



## Thriving with Your Spirited Child 2006 Impact Report

### **Situation**

Raising a child is a challenge. Often parents, are uncertain about how to “do the right things” in raising their children. Parent educators recognized the challenges parents were facing raising “spirited children” while teaching a variety of parenting education classes. These adults working with Spirited Children often think they have WILD, OUT OF CONTROL children. They feel isolated, frustrated and angry. Often what are really going on is the adults and the children have inadequate tools to deal with the child’s temperament. “Thriving with Your Spirited Child” is a new Extension curriculum based on the work of temperament theorists/educators like Stella Chess and Thomas Alexander, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, Linda Bud, and Stanley Turecki.

Spirited Children are those who either are “**more**” intense, sensitive, perceptive, active, persistent or moody than their peers or siblings.

### **Response**

In 2006, 26 parents/caregivers learned techniques to more successfully thrive with children who have challenging temperaments, as reported by participants.

Participants in “Thriving with Your Spirited Child” workshops gained greater understanding of nine temperament traits, are able to identify positive (instead of negative) labels for these temperaments and are able to apply effective strategies for positively influencing Spirited Children.

### **Outcomes**

Participants indicated they were planning to use the following strategies with their spirited child(ren):

*Be Consistent/Firm:* *Persistent* kids benefit from consistent/firm guidelines. Establish clear rules and expectations for your family.

*Prepare for Changes/Slow Down:* Regardless of the temperament characteristic that is most challenging to us, it is important to prepare our child for change. This often means that we must slow down for a smooth transition.

*Be Sure Child Gets Enough Sleep:* No one functions at their best when they’re tired – adult or child, spirited or not. But dealing with a tired spirited child is likely to escalate their “more” behaviors. The best defense is offense in this case. Take a break, let them catch up; insist on their getting enough sleep. Dealing with their intensity, persistence, etc. will be much easier when they are well rested.

*Watch for triggers:* Watch for environmental cues (triggers) that can initiate or escalate the child's strong responses. As you notice triggers try new strategies or use strategies that work, to help slow down the unwanted emotional outbreak. The goal is to help the child rely on these learned strategies to calm themselves rather than become out of control with their strong feelings. Intervene early.

*Teach Calming Techniques:* When a child's stress hormones signal extreme caution or intensity, adults need to help children calm these strong feelings. Assisting the child to find a quiet place to rest and relax. The goal is to teach children how to use calming techniques like quiet rooms, dim lights, deep breathing, or back rubs.

One Oconto Falls parent wrote, *"I am perhaps more 'spirited' than my son. Maybe that's where some of our situations arose from".*

Contact

Donna Doll-Yogerst

Professor & Family Living Agent

Oconto County UW-Extension

301 Washington St., Oconto WI 54153-1699

920-834-6845

[donna.doll-yogerst@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:donna.doll-yogerst@ces.uwex.edu)