



# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## Temperament Traits Parent Resource Packet

### Inside. . . Parent Resources for the “More” Child:

Intense  
Persistent  
Perceptiveness  
First Reaction Withdrawal  
Active  
Sensitive  
Ability to Adapt  
Rhythm  
Mood

### Resources:

The Preventive Ounce. <http://www.preventiveoz.org>

Budd, Linda, S. Ph.D *Living with the Active Alert Child: Ground Breaking Strategies for Parents*. Parenting Press revised, 1993

Carey, William, M.D., *Understanding your Child's Temperament*. New York; Macmillian, 1997

Chess, Stella, M.D., Thomas, Alexander, M.D. *Know Your Child*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1987. (Out of Print; check your library.)

Kurcinka, Mary Sheedy. *Raising Your Spirited Child, a Guide for Parents Whose Child is More: Intense – Sensitive – Perceptive – Persistent – Energetic*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

Kurcinka, Mary Sheedy. *Raising Your Spirited Child Workbook*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998.

Kurcinka, Mary Sheedy, “Raising your Spirited Child: Focusing on Children’s Strengths,” Family Information Services, Marketing and Outreach, page 23, 1995.

Neville, Helen and Clark Johnson, Diane. *Temperament Tools – Working with your Child's Inborn Traits*. Washington; Parenting Press, Inc., 1998

Turecki, Stanley, M.D., *The Difficult Child*. New York; Bantam Books, Second Revised Edition, 2000

UW-Extension and Minnesota Cooperative Extension, Positive Parenting of Teens, Perception section

Management Techniques for Parenting Children with Difficult Traits.  
<http://www.elainegibson.net/parenting/index.html>





# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## **Intense Strength of Emotional Reaction**

**What traits does an intense child exhibit?** Intensity is the driving force behind your spirited child's strong reactions. Most kids may simply whimper when they're hungry or hurt, but spirited children are likely to scream. As a parent of a spirited child, you need to know that intense children react with more energy of excitement or pain, not because they want to embarrass you, but because their bodies physiologically react more than those of other children. Or, as University of Minnesota professor Megan Gunnar, Ph.D., says, "Spirited kids experience more physical stress; they aren't just doing it to make you stressed. When spirited kids experience an emotion, their bodies surge with hormones, which tell the brain to be on alert for 'fight or flight.' Intense people do not choose to produce more stress hormones. Their bodies automatically do it."

There are subtle, nonverbal cues that parents and caregivers can learn to pick up. These cues can inform you that your child/youth's level of intensity is rising. By learning to identify these cues early on, you can take preventive actions before your child becomes overwhelmed and has a full-blown meltdown.

What behavior do you see before your child loses it?

gets louder	becomes sarcastic	becomes quiet	dives in heels
becomes bossy	swears	clings	
becomes sassy	whines	indecisive	
gets grumpy	becomes wild	flops on floor	

As you catch the cues that lead to rising intensity, describe or tell your child/youth what you see. The goal is to teach them to catch their own growing intensity and rely on their inner control to calm themselves rather than our external control.

### **What is positive about this temperament?**

Intense children/youth are enthusiastic, they do not hide their emotions – rather they wear them on their faces. You will know how he feels. Intense children/youth are sensitive and expressive. They can be very dramatic. They feel passionate about things that are important to them. They can channel their intensity into their work/hobbies/sports.

### **What labels need to be avoided?**

Loud, explosive, impatient, picky, indecisive, argumentative, demanding, wild

### **What can I say or do?**

1. Intervene early, remember, you can't teach children/youth new words or skills when they are reacting intensely or losing control. If they react intensely, you need to wait until they have calmed down and the incident has passed. Then you can point out to them what you saw and how they might handle it differently if it happens again. Spirited children/youth need soothing or calming activities to help them reduce their intensity and regain control (like baths, quiet time or read stories).





