

## Introducing the Melancholic

These notes are taken from 'Understanding Yourself' by John Sparkes, a temperament manual which is written from the perspective of what a child needs as they are growing up. It is available as an [ebook](#) via Amazon.

### 1. Issues of security

#### A. Sharing thoughts and feelings

The Melancholic child must be encouraged to share thoughts and feelings, negative and positive, regularly. It is not a case of waiting until he is in a muddle or for some major happening – sharing is a healthy and natural part of life. His emotional health as an adult will be greatly improved by his ability to communicate what he is feeling as he grows up.

His home needs to be a place where he feels free to share anything and everything without being made to feel or look foolish. Parents need to ensure that they are not judging their child by their own perspectives. The Melancholic child can be so easily misunderstood by a parent who does not have any of that temperament in them. Sometimes his sensitivity enables him to be more accurately aware of his parents' attitude towards him than are his parents!

There is always a reason why the child feels what he does. Love drives us to understand. It is too easy for a parent to sound condemnatory when a child expresses negatives that the parent does not understand. Understanding is not the opposite of firmness but firmness is only effective when it is preceded by understanding.

His feelings will not always require an answer but he needs to be heard. He needs to be secure enough to share whatever is going on inside him.

#### B. Order

The Melancholic child likes order so, despite his capacity to be negative, he has a high standard for himself and others. If there is no standard of discipline, morals, hygiene and awareness of family needs in his home he will be the first to get into a muddle. Either his own standard will become exaggerated (this becomes a means of trying to keep some semblance of order) or he will rebel and become, in practice, the very opposite of the ideal in his heart. This can result in a chaotic mind, emotional withdrawal, emotional disturbances evidenced by obsessions or general unruliness. Parents and teachers alike become aware that this child is not then functioning to full capacity.

### 2. Self-esteem

Because of his negative traits he will generally have a poor opinion of himself - despite his abilities and creative talents. This will prove to be a major factor in his life and, if not handled correctly, can lead to lack of confidence, anxiety and depression.

### 3. Justice

He has a strong sense of justice. He wants things to be fair and will feel indignant when they are not. It will be important for him to know that issues are properly resolved, at least within the family.

## 4. Effects of pressure

### a. temperament weaknesses

A Melancholic child will take a certain amount of pressure and then hit out with revenge. If the desire for revenge is squashed smouldering resentment causes the child to withdraw into himself. This allows the weaknesses of his temperament to come into play: moodiness, bitterness, a critical and negative attitude and depression.

### b. fear

This withdrawal into himself sets off damaging consequences. The 'vacuum' created by the lack of self-giving becomes a breeding ground for certain fears and even horror. The act of going in on oneself leaves the Melancholic exposed to many natural fears that can quickly grow out of perspective.

### c. self-absorption

He tries to cope with these fears by not looking at them and then absorbing himself in his own emotions. This is how he copes with any painful situation. If exposed to anything persistently enough which produces fear he attempts to cope with the fear by 'playing it out' in his mind. His vivid imagination responds spontaneously to his natural feel for life and again, when meeting fear, he finds himself using that imagination to 'play out' the fear and thereby try to control it. It is easier for him to control what he can keep before him rather than the unknown.

### d. morbidity

The tendency towards morbidity and this need to 'play out' fears in the imagination can lead, in some cases, to a world of horror that not only frightens but fascinates.

### e. loneliness

These early experiences of fear, when not properly dealt with tend to cause the isolation and loneliness of the Melancholic to deepen as he grows up. When a current situation reawakens the original fear, his defences cause him to switch on that which he held in his mind as a child and to project it onto the present situation. Thus people, objects and situations produce within him reactions which seem out of all proportion to the present situation, but which intensify his natural unsociable tendencies. He feels trapped, powerless and hopeless. Even his cries for help can be so misunderstood as to arouse hostility and impatience in others.

### f. Melancholic games

Sometimes a Melancholic will 'play a game' in order to attract attention. It may be an unfinished sentence, an 'I don't know', a shrug of the shoulders, a 'muddle', or a 'helpless child act' - all designed to hold the attention of the person trying to help.

That same ability to 'play a game' can be used to avoid responsibility in any form. Although usually very capable he claims to have no ability to do what is asked of him. The danger with 'playing games' is that he could fail to use his enormous potential to build good relationships and to make a very worthwhile contribution to life.

