



interSEEDnGrow
Developmental & Speech Therapy Services Provider

SEEDS FOR GROWTH: Tantrums

Why your child has temper tantrums

A temper tantrum is the emotional equivalent of a summer storm – sudden and sometimes fierce. One minute you and your child are in a restaurant enjoying your dinner, the next minute she’s whimpering, whining, and then screaming at the top of her lungs because her straw is bent. Children between the ages of 1 and 3 are especially prone to tantrums.

Though you may worry that you’re raising a tyrant, take heart – at this age, it’s unlikely that your child is throwing a fit to be manipulative. More likely, she’s having a meltdown in response to frustration.

How to handle a tantrum: 7 tips

1. Don’t lose your cool. A tantrum is not a pretty sight. In addition to kicking, screaming, and pounding the floor, your toddler’s repertoire may include throwing things, hitting, and holding his breath to the point of turning blue. While this may be hard to handle, you can rest assured that even breath holding is normal behavior for a child having a tantrum.

When your child is swept up in a tantrum, he’s unable to listen to reason, though he will respond – negatively – to your yelling or threatening. “I found the more I shouted at Brandon to stop, the wilder he would get,” says one mother of a 2-year-old. What worked instead, she discovered, was to just sit down and be with him while he raged.

In general, staying with your child during a tantrum is a good idea. Stomping out of the room – tempting as that may be – can make him feel abandoned. The storm of emotion he’s going through can be frightening to him, and he’ll appreciate knowing you’re nearby.

If you find yourself getting overly frustrated, some experts suggest calmly leaving the room for a few minutes and returning after your child has stopped crying. By staying calm, you’ll help him calm down, too.

Some experts recommend picking up your child and holding him if it's feasible (if he's not flailing too much, for instance), saying he'll find your embrace comforting. But others say that tactic rewards negative behavior and that it's better to ignore the tantrum until your child calms down.

You may find that a judiciously used time-out is a good solution too. Through trial and error, you'll learn which approach is right for your child. However you choose to handle the tantrum, consistency is key to making it work.

2. Remember that you're the adult. No matter how long the tantrum continues, don't give in to unreasonable demands or try to negotiate with your screaming toddler. It's especially tempting to cave in as a way of ending a public episode. Try not to worry about what others think – anyone who's a parent has been there before.

By giving in, you'll only be teaching your child that throwing a fit is a good way to get what she wants, which sets the stage for future conflicts. Besides, your child is already frightened by being out of control. The last thing she needs is to feel that you're not in control either.

If your child's outburst escalates to the point that she's hitting people or pets, throwing things, or screaming nonstop, pick her up and carry her to a safe place, such as her bedroom. Tell her why she's there ("because you hit Aunt Sally"), and let her know that you'll stay with her until she can be calm.

If you're in a public place – a common breeding ground for tantrums – be prepared to leave with your child until she calms down.

"When my daughter was 2, she had an absolute fit at a restaurant because the plain spaghetti she ordered arrived with chopped parsley on it," recalls one mother. "Although I realized why she was upset, I wasn't about to let her disrupt everyone's dinner. I took her outside until she calmed down."

3. Use time-outs sparingly. Depending on the child, using a time-out occasionally, beginning at about the age of 18 months, may help him manage his feelings better when he has a tantrum. A time-out can be helpful when your child's tantrum is especially intense and other techniques aren't working. Placing your child in a quiet or – better yet – boring spot for a brief period (about one minute per year of his age) can be a good lesson in self-soothing.

Explain what you're doing ("You're going to have a time-out so you can calm down and Mommy is going to be right over there") and let him know it's not punishment. If he refuses to stay in time-out, simply place him back in the spot firmly but coolly and go about your business. Beyond making sure he's safe, don't interact or give him attention during the time-out.

4. Talk it over afterward. When the storm subsides, hold your child close and talk about what happened. Discuss the tantrum in very simple terms and acknowledge your child's frustration. Help her put her feelings into words by saying something like, "You were very angry because your food wasn't the way you wanted it."

Let her see that once she expresses herself in words, she'll get better results. Say with a smile, "I'm sorry I didn't understand you. Now that you're not screaming, I can find out what you want."

5. Let your child know you love him. Once your child is calm and you've had a chance to talk to him about his tantrum, give him a quick hug and tell him that you love him. It's important to reward good behavior, including your child being able to settle down and talk things over with you.

6. Try to head off tantrum-inducing situations. Pay attention to which situations push your child's buttons and plan accordingly. If she falls apart when she's hungry, carry snacks with you. If she gets cranky in the late afternoon, take care of errands earlier in the day.

If she has trouble making a transition from one activity to the next, give her a gentle heads-up before a change. Alerting her to the fact that you're about to leave the playground or sit down to dinner ("We're going to eat when you and Daddy are done with your story") gives her a chance to adjust instead of react.

If you sense a tantrum is on the way, try distracting your child by changing locations, giving her a toy, or doing something she doesn't expect, like making a silly face or pointing at a bird.

Your toddler is becoming more independent, so offer her choices whenever possible. No one likes being told what to do all the time. Saying, "Would you like corn or carrots?" rather than "Eat your corn!" will give her a sense of control.

Monitor how often you're saying "no." If you find you're rattling it off routinely, you're probably putting unnecessary stress on both of you. Try to ease up and choose your battles.

7. Watch for signs of overstress. Although daily tantrums are a perfectly normal part of the mid-toddler years, it's a good idea to keep an eye out for possible problems. Has there been upheaval in the family? An extremely busy or harried period? Parental tensions? All of these can provoke tantrums.

If your child's tantrums seem overly frequent or intense (or he's hurting himself or others), seek help. Your doctor will discuss your child's developmental and behavioral milestones with you at routine well-child checkups.

These visits are good opportunities to talk about concerns you have about your child's behavior, and they help to rule out any serious physical or psychological problems. Your doctor can also suggest ways to deal with the outbursts.

Also, talk to your doctor if your child has frightening breath-holding spells when he gets upset. There's some evidence that this behavior is linked to an iron deficiency.

Reference:

www.parents.com