## Thriving with Your Spirited Child

2. Help them recognize their intensity is rising by encouraging them to listen to their body. Ask them how they are feeling, use images like: Is the engine racing? Is the earthquake ready to erupt? Are your muscles getting tight?
3. Encourage regular exercise; this is effective in managing intensity in parents and children/youth. Allow them to “blow off steam.” To help them manage their intensity, ask them if they need exercise or a break?
4. Try offering repetitive motion (especially of the jaw) activities:
  - Young children – sucking (bottle, pacifier, thumb), swinging, rocking, riding a rocking horse, riding in a baby carrier.
  - Older children and youth – drinking from a straw, chewing gum, talking to a friend, swinging, rocking, jumping rope, riding a bike, going for a walk.
5. Teach them deep breathing techniques. Intense children/youth tend to hyperventilate or hold their breath when intensity rises, so teach them to use deep breathing (blow bubbles, pretend to blow out candles on birthday cake, count to ten). To help them manage their intensity, ask them to breathe with you, or if they need to breathe deeply.
6. Use humor - not sarcasm or ridicule. Try doing the unexpected (silly response, use a different voice, use funny mask or puppet).
7. Change the scene – distract them and/or change the activity. The key to changing the scene is to momentarily distract and disconnect from the source of intensity. Encourage sensory activities to diffuse intense feelings for children try play-doh or silly putty, infant massage, dim lights in the room, sensory table or bucket filled with water, sand, salt, oatmeal, cornmeal, reading, dress up, or water play (bath, play in sink, paint with water, cool, wet washcloth, play in wading pool). De-intensifying activities for could include back scratches or massage, listening to favorite soothing music, or reading.
8. Provide cooling off time/space – teach them ways to calm down. This is not a punishment; the purpose is to regain control. Choose a quiet, comfortable spot. Teach them that time-out is an opportunity to pull out of the action to rest and relax, rather than a punishment to endure so they can feel comfortable taking a break.

*“Intensity is the driving force behind the strong reactions of the spirited child. It is the invisible punch that makes every response of the spirited child immediate and strong. Managed well, intensity allows spirited children a depth and delight of emotion rarely experienced by others. Its potential to create as well as to wreak havoc, however, makes it one of the most challenging temperamental traits to learn to manage.” - Mary Shеды-Kurcinka*

Summarized by Faden Fulleylove-Krause, Professor  
and Calumet County Family Living Educator, 4/2002





# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## **Persistent**

### **Determination to Achieve Goals**

**What traits does a persistent child exhibit?** The persistent/controlling child/youth is determined and strong willed. They never give up. They push where other kids don't push. They demand more than other kids. It is hard to ignore or distract them. They are ready for battle in every situation. They have a high need for control.

According to Kurcinka, in her book Raising your Spirited Child, "Persistence is the temperamental trait that plays a major role in power struggles. Spirited kids need, want and seek power (pg. 93)." Budd, in her book Living with the Active Alert Child, draws a similar conclusion about the 'active alert' child. "The active alert child appears to manipulate his playmates – even boss them around. It's because he doesn't know he has no "right" to control others. Active alerts often have such creative play ideas that peers willingly follow along, even if it means they will surely be dominated (pg. 22)."

### **What is positive about this temperament?**

Actually, persistence is a very admirable trait. The ability to say no, achieve goals, and work to solve problems are needed skills to be successful. Many famous leaders exhibit persistence and control. Our job as parents is to encourage a child's persistence while simultaneously helping them learn how to respect others and the world around them.

### **What labels need to be avoided?**

Stubborn, want your own way, bossy, bull-headed, dominating, inflexible

### **What can I do or say?**

1. Recognize that the child/youth doesn't argue or say no just to irritate us.
2. Focus on common interests rather than individual positions. Persistent kids get upset when someone tells them no and when they feel their interests are not being listened to.
3. Seek understanding of your child/youth's perspective, first, by truly listening. Find out what is most important for the child – their interest.
4. Go for win-win when exploring solutions. Look for the yes in situations.
5. Establish clear rules and expectations for your family. Remember, some rules are negotiable and some are not. Spirited kids need limits.
6. Make rules clear and precise
7. Be consistent.
8. Use a firm voice.
9. Don't be afraid to stop them – they will test you to be sure the limits stand firm – be clear that when they break the rules the consequences will be enforced.



## Thriving with Your Spirited Child

10. Practice PIECE (negotiating a solution).
  - a. Position – What does each person want?
  - b. Interests – Why does each person want this
  - c. Expectations/rules – What are the rules or expectations
  - d. Consensus – What potential solutions would meet the interests of everyone involved?
  - e. Evaluate – Take a look at how it's going and make changes as appropriate.

Summarized by Nan Baumgartner, Associate Professor  
and Fond du Lac County Family Living Educator, 4/2002



# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## **Perceptiveness Insights and Understanding**

**What traits does a perceptive child exhibit?** Spirited children/youth are often perceptive. Their senses are keen, drawing in every aspect of the stimulation around them. It is this ability to perceive that gives them an understanding and insight beyond their years. It is the basis of a sharp sense of humor and creative thought.

