



Toddler Tantrums

A challenge for both you and your child

What it is: One minute your child is as happy as can be; the next she's a ball of rage — crying, throwing then self on the floor, kicking, screaming and completely out of control and pushing the limits.

Why it happens: This behavior occurs for a variety of reasons. The most common include: an inability to express feelings and desires through words; the need to affirm one's independence; feeling a lack of control; having either too few or too many limits; and hunger, fatigue, overstimulation, and boredom. Just a lack of verbal skills to express frustration!

What you need to know: Despite the term "the terrible two's," tantrums can start as early as 12 months and continue beyond age four. Import however is that these tantrums are natural, frequent and positive steps forward in your child's development. They prove that your toddler is beginning to develop a sense of him/her self and him/her place in the world. It is a typical stage in the child's development.

What to do about it: Some tactics work better than others, depending on the child, but always remain adult, caring, positive and consistent throughout. You can feel angry, shocked and unable to cope; try and think of some of the following and stick with what works best for your toddler:

- Tantrums usually happen at an inconvenient time(when on the phone, at the supermarket, etc.). What was upsetting your toddler in order to have an outburst?
- Stay calm and speak softly, don't panic. Remember, seeing you lose your temper will make it harder for your child to calm down.
- Move a child who is physically out-of-control (thrashing, hitting) to a safe place. Pick her up firmly (without dragging or pulling). If that's not practical, hold your child tight to prevent her from hurting herself. (Some toddlers calm down when they're held tightly.)
- Setting limits is always a good tool in helping your toddler grow up. Devise rules about eating, sleeping, touching dangerous things, hitting, biting, etc. Have the same rules wherever you are. Stick to the routines and rules so that your toddler knows what to expect.
- Look your toddler in the eyes and speak clearly and firmly. Talk about the behavior you don't like; describe the situation by mentioning what happened in a simple ways. ("You are angry, because you wanted that toy", "You didn't like your friend taking your food", "You

were running around the restaurant".)

- Never use words like "you're a naughty boy/girl". It doesn't give the child an explanation about the behavior he/she showed.
- Avoid physical punishment. It's never a good idea, but it's especially risky at a time when emotions are running high and you're in danger of losing control.
- Create a diversion; try to distract your child or involve him/her in another activity.
- Stick to what you say and be consistent. Say "yes" or "no" and don't change your mind. If your child sees once that he/she can change your mind by whining, crying, shouting or screaming, he/she will almost certainly try the same "tactics" next time (manipulative tantrums). The more consistent you are, the easier it will be for your toddler to learn what to expect.
- Try to find a balance in what you can allow your child to do and what not. Let your child make his/her own choices in certain situations, but make sure you control the situation.

How to prevent it:

- Ward off the "fearsome four": hunger, fatigue, boredom, and overstimulation. To that end, make sure your child is well-rested and well-fed, avoid over-scheduling, and bring healthy snacks and a favorite small toy or book when leaving the house.
- Work with your child's personality. For many toddlers, sticking to a regular routine decreases the risk of tantrums. Others thrive on spontaneity.
- Cut down on the need to say "no." This includes childproofing your home (so you don't have to constantly cry, "No, don't touch that!") and setting clear limits.
- Provide some choice whenever possible. Being able to make decisions ("Do you want to eat cereal or yogurt this morning?") helps a toddler feel more in control.
- Say "yes," "no," or negotiate a compromise, but don't say "maybe." In toddler translation, "maybe" equals "yes."

Whatever you do — don't give in to her demands. After a tantrum or even during a tantrum, speak to your child and reassure him/her that you still love him/her. ("You're angry, I hold you (help you) because I love you".) Tell your child how you felt about the tantrum, and what you expect next