



Temper the Temperaments!

What is a human being?

Understanding the human being leads to more questions, more developments, more possibilities....like a pattern or puzzle waiting to be linked together.

The four temperaments were first described by Hippocrates and later by the Greek physician Galen in the second century AD.

Temperament, from the Latin verb *ētemperare* means to mix, to combine, to blend. The idea that the physical body could have an influence on the soul was generally accepted for over 2000 years until the 19th century.

The original Greek texts on the humors are thought to have been lost in the great library fire in Alexandria, Egypt, in 391 A.D. Hundreds of years later, when the Crusades ended, previously unavailable Arabic translations were brought to Europe.

Rudolf Steiner spoke about the role of the temperaments in 1919 to teachers of the first Waldorf School. He described how teachers who understood the temperaments could develop a heightened sensitivity to children's behavior. Steiner also stressed that each person is influenced by all four temperaments and that the dominant temperament should be seen as a tendency toward certain behavior rather than as a conclusion. In this view, causes for behavior are found both within the child and without. He emphasized the importance of both the environment and the teaching methodology for child development.

Our temperaments are expressed by psychological and physical characteristics which fall into four broad groups: Choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic and sanguine. I will only attempt to outline some of the main traits of each in this circle I have here.....

Cholerics are solidly built, firm and muscular people. They often have broad shoulders, short necks and strong chests. They look determined and act slightly superior to others, whether they intend to or not. They speak with loud, strong commanding tone of voice. They are in control.

Choler....blood system relates to circulation...needs vigorous exercise.

Strong leadership qualities, strong step, heels pounding into the floor, sense of purpose, motivated by the world around them, eager to change and direct events.

They relate to the element of Fire as they move quickly and sometimes burn things in their way. They can have explosive tempers when they are too dominated by their primary temperament and can intimidate or bully those around them who are less courageous. They have something to say about everything.

Courage is their strong point and they often initiate projects which then become reality and benefit great numbers of people. Cholerics who transform their power of will into deed can move mountains other people are content to just talk about.

It is difficult for the choleric to accept criticism or blame. A choleric who thinks about a situation and sees that they really are at fault will try to sort it out. This will not happen in the heat of an action but afterwards. It is painful for a choleric to feel that they have done something wrong or harmful for they just want to be appreciated and respected by other people. They are fighters for humanity and lovers of freedom. Their aims are high and the standards they set for themselves and others are high. They like to see themselves as indispensable.

Transformed Cholerics become sensitive to those around them. They begin to find the power of speech as healing through tactfulness. They take their initiative into the realm of the will and seek to improve upon the world. They become soft and learn kindness. Magnanimity and generosity are two virtues of Cholerics which can be evoked.

Respect is the key word for Cholerics both in giving and receiving it. As a teacher I know I have the choleric child in check if I garner their respect. That is what they need and look for. If I don't have their respect, I might as well put them in front of a computer. If they have acted inappropriately, I will rarely have them face immediate consequences. Their denial is just too strong. Once their tempers have cooled, kind and soft words generating the respect I have

for them often allows them to admit to making a mistake or needing to apologize to another child or what have you. Teaching is rarely dull with Choleric in your class!

To reiterate...the choleric should be able to develop esteem and respect for the accomplishments of others.

Melancholics walk with the burden of people beyond their years. Even children display this tendency. Usually lean, they walk slowly and uncertainly, with his head bent towards the earth, shoulders and face lowered. They give the impression of being within their thoughts.

The melancholic is uncertain in their body, often feeling every ache and pain.

They are very sensitive to the fabric and feel of their clothes and the feeling against the body. They might complain of feeling unwell and may lack a certain vitality. With melancholics there is an acute awareness of physical ailments and a willingness to describe them in detail to all who will listen.

Full of problems and everything will go wrong anyway so why not wait to face them?

Bound up with themselves, melancholics might not pay much attention to others. They are serious, quiet, and reflective. They live deeply into the past and in their memories, hanging onto details. They imagine that they carry a greater burden of life than other people and they are resigned to it. They have a tendency to look for obstacles in their way. All kinds of problems could occur, so they fear going far from home, potentially avoiding unfamiliar experiences because each holds potential dangers.

They take themselves so seriously that they may have a hard time laughing at themselves. Making decisions might be painful. Often they sigh deeply and respond succinctly.

Melancholics are the class perfectionists, meticulous workers and expect their work to be flawless. They are visionaries. When a melancholic makes a mistake however, it often confirms their sense of being a failure and they they might even destroy their work. They are

capable of deep pondering and meticulous research and leave no stone unturned.

