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TEMPER TANTRUMS

Almost every parent of a toddler has experienced the frustration of dealing with a child throwing a floor-thumping, hair-pulling temper tantrum. Even though this can be embarrassing and challenging for parents, this is normal behavior for most young children.

Why do they do it?

Toddlers are not yet able to use words to express their feelings and emotions. When they are tired, frustrated, or angry and unable to express themselves with words, they may throw a temper tantrum. Some children throw tantrums because their emotions run out of control, and they aren't yet old enough to know how to contain them. Finally, some children continue to throw tantrums if they are rewarded for doing so (that is, if they learn that parents will give them what they want to stop the tantrum).

How can parents prevent tantrums?

It is often easier to prevent tantrums than to deal with them once they have begun. Parents may notice some signals that children give as a warning that a tantrum may be brewing. If a parent suspects that a tantrum is coming or if a child gets in the habit of having a tantrum after a particular experience or at a particular time of day, here are some prevention tips to keep in mind:

- Distract or redirect your child's attention to something else.
- Use a sense of humor to distract your child. This may help you cope, too.
- Give your child control over small things by giving him or her a choice.
- Take your child to a quiet place and speak softly to him or her.
- Encourage your child to express emotions and feelings with words.
- Stick to a daily routine that gives your child enough rest and enough activity.
- Reward your child when he or she requests something without having a tantrum



How can parents deal with tantrums, especially public temper tantrums?

Parents can be caught off guard when a child throws a tantrum in public. It can be embarrassing, and parents may be tempted to give in to the child just to stop the tantrum. But giving in just teaches the child that "tantrums work." Instead, try some of the following tips to deal with tantrums that happen in the home or in public:

- Remain calm. Don't lose control because your child has lost control. Instead, try to model behavior that is calm and controlled.
- Hugging or holding your child until the tantrum subsides may help a younger child through a tantrum.
- Put the child in "time out" or in a quiet place (even strapped in to a stroller) where he or she can calm down. Time out should be one minute for each year of the child's age.
- Older children who throw tantrums may be seeking attention. Try ignoring them until the tantrum is over.

www.circleofparents.org

"Follow through. Follow through on both rewards and punishments. Empty promises and threats don't achieve anything."

Jeni Tracy

"Give Your child your full attention. Listen without an agenda. Give your child all the time s/he needs to develop his/her thoughts."

Claire Hatch

"Avoid showing disappoint in your child. Let your child know when you are disapproving of his/her behavior though."

Nina Ramsey

Parenting Tips ~ Children Misbehave for These 4 Reasons:

- **Power** ~ they want to get their way
- **Revenge** ~ they want to get back at you for something
- **Attention** ~ they want to be noticed
- **Helplessness** ~ they want you to do things for them they can do themselves



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AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Tantrums are a normal part of growing up. All children will have them sometime or another. But if tantrums seem to be happening too often, you might want to consider the following suggestions:

- Study a child's tantrums. When and where do they seem to occur? Who is generally involved? What happens before, after, and during a tantrum? Look for patterns in behavior that can give you clues about how to avoid conditions or situations that seem to encourage tantrums.
- Set realistic limits, and help children stick to a regular routine. Predictable meal times and nap times are particularly important.
- Offer real choices. Don't ask, "Would you like to take your nap?" unless you are prepared to honor a child's choice not to nap. Instead try, "It's nap time now."
- Choose your battles carefully. Say, "No" to things that are really important. Avoid fighting over little things.
- Give children a few minutes warning before you end an activity. Say "We are going to leave the park and go home in a few minutes" or "I wonder what we will have for a snack." It helps children get ready for change.



Help children not to "get in over their heads."
Children need challenging activities but not so challenging that they experience overwhelming frustration and failure.

National Network for Child Care - NNCC. Part of CYFERNET, the National Extension Service Children Youth and Family Educational Research Network.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO AFTER THE TANTRUM?

As children get older, they will grow out of temper tantrums! In the meantime, try to take some time and talk over the experience with your child after it happens. Helping your child identify and talk about feelings will help your child to express feelings with words rather than with tantrums. Finally, congratulate yourself for getting through your child's tantrum while remaining calm. A calm parent provides a child with a great behavior model for the child to follow.

For more information about dealing with temper tantrums and other parenting resources, visit the Circle of Parents website (www.circleofparents.org).

