Children develop difficult behaviors for different reasons, and all children display difficult behaviors at various times in their lives. However, once these difficult behaviors become more regular, caregivers’ relationships with their children can become frustrating, and family life becomes stressful. Once these negative cycles begin, ending them may require making a commitment to adjusting caregiving strategies.

**Children’s Temperament**

Children (and caregivers) are born with temperaments – the ways we adapt, regulate emotions, and interact with the world around us. There are 8 basic areas of temperament:

- **Activity Level**
- **Response to New Situations/People**
- **Adjustment to Change**
- **Intensity of Responses (Positive or Negative)**
- **Mood and Pleasantness**
- **Attention Span**
- **Distractibility**
- **How Much Sensory Stimulation Needed for Response**

**How different situations and child temperament produce different (and difficult) behaviors**

- People - familiar? strangers? crowds?
- Situation - structured? demanding? loud? chaotic?
- Emotional - scary? frustrating? angry?
- Shy, timid, fearful of new things
- Sensitive to sound, activity level
- Emotionally reactive
- Intense reactions that seem too big for the situation
- Quick changes in mood and trouble calming
- Fussy, angry, difficult behaviors
Understanding Children’s Difficult Behaviors

How difficult behaviors affect families

Sometimes parents and children get into cycles of negative behaviors and emotions. When they occur, they are stressful for caregivers and children. Learning new ways of reacting to negative behavior can break the cycle and reduce stress.

Developing Skills and Self-Regulation

Children learn all skills within relationships. Parent’s help their children learn to eat, get dressed, make their beds, ride a bike, etc.

Children need the exact same help learning to regulate their emotions and behaviors.