

## Positive Parenting of Toddlers

# Tantrums

***The first time your toddler throws a tantrum may be a real surprise. You may be stunned into embarrassed silence—especially if the tantrum occurs in public. It is best to deal with tantrums as soon as they start. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you manage tantrums and teach your toddler to calm down quickly.***

Tantrums may start at about 12 months of age, when toddlers are learning to be more independent. At this stage they may appear to be demanding, stubborn and uncooperative. Tantrums are common in two year olds, but if managed well are less common in three and four year olds. As children learn to solve problems in other ways they throw fewer tantrums. Children may not grow out of tantrums without help from their parents. Part of your task as a parent is to teach your child to manage frustration and express anger in appropriate ways.

## What Are Tantrums?

Tantrums in children can be short (20 to 30 seconds) or go on for hours. They can include:

- Crying (without being hurt).
- Screaming and yelling.
- Stamping feet.
- Rolling around on the floor.
- Holding breath (this can be frightening but all children eventually take a gasp of air).

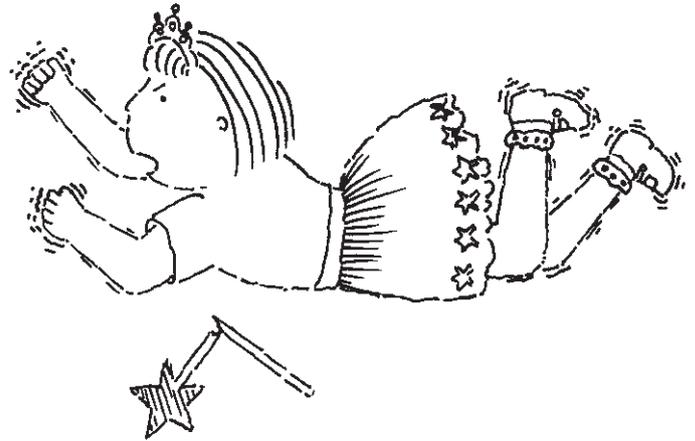
## Why Do Toddlers Have Tantrums?

Tantrums occur when children feel angry or frustrated. Toddlers often get frustrated when:

- They are told *No*.
- Things don't go the way they expect.
- They are unable to manage difficult tasks.
- They do not know the words to say what they want.
- They are overtired.
- There is no obvious reason.

Children have different temperaments. Some children are quiet and easygoing and rarely throw tantrums. Others have quick tempers and often have tantrums.

Children also learn to continue throwing tantrums if



they get what they want. They learn to turn up or escalate their behaviour to make other people give in to their demands. For example, imagine your child picks up a small toy in the supermarket and says *I want it*. You calmly say *No* and put it back. Your child whines, grabs the toy and starts shouting *Mine! Mine!* If you try to avoid a tantrum by saying *Okay have it. But just this once . . .* your child will learn that *No* means try harder and protest louder until you get what you want. If tantrums work they are likely to happen again.

## How To Help Prevent Tantrums

- Where practical, put away special things you do not want your child to touch, to avoid having to say *No* and *Don't touch* too often.
- Have a few necessary and realistic rules.
- Try to keep to your child's usual routine for meals and sleep times.
- Keep your child up to date on things you are doing through the day by telling them what is going to happen.
- Keep your child busy with activities in situations where they might otherwise be bored and disruptive.
- Watch for your child being good and praise good behaviour.
- Decide if your child's requests are reasonable before you say *Yes* or *No*, and stick to your decision.

## How To Manage Tantrums

### ***Use Planned Ignoring***

Ignoring tantrums can be effective for toddlers under two years old. For this to work, your child's tantrum must be completely ignored. If it is safe, walk away and pay no attention to your child until the tantrum stops.

Ignoring can be difficult when other children or visitors are there. At these times you may prefer to use the following suggestions instead.

### ***Tell Your Child What To Do***

For tantrums in older toddlers, stop what you are doing and move within an arm's length of your child. Calmly but firmly tell your child to stop the tantrum and what to do instead—*Christopher, stop screaming right now and speak in a nice voice*. Praise your child if they do as you ask.

### ***If the Tantrum Continues, Tell Your Child the Problem and the Consequence***

If the tantrum does not stop, say—*You have not done as I asked. Now go to time-out. Right now.*

### ***Use Time-Out***

Act. Don't threaten to act. Take your child to a safe but uninteresting room or space (or cot for younger toddlers under two years). Tell your child they must be quiet before they can come out of time-out. Give this reminder even though your child might be upset or angry. When your child has been quiet for two minutes return them to the activity or find them something to do. Praise your child as soon as they behave well again.

### ***How To Manage Tantrums in Public***

If a tantrum occurs when you are out, you will need to use quiet time. Quiet time involves finding a safe place to sit with your child such as a park bench or your car. Wait beside them (without talking) until they have been quiet for 30 seconds, before going on. If your child does not quieten down, as a last resort pick them up, go home and take them straight to time-out. Try again next time.

### ***General Tips***

#### ***Be Consistent***

- If you have started to ignore a tantrum, continue to ignore your child until they become quiet.
- If you use time-out, do not let your child out until they have been quiet for a short time. It may take

- your child 20 minutes or more to be calm and quiet.
- Do not cuddle or comfort when your child throws a tantrum.
- Do not talk to your child in time-out as this can make the tantrum worse. Your child will learn an important message—when you have yourself under control you are welcome to rejoin us.
- Toddlers who throw lots of tantrums may need to go to time-out several times on the first day.

### ***Forgive and Forget***

Do not mention the incident after time-out. As soon as your child is busy in an activity, praise them.

### ***Keep Track***

You may find it helpful to write down each time you use time-out and how long it takes. By the end of the first week tantrums should be less frequent, and time-out should be shorter and needed less often.

### ***Key Steps***

- Plan ahead to prevent tantrums.
- Give your child attention and praise when they are behaving well.
- If a tantrum occurs, use planned ignoring for younger toddlers.
- For older toddlers, tell your child what you want them to do, and use time-out if the tantrum continues.
- Return your child to an activity and do not mention the incident after the tantrum stops.

***See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and there has been no progress after two weeks, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.***



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Published by the Victorian Parenting Centre 2005.  
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Code: PPT2009