

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Temperament Phlegmatic

Phlegmatics usually possess calm and unruffled temperaments and they have a natural tendency not to involve themselves, to any great extent, with the outside world. Their faces show little indication of their feelings; in some cases being passive with the eyes showing little interest. Many phlegmatic children will be big boned and well built.

They may well appear lazy because they usually like to work at a slow pace. They need to do this because they are methodical and need time to absorb material; they do not like starting a new task until the old one is completed. They may take what appears to be a superficial interest in their lessons and the teacher may think they lack commitment.

They may not complete their work in the time allowed or finish only a small part of it; this is not because they are setting out to deliberately avoid work but because it is their natural inclination to be meticulous.

Phlegmatics do not usually wish to assert themselves and many of their carefully thought out ideas and plans are not expressed or discussed. As they prefer caution to initiative and may deprecate their own efforts they are not easy children to teach. They do, however, possess many fine qualities such as faithfulness, reliability, truthfulness and they are also orderly and conscientious.

They have, on many occasions, a care and a love for other children which the other temperaments do not possess. For example it is probably the phlegmatic child who will be the first to help another in difficulty or who will not act selfishly at times when the opportunity arises to do so.

In many ways the phlegmatics are the least attractive of all children for they appear, to all outward appearances, uninteresting and uncreative; their virtues may be easily ignored because, say, of the liveliness of the choleric or sanguine. In difficult situations where other children would panic it is the phlegmatic who will retain control and keep calm.

Phlegmatic children do possess tenacity and a will to work. They will perform monotonous tasks which the other children will shirk. Yet they lack the ability to appreciate any other point of view except their own. They do not welcome any kind of innovation but would prefer a set and unchanging framework within which to work.

In the first stage of child development phlegmatics will be happy to dwell in their own little world. They will avoid anything that is new unless they are given a great deal of time to adjust to it; they would much prefer what is familiar. The teacher needs to constantly encourage phlegmatics to move out of their secure, but in many ways static world to the point where they are receptive to new ideas and situations. This should occur in the second stage. In the third stage any indications that such children want involvement in the outside world needs to be reinforced. When phlegmatics reach adulthood much of what is best in man may well be reflected in their approach and attitude.

As we have seen phlegmatics work methodically and are happier when they are involved in only a few relationships, where qualities of loyalty and friendship can develop. Many phlegmatics will be attracted to occupations where these situations exist; they will become involved in work of a methodical nature, for example, scientists, accountants and architects.