

Handling Toddler Tantrums: Tips for Parents



Highlights

Temper tantrums are outbursts of screaming and other challenging behaviours when your child loses control.

Tantrums are normal in toddlers and typically occur up to age 3.

Children may have tantrums when overwhelmed by feelings, such as frustration or disappointment.

Pestering can lead to tantrums, for example, when your child repeatedly asks for something after you've said "no."

If your toddler has a tantrum, remain calm and stay with them in a quiet place, but don't try to reason with them or give in.

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What are temper tantrums?

Temper tantrums are outbursts of challenging behaviour when your child loses control. They range from whining and crying to screaming, kicking, hitting, and holding their breath. Toddlers may throw themselves on the floor, clench their teeth, and pound their fists.

Tantrums are natural for young children who can't express anger and frustration in words. They are a normal part of child development and mostly happen in toddlers between 18 months and 3 years old.

Some children are naturally easy-going, while others, who are more intense and persistent, may have more frequent or intense tantrums.

Why do toddlers have tantrums?

Tantrums occur when your child feels overwhelmed and needs your help. They may also be a way for your child to get attention.

Tantrums are more likely if your child is:

- tired
- hungry
- feeling sick
- anxious about a new situation
- bored
- living in a stressful home environment
- spending too much time on screens

Frustration often triggers tantrums. Children may get frustrated when they don't get what they want or when they can't do something. For toddlers, being told "no" can lead to tantrums, especially if they keep pestering you for something you've already refused.

How can I prevent my child having a tantrum?

Although tantrums can't always be avoided, there are strategies to reduce their frequency:

Identify and manage stressors in your child's life.

Recognize triggers, such as changes to their routine.

Talk about emotions and teach your child to express feelings like anger, sadness, or disappointment.

Give your child control by letting them choose from limited options.

Know when your child is too tired or unwell for certain activities.

Stick to a consistent routine.

Keep things out of sight to avoid struggles over them.

How can I prevent my child pestering me?

Children pester when they know it works. Don't give in, as that encourages more pestering.

Be consistent so your child learns you mean what you say. If you're inconsistent, they may continue pestering, hoping to get their way.

Before going to the shops, tell your child what behaviour you expect. Praise them when they behave well. If they manage the trip without pestering, offer a reward, like a play in the park.

Try not to say "no" too often. When you do say "no," keep it meaningful. Offer alternatives or distract your child.

How should I respond if my child is pestering me?

Stay calm and manage your temper by breathing slowly. Don't give in to demands or whining. Tell your child clearly that they need to ask politely.

Even if they ask nicely, you don't have to say "yes." Praise them for politeness and explain why you're not agreeing. Stick to your decision if you say "no."

How should I respond if my child has a tantrum?

Stay calm during your child's tantrum. Be with them to offer security and reassurance.

If you're in a public place, pick your child up and take them to a quieter spot to calm down. Don't let your own frustration escalate the situation. If you feel overwhelmed, step away briefly but return to help them calm down.

Avoid reasoning or punishing your child during a tantrum. You can try distracting them with another activity.

What should I do after the tantrum?

Do not reward your child by giving in to their demands. Instead, praise them for regaining control.

Your child may feel vulnerable after a tantrum, especially if they realize their behaviour was inappropriate. Hug them and reassure them you love them no matter what.

Talk to them about their feelings, such as sadness or disappointment, and help them understand and learn from the experience.

How can I encourage good behaviour in my toddler?

Model good behaviour for your child, as they learn from observing you.

Here are some ideas to promote positive behaviour:

Praise and reward good behaviour.

Give simple instructions and ask your child to repeat them.

Encourage using words instead of screaming.

Keep items you don't want them to touch out of sight.

Set up situations that help your child succeed and avoid frustration. Offer age-appropriate toys and praise their efforts.

When should I seek professional help?

Most children outgrow tantrums by 5 years old. However, if tantrums persist or become more severe, they may indicate an underlying issue, such as:

anxiety

trauma

family stress

hearing or learning problems

Seek help if your child:

injures themselves or others during a tantrum

misses school because of tantrums

has physical symptoms like fainting or seizures

experiences nightmares or stomach aches

begins wetting themselves after being toilet trained

Seek support if you feel overwhelmed and worry you might harm your child.

Tools And Assistance

If you're struggling with your child's behaviour, try these resources:

Speak to your doctor or a child health nurse.

Parenting guides offer tips on managing tantrums.

If feeling overwhelmed, call a support line for help.