



## Difficult Personality Traits, part 2 of 5—

# The Self-Absorbed Child

by Sandy Friesen, Managing Editor, Christian School Services

Jen was the sweetest, most compliant child I'd ever met. If I said "Stand," she'd stand. If I said "Sit," she'd sit. She never questioned, argued, or even offered an opinion. She wore whatever her parents gave her to wear, ate whatever was placed before her, and spent countless hours in solitude. A blessing? Probably not.

Dr. Greenspan, author of *The Challenging Child*, has researched and grouped personality traits that have historically been labeled "difficult" into the following five categories:

- *Highly sensitive*
- *Self-absorbed*
- *Defiant*
- *Active-aggressive*
- *Inattentive*

Jen would probably be considered a *self-absorbed* child. This personality type may be described as a thinker, independent, loner, easy, and adaptable. In reality, they may be withdrawn, unmotivated, uncommunicative, unresponsive, passive, and uninvolved. These children do not disturb our world, so we tend to leave them alone, especially as infants. The problem is that it takes a great deal of stimuli or interaction for these children to come out of their worlds. Sometimes we choose to leave them there. This oversight doesn't usually represent problems until these children need to make their own way in the world.

If left to withdraw, they may not

develop social skills, may not learn to meet life's challenges, may not be able to express themselves adequately, and may not be able to get involved in the process of living.

Self-absorbed people explain that it takes too much effort to respond, that it is easier to withdraw, and that they tend to feel lonely and detached.

What patterns do parents and sponsors tend to take with these children?

1. *Leave them alone, assuming that they're happier that way.*
2. *Leave them alone, then overcompensate and over-stimulate.*



3. *Tend to be critical and use condemnation, hoping to evoke a reaction that will motivate the child to respond.*

4. *Give up and initiate no contact.*

## How to Help

What are some practices that can help this child?

### 1. The Focus and Engage Approach

Dr. Greenspan describes this as gently wooing and teaching the child to enjoy you and themselves.

### 2. The Two-Way Communication

This involves expecting the child to interact by generating emotional energy through logical conversation. You can ask questions or opinions and wait for or elicit their responses.

### 3. Express Emotional Ideas and Thinking

These children don't seem to experience the emotional intensity, or at least the desire to express it, like many of us do. Help them develop an emotional vocabulary. For example:

**Teacher:** How do you feel about playing this game?

**Child:** I don't know.

**Teacher :** Do you feel excited, scared, willing, or hesitant?

**Child:** A little excited, a little scared.

**Teacher :** What does excited feel like?

**Child:** Like happy or funny.

**Teacher :** What does scared feel like?

**Child:** Sad, my palms are hot.

**Teacher :** Sometimes I feel those feelings when I try something new. What do you think I should do when I feel that way?

**Child:** Try.

**Teacher :** That's a good idea. Sometimes I pray if I'm really scared. Sometimes I laugh if I'm

excited. What would you like to do?

**Child:** Try.

#### **4. Opportunities of Involvement**

Give opportunities for involvement, then help the child dive in. Partner with him. Sometimes tactual interaction helps, which could include a gentle hug, physical activities, or music.

The goals are:

1. *To bring him out of his private world.*

2. *To help him develop meaningful relationships.*

3. *To help him know himself and express himself to others.*

God did not intend for each of us to be exactly alike. The goal is not to make these children into extroverts. The hope is that these children will see their value in the

Kingdom of God, will love God, and will reach out to others and love and relate to them while loving and appreciating themselves.

These children need our help to gain these skills. Not only do we need to model involvement behaviors for them, but we also need to find ways to draw them out.

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom.

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#### **Questions For Further Study—**

1. What misconceptions are often made concerning the self-absorbed child?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are some things you can do to draw the self-absorbed child out of his self-absorbtion?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the most important thing you and your workers can do in ministering to any child?