



# Temperament and Regularity

It can certainly be difficult to manage children with widely different temperaments. *Regularity* is one of the traits which define temperament. Children who are *regular* and predictable in their daily routines like to eat, sleep and have bowel movements (BMs) at about the same time almost every day. If children are extremely regular, then you can practically set your watch by when they do things every day.

If a child is *irregular*, then it is hard to predict when he or she will want to eat, nap or have a BM. The child's biological schedule may be different every day. Maintaining a consistent routine between child care and home (even on the weekends) may help this child to regulate, but do not expect that the child will be as predictable as the more regular child.

## Working with a particular child's temperament

Regular and irregular temperaments each bring their own challenges, especially if an irregular child is matched with a child care provider or parent who is regular, or vice versa. It can be frustrating for a regular child care provider or parent to try and predict the needs of an irregular child around such routines as mealtime, naps and elimination.

It's easy to plan outings, snack times and diapering needs for regular children because their habits are predictable. However, very regular children can be dramatically thrown off their schedules for

a short period of time by changes such as daylight savings time. They may feel a little disoriented, almost as if they have jet lag.

While irregular children are more difficult to predict, they are also less likely to be upset by changes in routine. Irregular children are more likely to adapt to variable routines without much of a problem. However, if a child is consistently refusing to eat at lunchtime, sleeps without a pattern of consistency, and has three BMs today and none tomorrow, this child may have a *very irregular* temperament. Ask the parent about the child's routines at home and if there are ways that consistency can be promoted in the child care setting. Parents may not be aware that their child's body can't be as routine-oriented as the other children, or even their own siblings, and they may see the irregularity of the child's response as deliberate or manipulative.

## Working with parents

You may hear from parents whose children respond regularly at child care due to the consistency of the child care environment, but are irregular at home. This is a great opportunity to share your knowledge of temperament with them so that you can work together to meet this child's needs. Be sensitive when sharing information with parents who are frustrated by their child's irregularity, as it may seem to reflect on their parenting abilities.

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