not attempt to get it. They generally have positive moods and are highly adaptable.

- **Active or Feisty** - Children with this temperament are often intense in displaying emotions. They need opportunities to make choices. They also require opportunities for active play.

- **Fearful or Slow to Warm** - Children with this temperament may be slow to warm up to new people and new situations. They may need encouragement to approach group play.

Strategies for Temperament Types

- **Easy or Flexible** - Check in with children often and initiate communication about emotions. Encourage children to seek help when needed. Work with children to communicate feelings and needs to others.

- **Active or Feisty** - Be flexible when appropriate. Prepare children for transitions. Create opportunities for active play.

- **Fearful or Slow to Warm** - Provide additional preparation and support for new situations or people. Set up a predictable environment and stick to a clear routine. Give children who are cautious ample time to establish new relationships.

Temperament Self-Assessment

Use this brief self-assessment as you create and reflect on your practices related to Temperament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>What do I need to make this happen?</th>
<th>Who can support me?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I acknowledge children’s temperament traits Ex. “I know you like to watch for a while when we try new things.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adapts schedule, behavior and energy level to meet the temperamental characteristics of different children.</td>
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<td>Uses positive or neutral descriptors and avoids negative labels for children’s temperament.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observes throughout the day and objectively and routinely records the behavior, interactions, and activities.</td>
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<td>S sensitively shares observations regularly with colleagues and child’s family to learn if everyone is observing similar things.</td>
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<td>Uses formal and informal assessments to measure child’s social-emotional development over time.</td>
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