

Behaviour

Tantrums



Children have tantrums because they are letting us know that something is upsetting them and they need help to manage their feelings. As Eileen Hayes points out on the Super Nanny website, every child will throw a tantrum at some point. Temper tantrums usually start at around 18 months and are very common at that age. One in five two-year-olds has a temper tantrum every day.

One reason for this is that two-year-olds want to express themselves but find it difficult. They feel frustrated and the frustration comes out as a tantrum. Once a child can talk more they're less likely to have tantrums. By the age of four, tantrums are far less common.

These ideas may help you to cope with tantrums when they happen:

- **Find out why the tantrum is happening.** Is your child tired or hungry; frustrated or jealous, maybe of another child? They may need time, attention and love, even though they're not being very loveable.
- **Understand and accept your child's anger.** You probably feel the same way yourself at times, but you can express it in other ways.
- **Find a distraction.** If you think your child is starting a tantrum, find something to distract them with straight away. This could be something you

can see out of the window. Say, for example, "Look! A cat". Make yourself sound as surprised and interested as you can.

- **Wait for it to stop.** Losing your temper or shouting back won't end the tantrum. Giving in won't help in the long term. If you've said no, don't change your mind and say yes just to end the tantrum. Otherwise, your child will start to think that tantrums can get them what they want. For the same reason, it doesn't help to bribe them with sweets or treats. If you're at home, try going into another room for a while. Make sure your child can't hurt themselves first.
- **Be prepared when you're out shopping.** Tantrums often happen in shops. This can be embarrassing, and embarrassment makes it harder to stay calm. Keep shopping trips short. Start by going out to buy one or two things only, and build up from there. Involve your child in the shopping by talking about what you need and letting them help you.

Hitting, biting, kicking and fighting

Most young children occasionally bite, hit or push another child. Toddlers are curious and may not understand that biting or pulling hair hurts. This doesn't mean your child will grow up to be aggressive. Here are ways to teach your child that this behaviour is unacceptable:

- **Don't hit, bite or kick back.** This could make your child think it's acceptable to do this. Instead, make it clear that what they're doing hurts and that you won't allow it.
- **Take them out of the situation.** If you're with other children, say you'll leave or ask the other children to leave unless your child's behaviour improves. You must be prepared to carry this out if you want it to work.
- **Put your child in another room.** If you're at home, try this for a short period. Check that they're safe before you leave them.
- **Talk to them.** Children often go through phases of being upset or insecure, and express their feelings by being aggressive. Finding out what's worrying them is the first step to being able to help.
- **Show them you love them, but not their behaviour.** Children may be behaving badly because they need more love. Show you love them by praising good behaviour and giving them plenty of cuddles when they're not behaving badly.
- **Help them let their feelings out in another way.** Find a big space, such as a park, and encourage your child to run and shout. Letting your child know that you recognise their feelings will make it easier for them to express themselves without hurting anyone else. You could try saying things like: "I

know you're feeling angry about...". As well as showing you recognise their frustration, it will help them be able to name their own feelings and think about them.

Ask an expert. If you're seriously concerned about your child's behaviour, talk to your health visitor or GP.

Useful websites:

For further information and advice on childhood tantrums visit:

Super Nanny: www.supernanny.co.uk/Advice/-/Parenting-Skills/-/Discipline-and-Reward/No-More-Tantrums.aspx

Ready Steady Toddler: www.readysteadytoddler.org.uk/growing-up/toddler-tantrums/index.aspx

baby centre: www.babycentre.co.uk/a539847/coping-with-tantrums

KidsHealth®: <http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/tantrums.html>