Problems occur for the perceptive child when they are barraged with information from their senses and are unable to sort it out. It is as though they are incapable of deciding which is the most important message or where the focus should be. When this occurs, they become distracted, confused, and unable to concentrate on the task at hand or the instruction they have just been given by their parent or teacher. It appears as though they are not listening. It is our job to help kids like this understand their perceptiveness and to teach them techniques for distinguishing the most important messages in their lives. It's important to remember that perceptive kids really are trying to listen – the trouble is they are listening to everything. It is our job to help them identify the most important messages by slowing down. Perceptive children do not want to miss out on anything!

### **What is positive about this temperament?**

Because of their keen senses, they hear what others do not hear. They see/feel what others do not observe. They are creative and imaginative. They always have an idea. They are thorough, methodical, and observant. They catch all the details. They can solve problems. To be perceptive is a special gift.

### **What labels need to be avoided?**

Flaky, distracted, can't focus, airhead, slow, loses things, confused

### **What can I say or do?**

1. Change the environment to eliminate or reduce distracting stimulation. What can you move, turn off, or put away that will help your child focus on the most important information? Turn off TV, close the blinds, put away toys, ask the teacher to move child to the front of class, do homework in a room without toys/TV/phone or other distractions. Provide quiet places to work and play.
2. Make eye contact – get their total attention. Make sure your child/youth sees you and is looking at you when you give instructions. They hear best when they can see what they are hearing. Have the child/youth repeat back the direction so that you know it has been heard and understood. You may also want to touch them to ensure you are being heard.
3. Keep instructions simple. Limit the number of directions to one or two steps at a time. Limit the number of words you use. Please and okay get you into trouble by changing a directive into a question (i.e., "It's time for bed," "It's time for bed, okay?"). Use words that are easy to understand.





## Thriving with Your Spirited Child

4. Give them enough time to finish the tasks. Assist them in managing their time.
5. Tell them what they can do, not what they can't. They will think about what you didn't tell them they couldn't do and then do it ("You told us not to eat in the living room, not the family room"). They are much more receptive to hearing what they can do, than what they can't.

Examples:

Don't Directions	Can Do Directions
Don't be so noisy	Use a whisper voice
Don't put your feet on the chair	Feet on the floor
Don't go in the street	Stay in the yard
Don't play with your food	Use your spoon for your potatoes
Don't tease your dog, cat, brother, sister	Treat your dog, cat, brother, sister with kindness

6. Use images and actions as well as words to communicate your message. Perceptive kids are often visual learners. Techniques to help your child "hear" you (visual cues) include: point, use a timer, chart or list, write a note, touch their shoulder, flickering light, whisper or sing the message, tie words to actions (i.e., hop on one foot while picking up toys).

Summarized by Faden Fulleylove-Krause, Professor and Calumet County Family Living Educator, 4/2002





# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## **First Reaction-Withdrawal Reactions to New Experiences and Things**

### **What traits does a child exhibit whose initial reaction to a situation is withdrawal?**

Every child responds to "new" differently. A great deal can be discovered about the temperament of a child by watching them in new situations.

The child whose initial reaction is withdrawal will come to see the world as a difficult place. These children/youth have a temperament trait that makes them cautious and reserved. They need time to get used to new things. Their usual first reaction is to withdraw from or avoid new situations or say "no." Often they have trouble adapting to changes. Parents may find this behavior hard to tolerate and are embarrassed by their responses. This temperament trait has nothing to do with being male or female. If the child demonstrating initial withdrawal is a girl, our culture is more tolerant. When a boy demonstrates initial withdrawal, he is often subjected to ridicule for being a sissy, coward, or a baby. This is unfortunate because there is nothing wrong with being cautious. If given a chance to get used to things gradually, to adapt at a slower rate than the average person, these children/youth will accept new things and adapt to changes. If they are forced beyond their comfort zone, they will be stressed emotionally and become even more resistive.

### **What is positive about this temperament?**

The child/youth demonstrating initial withdrawal is cautious; they will investigate thoroughly before jumping into any activity. They are not likely to "run off" in public. They use care in all that they undertake. They are skeptical and can uncover a con. They often prefer to stay home.

