

Temper Tantrums



Most young children have temper tantrums. Crying, screaming, lying on the floor, holding their breath, kicking and biting are common behaviors.

There is no “cure” for tantrums but to reduce the number and intensity of them, it is good to understand why they may be happening and what to do.

Sometimes Children Have Tantrums Because They...

- Are tired, hungry, not feeling well or uncomfortable
- Are frustrated and want to do things for themselves
- Do not have a regular routine
- Are expected to do more than what they are capable of doing

Things You Can Try with a Toddler to Reduce Tantrums

- Watch for signs that your child is feeling tired, hungry or needs a break and don't expect him to tell you with words what is wrong.
- Provide consistent nap times and a light snack or a meal when you see that he feels hungry.
- Follow periods of lots of activity with quiet activities such as reading a book or taking a bath.
- Find out if your expectations of your child are too high or too low.
- Consider planning personal or household activities around your child's routines.
- Before asking him to stop one activity to start another, give a few minutes warning to help him get ready to change the activity.

Things You Can Try with a Preschooler to Reduce Tantrums

- Keep your child's needs in mind. Choose to go out when it is not meal time, nap time or when he is sick.
- “Practice” at home before going out and talk to him about what to expect.
- Make sure to take with you healthy snacks and drinks, favorite books and toys and a change of clothes for spills and accidents.

Prepare Yourself

- Make sure you balance taking care of business and interacting positively with your child.
- Some experts suggest that parents not reward children for “good” behavior on outings because they believe that having a pleasant time is its own reward and that rewards can lead to frustration. Choose your “reward policy” and be ready to stick with it!

When a Tantrum Happens

- Try to remain calm even though this may be really difficult.
- Try to identify what you think he is feeling. For example, “It's frustrating when the toy doesn't work.” This helps him understand what he is feeling and may give him words to use to express feelings better.
- Redirect his attention to something else. For example, if he is upset because he can't climb on the cabinets, find a safe place to practice climbing such as on a large stack of pillows.
- There may be times when, after trying different things, he is still upset and needs to release frustration. You may choose to give your child some space to help calm down and by saying, “I can see that you are mad. I'm going to leave you alone until you calm down.”

- When giving him some space, stay close so that he can see and hear you to reduce any fear he may have.
- Depending on your child's personality, you may need to hold, talk, distract or leave him alone until he is ready to interact on his own.
- Being out of control can feel very scary. Once he starts to calm down, offer to comfort him but wait if he is not ready to be comforted.

Remember...

- One of the ways children learn to manage strong emotions is by watching you manage yours.
- Young children are learning to manage emotions and a tantrum is a way of communicating feelings.
- Typically, tantrums will decrease as he learns more words and coping skills.
- Trying to reason with a child who is in the middle of a tantrum isn't possible so wait until he has calmed down.

Dealing with temper tantrums can be challenging. Sometimes professional assistance is needed and getting help is a sign of strength. Call your county health department and ask for a Child Guidance professional.

Sources:

Your Toddler by Johnson and Johnson

The Baby Book by William and Martha Sears



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