It might be difficult for a melancholic to make friends. They usually prefer the company of just one or two friends whom they feel that they can trust.

Forgiveness is the key to transforming the melancholic. They need to be able to forgive themselves and the anger they direct towards themselves first. Then they can forgive others for their transgressions. Melancholics can be kind and gentle. We must show the child how people do suffer as well. They must be able to engage with certain heartfelt sympathy.

They need to be put in a position of responsibility, to help those less fortunate, so that the compassion in them can be evoked and put to an altruistic use in the world. When melancholics find themselves in the service of others, love enters into the experience, and they can find true appreciation for others. The transformed melancholic is a great gift to humanity.

Phlegmatics typically have a roundness and heaviness to their bodies. They move slowly and deliberately, living in the fluid element of water. They appear quite calm and composed and have a generally unruffled demeanor. They can speak in an even, steady monotone voice on and on and on without realizing that other people are disinterested. They walk in an unhurried stride.

They love the comforts of life. They love routine and habit, they live and grow strong as creatures of habit. They love to eat the same thing at the same time everyday and wonder why anyone would want something different. They can be very loyal to their favorite foods. Food is very important to them. Their homes need to be simple and comfortable.

The phlegmatic usually has a regular rhythm of waking and sleeping and very quickly falls asleep. They can become quite disgruntled if this rhythm is broken by outer events.

Everything about phlegmatics is about time. They hate to rush. They are deliberate in everything they do. When they set about a task they take the time to set everything out, to be sure they understand what they have to do and most of all they need time to work things out carefully. They will slowly come to a decision about how to go about a task. Once they start they are very orderly and capable and thorough. They will always complete a task eventually. They can tackle only one job at a time. They don't mind routine work. They can do the same task over and over again without being bored.

Some phlegmatics can function in a midst of total chaos and appear quite calm and collected. Nothing seems to bother them. Worry isn't part of their experience. "What will happen will happen..." is a motto. They do have the tendency to take everything literally. Intentions need to be clear when speaking to phlegmatic people. They are also great observers. They are able to watch without getting involved which makes them excellent judges; objective and steady.

Phlegmatic children are not initiators. They are followers and peers are very important to them. When I want to tell a phlegmatic to neaten up their handwriting, I lean over the desk of their neighbor and make a comment on their handwriting. Invariably the phlegmatic begins to write neatly. It is important to understand that phlegmatics don't lack intelligence, they lack initiative. Copying work gives them strength and stability and given enough time they might come up with a better way. But they must be given time.

It is most important for phlegmatic children to become stimulated by the interests of others. Friendships are essential for them.

Phlegmatics are faithful, upright and reliable. They are thorough, devoted members of society. The calm and thoughtfulness they can

bring to others makes people feel secure in their presence. They know how to relax. What better treatment for a fast-paced society such as we have! To take problems in stride and objectify experiences are assets we can all learn from.

Sanguines have an airy temperament. They have a light-well-proportioned body. They walk lightly, often running instead of walking. They almost walk on their tip-toes, their feet barely touching the ground. They seem to dance across the room. Their eyes light up easily and they seem to smile at everything. They love to talk and chatter away, whether or not anyone is listening. Sanguines find each new experience an adventure. They are interested in everything. They have a nervous tendency, grasping impressions, only to lose them just as quickly. Concentration is difficult because they distract so easily. They mix emotions with facts, making it difficult for them to be objective. They often exaggerate freely in the name of a good story.

Memory is evasive as each new experience leads their minds on to new realms of thought. "Been there, done that" is another motto. They just want to move on.

Sanguines love to express themselves in their physical environment, beautiful things are important here and especially if they can move them around. They like their things but are not very attached to them, often leaving a trail of belongings in their wake.

Friendship is their gift to the world. They smile and laugh and enjoy the social life. They are charming and especially good at small talk. Groups of friends surround the sanguine personality, but they can tax their friendships through their unreliability and forgetfulness. They have a harder time committing themselves to just one relationship. They intuitively understand people and are very good at match-making!

They forgive and forget very quickly and are shocked when others don't do the same. Mood swings can occur, but not for long! Because the sanguine is focused outwards so strongly, they depend on the environment for stimulus. In an effort to make an impression, they can become trendy, caught up in the latest fashion or novelty. This can become quite superficial actually, in their social relations or in their relation to the world at large.

Sanguines live through their nervous system. can become overloaded and hysterical.

Change is the joy of sanguines. Everything is possible or interesting. Flexibility is their strong point. Organization is a weakness for them, but their sheer enthusiasm to overcome it

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