### **What labels need to be avoided?**

Anxious, irrational, manipulative, resistant, stubborn, whiney, unsocial

### **What can I say or do?**

1. Recognize the temperament trait differences and prepare them for transitions. Lovingly tell them, "You need time to get used to this new situation. In a few (minutes/days) you'll be comfortable with it."
2. Help your child/youth understand and express their feelings, acknowledge these feelings and offer your support. Use images to describe these feelings, "you feel like a can of soda ready to explode or a race engine wound/revved up." You can ask youth to rate their feelings on a 10-point scale. Encourage them to ask for what they need to feel comfortable.
3. Give them time and patience to get used to new things. Visit new places ahead of time, or arrive early so they can gradually adjust. Younger children may need to be carried to feel safe. Reassure them by saying, "This is all new and unusual. Let's sit over here and spend some time looking around before we go into the museum (or what ever is new)." Then talk about everything they are seeing and smelling and hearing and wait for them to make the next move. This strategy works with





## Thriving with Your Spirited Child

- youth too when they encounter new situations like school activities or job environments. This strategy needs to be repeated with each new situation.
4. Realize that rules and rituals are relaxing (once they are familiar) for these children/youth. Rules, rituals, and traditions help the child/youth know what happens next. Life is predictable with fewer surprises. The younger child may like the same bowl/cup at mealtime or get a story at bedtime. Older children/youth may like the same bathroom procedures in the morning and evening.
  5. Parents need to remain close to them until they are comfortable in new surroundings. Allow them the time and the protection they need without forcing them to participate too soon.
  6. Children, whose initial reaction to new situations is withdrawal, don't like surprises and need advance warning before things change. Let them bring security items. As they get older, they will learn coping skills and adapt to the pressure demands of society, but when they are small, they need our help, understanding, and patience.
  7. Remind your child/youth of past successes. Allow them a second chance. Provide opportunities to practice adjusting. Reassure and encourage youth/children that they will handle the new situation successfully.
  8. Teach them calming techniques, like taking deep breaths or thinking calming thoughts.

Summarized by Faden Fulleylove-Krause, Professor  
and Calumet County Family Living Educator, 4/2002





# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## Active Energetic Activity/Energy Needs

**What traits does an energetic/active child exhibit?** Sometimes referred to as energy, how active is your child/youth? Very active, always into things, makes you tired, gets wild or "revved up", loses control, hates confinement, running, climbing, pacing, fidgeting, taking things apart. Active children are always moving, have many interests, and are always busy.

Budd, in her book Living with the Active Alert Child, identifies an active alert child as a child for whom you put on your running shoes when she was born and you have worn out several pairs watching them grow, or you can't keep the toilet paper on the roll in your house because your child constantly unravels it. " If you have a child some call active, difficult, obstreperous - a child who some see as a problem, a child/youth who takes all your energy during the course of the day and then demands more at bedtime. Or a child/youth who gives you a roller coaster ride with high points of incredible joy and low points of anger and frustration (pg 5)." You may have an active alert child.

An active child/youth gets irritable if there hasn't been time for exercise, fidgets and won't like being restrained in the car seat, stroller or high chair, loves to climb, frequently spills things or falls out of their chair at meals or is constantly out of their chair, always into things, makes you tired, gets wild or "revved up", loses control, and hates to be confined.

### What is positive about this temperament?

Energetic, moves to feel good, not passive, has many interests, large capacity for *doing*.

### What labels need to be avoided?

Over stimulated, wild, impulsive, over excited, out of control

### What can I do or say?

1. Put your child's feeling/actions into words:
  - a. "You accomplished many things."
  - b. "You have energy to be a great athlete/dancer."
  - c. "You're overexcited."
  - d. "I like your energy."
  - e. "Sitting still too long is hard for you."
  - f. "Being able to move is important to you."
  - g. "I think you are getting too revved up."
  - h. "You are beginning to lose control."
2. Intervene early, provide quiet distraction, provide cooling off space, before a family holiday, take the child outdoors to play ball, ride a bike, etc. (more likely to sit still at dinner), provide space for blowing off steam, don't confine, redirect to safe alternatives.
3. Recognize the difference, plan kinesthetic activities, and create a safe environment. As child/youth ages, provide safe risks, such as cheerleading, sports, extra curricular activities.

Summarized by Donna Doll-Yogerst, Professor  
and Oconto County Family Living Educator, 4/2002





# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## **Sensitive Sensory Reaction**

**What traits does a sensitive child exhibit?** The sensitive child/youth is keenly aware of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, textures and emotions. They feel things others do not because they miss nothing. They are alert to all sensations. This extreme sensitivity is also sometimes referred to as having a low sensory threshold.

