

Dealing with Temper Tantrums

What's Happening

Toddlers have many skills, but controlling their tempers is not one of them. Tantrums are common between ages 2-3 because toddlers are becoming independent and developing their own wants, needs, and ideas. However, they are not yet able to express their wants and feelings with words. Take comfort in the fact that most children outgrow tantrums by age 4.



What You Might Be Seeing

It is normal when toddlers:

- Say “no!” “mine!” and “do it myself!”
- Test rules over and over to see how parents will react
- Are not yet ready to share
- Need lots of fun activities, play times, and opportunities to explore the world
- Respond well to a routine for sleeping and eating (a regular schedule)
- Imitate grownups and want to “help” mom and dad

What You Can Do

It is often easier to prevent tantrums than to deal with them once they get going. Try these tips:

- Direct your child’s attention to something else. (“Wow, look at that fire engine!”)
- Give your child a choice in small matters. (“Do you want to eat peas or carrots?”)
- Stick to a daily routine that balances fun activities with enough rest and healthy food.
- Develop a feeling vocabulary, your child will be able to tell you how they are feeling rather than act it out.
- Anticipate when your child will be disappointed. (“We are going to buy groceries for dinner. We won’t be buying cookies, but you can help me pick out some fruit for later.”)
- Praise your child’s behavior when he or she shows self-control and expresses feelings with words.

If you can’t prevent the tantrum, here are some tips for dealing with it:

- Say what you expect from your child and have confidence that your child will behave.
- Remain calm. You are a role model for your child.
- Holding your child during a tantrum may help a younger child feel more secure and calm down more quickly.
- Take your child to a quiet place where he or she can calm down safely. Speak softly or play soft music.
- Some children throw tantrums to seek attention. Try ignoring the tantrum, but pay attention to your child after he or she calms down.
- Resist overreacting to tantrums, and try to keep your sense of humor.

When disciplining your child, keep these 4 questions in mind:

1. What do I want my child to learn?
2. Is what I’m doing teaching that?
3. Are there any negative results from it?
4. If so, what can I do differently?

When your child is having a floor-thumping tantrum, the most important thing you can do is remain calm and wait it out. Do not let your child’s behavior cause you to lose control, too.

