

Temper Tantrums

What are temper tantrums, and why do they occur?

Temper tantrums are a normal part of childhood development, although they can vary a lot from one child to the next. Some children have daily temper tantrums, while others have them very rarely. Temper tantrums occur equally in boys and girls, typically between 1 and 3 years old.

A young child may understand what is being said but not know how to say what they are feeling. They may be tired, hungry, or upset and show this by having a temper tantrum. They may cry, scream, bite, hit, fall on the floor, kick their feet, or bang their head. Children of this age are very focused on learning how to do things for themselves. When a toddler understands they cannot do everything on their own and cannot have everything they want, they often express their disappointment in the form of a temper tantrum.

How can tantrums be prevented?

- **Be consistent.** Establish a daily routine so that your child knows what to expect. Stick to the routine as much as possible, including nap time and bedtime. Set reasonable limits, and follow them consistently.
- **Plan ahead.** Run errands when your child isn't likely to be hungry or tired. If you're expecting to wait in line, pack a small toy or snack to occupy your child.
- **Encourage your child to use words.** Young children understand many more words than they're able to express. If your child isn't yet speaking — or speaking clearly — teach them sign language for words such as “I want,” “more,” “drink,” “hurt” and “tired.” As your child gets older, continue to teach them new words to express their emotions and feelings.
- **Let your child make choices.** Avoid saying no to everything. To give your toddler a sense of control, let them make choices. For example, “Would you like to wear your red shirt or your blue shirt?” or “Would you like to eat strawberries or bananas?”
- **Praise good behavior.** Offer extra attention when your child behaves well. Give your child a hug or tell them how proud you are when they share or follow directions.
- **Avoid situations likely to trigger tantrums.** If your child begs for toys or treats when you shop, try to steer clear of areas with these temptations. If your toddler acts up in restaurants, choose places that offer quick service.
- **Be patient.** Your child is learning how to express themselves and how to best interact with others. Be patient as they learn these life skills. Also, be patient with yourself. If necessary, ask your spouse, your partner, or a trusted friend to watch your child for a few minutes if you need a break.

What can I do when my child has a temper tantrum?

- **Keep calm!** This is often hard to do during a tantrum, but it is extremely important. Children can sense your frustration, which will make the tantrum worse.
- **Do not hit or spank them.** These physical tactics do not help, and they can lead to worse behavior over time and teach your child that physical aggression is okay.
- **Try to figure out why the tantrum is occurring.** If you can understand the cause of the tantrum, you can try to avoid it in the future.

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- **Ignore the behavior.** If your child is safe and not hurting themselves or others, let them have their temper tantrum. Always keep them in your eyesight to ensure their safety, but do not give them attention for their behavior. Eventually it will stop.
- If they are in danger of hurting themselves or others, you should physically **remove your child from the environment** and go somewhere quiet for them to calm down.

Resources and References:

<https://www.kidshealth.org/en/parents/tantrums.html#catbrain>

https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Families%20and%20Educators/Temper_Tantrums_Guidelines_for_Parents_and_Educators.pdf