According to Kurcinka, in her book Raising your Spirited Child, “problems occur for sensitive children when they are overwhelmed by stimulation and emotional stress around them. It can happen easily because within sensitive children emotions and sensations are collected and concentrated. They are soaked up rather than diffused (pg. 116).” Budd, in her book Living with the Active Alert Child, indicates the same in slightly different words. She says, “they (active alert children) are unable to stop watching and block out the world, they are constantly stimulated, sometimes, bombarded – by all they take in. They are nonscreeners (pg. 17).”

### **What is positive about this temperament?**

Keep in mind that the world needs individuals who are tenderhearted, loving, selective and discerning. Sensitive/alert children make great debaters and arbitrators because they use all they see and know about the world. They are sensitive to feelings and care about other people. They can draw upon a rich array of sensations.

### **What labels need to be avoided?**

Picky, fussy, difficult to please, finicky, particular

### **What can I say or do?**

1. Recognize that the child/youth is really being bothered and not just being contrary.
2. Acknowledge the child/youth’s perceptions as valid for him or her. Name the sensations and affirm the feelings. Say, “I know this tastes funny to you.” “I know the smell in there really bothers you.” Give them words to describe the sensations and emotions they experience.
3. Give the child/youth permission to make themselves comfortable.
4. Identify your child/youth’s triggers, then eliminate or avoid them, if possible. What smells, tastes, touch, sounds, sights, emotions trigger a response in your child/youth? Make a list of triggers and brainstorm ways to eliminate or avoid them.
5. Help the child/youth recognize when they are getting over stimulated and to ask for help stopping or reducing the stimulation. Teach them it is okay to take a break.
6. Avoid over stimulation whenever possible – control the amount of TV, radio and noisy toys.



# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## Ability to Adapt Adapt to Changes and Transitions

**What traits does a child who has the ability to adapt exhibit?** The ability to adapt in a child/youth plays out in how quickly they are able to get comfortable with or adapt to a change in their environment. It is also referenced as the degree of difficulty a child/youth has with making transitions.

According to Kurcinka, in her book Raising your Spirited Child, “a transition is a change or passage from one place, action, mood, topic or thing to another. Spirited children adapt slowly to transitions. To shift gears, to pass from one activity, place or topic to another requires a wrenching, grinding effort on their part (pg. 137).” Budd, in her book, Living with the Active Alert Child, refers to this trait in the active alert child as being fearful. “Active alerts are unable to make transitions and are often fearful in new situations. To the active alert child, confronting such an onslaught of new stimuli means uncertainty about how much control he will have in his new environment with new adults and peers (pg. 23).”

### What is positive about this temperament?

Being cautious and checking things out before acting isn't all bad – in fact it can help avoid disastrous results. These individuals can be highly organized and thrive on routine

### What labels need to be avoided?

Inflexible, not willing to try new things, baby, sissy, coward, scaredy cat

### What can I say or do?

1. Remember, the child/youth is not intentionally misbehaving or trying to make their parents look bad in public – they truly find dealing with change challenging.
2. Give them words to express their feelings – “you are upset because you were surprised,” or “Change is difficult for you, but you can change and do all of the time – remember last week when. . .” or “You need to know what to expect.”
3. Establish routines to provide a sense of control.
4. Allow enough time to make the transition.
5. If the transition is predictable, prepare your child/youth for the change.
  - a. Forewarn – give a visual picture of the future.
  - b. Adjust – read cues, acknowledge feelings and solve problem together.
  - c. Refocus – help the child shift focus to the next activity – use your child's imagination to help.
  - d. Move through the transition – stay calm and cool yourself.
6. If the change is unpredictable, work through it to bring down the intensity and figure out what will calm your child afterward
7. Identify what transitions are “trigger points” for your child – point them out to your child and gradually work toward having your child recognize them as well and cope with them.





# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## Rhythm

### Predictability of Bodily Function

**What traits does a rhythmic child exhibit?** Rhythm/regularity concerns physiological functions. How predictable is the child in her patterns of sleep, appetite and bowel habits. They may be regular in one body function, but not another. The rhythm controversy ranges from regular to irregular. Some children need to eat, sleep and eliminate at very specific times. Some fall asleep at a predictable time each day whereas for others, naps and bowel movements occur irregularly, they may have eating days and non-eating days, or is not always tired at bedtime. These children/youth can have challenges with routines, waking at night, or moods that change suddenly.