## Meeting the needs of the Melancholic

### 5. Don't miss the Melancholic

If a child has a stronger temperament on top of the Melancholic it is all too easy to take little notice of the Melancholic side. The result could well be many internal dilemmas and real difficulty in forming healthy and strong relationships. In particular, many adults live in their extrovert temperament but are affected by their introvert. Thus, the person with the Melancholic temperament sees that part of who they are as the place where fear and depression lurk. The inability to live in and explore this part of who they are leads to the Melancholic 'holding back' the person who may well want to drive forward. Take time to hear what this child is saying and address that side of your child.

### 6. Don't hold him back

From the cradle introduce him to the world around. Even the cradle can be a place of retreat and security. He will need someone to give him the confidence to go forward at each new stage and to handle each challenge e.g. meeting people, school.

### 7. Two-way conversation

Recognise quickly what causes fear and pressure. He will try to relieve these by having a two-way conversation in his mind. Make it two-way with yourself and put in the positives, making sure you really hear his part of the conversation.

### 8. Response to pain

Recognise how he reacts to pain and hurt and seeing others hurt, e.g. self-punishment. Teach him to use his pain constructively to serve others.

### 9. Comfort

Be aware of what he uses to bring comfort, e.g. jogging, rocking, sucking thumbs, cloths etc., over-attachment to teddies, cuddly toys, pets or any possession. If the child finds the real world an uncomfortable place to be he can use his powers of imagination to create daydreams or fantasies to meet his emotional needs. Depending on which extrovert temperament he has, he can develop patterns in which eating, drinking or other physical activities become a means of comfort.

An adult can sometimes withdraw into the non-threatening world of a child for comfort and acceptance. He tends to retreat into what brings comfort easily instead of involving himself with the challenge of responsible relationships within the family. It is from these relationships that he would gain a healthy understanding of acceptance.

### 10. Agitation

He will sometimes sing himself to sleep - recognise when the singing becomes agitated. If he goes to bed with issues he has not been able to resolve during the day he will find, as he tries to sleep, that these issues fill his thoughts and perhaps his dreams and nightmares.

### 11. Pressure

Be aware of pressures at school, and pressures from family, especially brothers and sisters. Anyone in the family with a stronger, more outgoing temperament is a potential threat unless

there is real understanding of the Melancholic. Give him opportunity to share how he feels about things in the family. Try and get in touch with his feelings rather than just how you would react. Remember that his self-sacrificing trait means that he can be taken advantage of easily.

It is important that his environment does not produce unnecessary pressure. It should contain positive attitudes. Noise, confusion, chaos, untidiness and dirtiness can all cause inner conflict. He needs his own space, surrounded by familiar possessions and a stable, well-ordered home life.

### **12. Being Objective**

The Melancholic child has no means of switching off his feelings so he can be very influenced by his, or others', emotions in any given situation. This child may well view life in an overly subjective way - i.e. what does this make me feel? Teach him to stand back and make an objective assessment of each situation. He has to learn that he cannot just do things because he feels like it! The ability to reason and a sense of logic need to be added to what his emotions will tell him.

### **13. Being Sensitive**

Teach him to use his sensitivity for the benefit of others. If he has already developed patterns of avoiding pain by finding comfort in an indulgence of his own emotions he will be more aware as to how situations affect him rather than how he affects other people.

Although it is important that he can always identify and express his feelings he will need to be helped to use those feelings constructively for the benefit of others. If this does not take place his first thought in any given situation will be as to how what is happening affects him and this would prevent him from being able to deal effectively with the challenges and responsibilities of life.

### **14. Being Creative**

It will be important that his creativity is recognised and used. He may need help to discover the best ways to express his creativity. Encourage him to enjoy what he does and to make his gifts available for others to appreciate. His talents make it easy for parents to try to push him too hard down the road of achievement but accomplishment must not be allowed to become an end in itself. Failure to express creativity and undue pressure to achieve can both lead to emotional withdrawal and the consequent inner confusion.

## **Summary of the Melancholic**

- a. The Melancholic can be a lovely person with depths of quality and creativity. He is capable of making valuable contributions to all aspects of life.
- b. The key is in getting into his world, taking his hand, and giving him the worth and confidence to use what God has given him.



- c. For his part, he needs the will to use the abilities that God has given him and not to hide behind his negative view of himself.
- d. Encourage a Melancholic to develop a deep relationship with the Lord at an early age and he will find stability and security.
- e. Where there is damage, change will not occur overnight but if you stick with such a person you will gain a good friend.