According to Carey in his book, Understanding Your Child's Temperament, "as children grow older, they become better at finding their own ways of accommodating life's irregularities. The more parents accept this trait in the early years and help their children expect occasional bumps in their well-ordered lives, the more these children will be able to handle unpredictable events with flexibility in later years" (pg 64). Tureki indicates a lack of predictability in two key areas: appetite and sleep, which can bewilder parents. "It is extremely difficult to deal with a child/youth who isn't hungry and sleepy about the same time each day. Parents and children involved in conflicts over sleep and meals usually end up caught in a vicious cycle of escalating demands and excessive punishment. The temperament issue is irregularity, (rhythm) and the key is to separate sleep from sleep time, mealtime from eating time" (pg 162-3).

### What is positive about this temperament?

Children with this temperament are flexible, full of surprises, will be great at jobs with crazy hours.

### What labels need to be avoided?

Uncooperative, moody, a loner, inconsistent

### What can I say or do?

1. Recognize that rhythm/regularity may not be the same in each bodily function.
2. Put your child/youth's feelings into words such as: you are flexible, you can wait if meal time is late, you can be very spontaneous, you will make a great traveler. You're always hungry at mealtimes, having food available at all times is important to you, choices are important to you, sometimes it is hard to fall asleep.
3. Provide routine and a schedule that is consistent so they can adapt gradually.
4. Recognize that your child/youth may not be ready to eat or sleep. Invite them to join the family to talk even if they are not hungry. Let them know they can lie quietly and rest even if they are not ready to go to sleep. Teach them to make their own nutritious snacks. Let them know that routines may help. Teach the social norms of mealtimes, bedtime, while providing flexibility. Teach self-help skills. Establish routines for meal times and bedtime. When a child/youth refuses to eat: recognize different styles, teach nutrition, teach simple food preparation, don't close the kitchen, and plan meals as family rituals. Remember to "wait it out." Time is on your side.

Summarized by Donna Doll-Yogerst, Professor  
and OcontoCounty Family Living Educator, 4/2002





# Thriving with Your Spirited Child

## Mood

### Overall Disposition

**What traits does a moody child exhibit?** Parents/caregivers realize that one baby is happier than the others at birth. A person with a positive mood reacts to things in a positive spirit. Their first reaction is positive. A child with a negative mood responds with a negative first reaction. Mood is the overall disposition; related to specific pattern of brain activity and analytical abilities.

Neville and Clark in their book, Temperament Tools, Working with Your Child's Inborn Traits share, "Mood also seems to reflect how well the child's environment fits him. For example, a cautious child who is repeatedly pushed too hard and fast into new experiences will be unhappy (pg 19)." A "good fit" between your child/youth and his environment is very important.

Turecki, in his book The Difficult Child reminds us, "In the case of mood, the label is not for the child but rather for you (parent). It helps you not to feel angry with a child who always sees the glass as half empty even in a situation that would make most children happy. To yourself, you would say, 'This is the way he is; he can't help it' (pg 154)."

### What is positive about this temperament?

Child makes good suggestions, is a good evaluator, thinks deeply and analytically.

### What labels need to be avoided?

Negative, cranky, complainer, whiner, never satisfied, sulks, gripes, over-analyzes, unhappy.

### What can I say or do?

1. Accept the child/youth as they are, we cannot change them, but we can try to enhance desirable traits and subdue the less than desirable traits.
2. Don't tell the child to cheer up as their negative mood usually increases. If you try to change the child, he feels unloved.
3. Don't give attention to the negativism, it is likely to increase. Listen to complaints up to a point. Use active listening and clarify that you really understand. Knowing that he was heard helps dissipate the mood.
4. Change the topic; ask him to think up one thing that was good or he enjoyed about a situation. They may do so, or change the topic to something else he wants to talk about.
5. Focus on the enjoyable traits; negativity is only part of this child's temperament. Remember all the other things you really like about this child.
6. Tell yourself this is the way the child/youth is; they can't help it. It is NOT a personal attack on your ideas or on you.
7. Make sure the child/youth is getting enough sleep.
8. Teach the social graces, "thank you", "that is nice", "I appreciate your help", etc.
9. Break situations into parts to avoid one general statement.
10. Appreciate their suggestions.
11. Give them time to adjust or get on with life.
12. Slow down; avoid too many transitions, too much stimulation or too many no's.
13. Don't say anything; recognize you cannot make things better for this child. Keep your reactions neutral.

Summarized by Donna Doll-Yogerst, Professor  
and Oconto County Family Living Educator, 4/2002

