

How to Handle Your Child's Temper Tantrum



A tantrum can turn your child.....into a monster in no time flat.

The only people who find temper tantrums amusing are a child's grandparents—because it's finally payback time as they watch their grown children struggle helplessly with their own little monsters. Unfortunately, tantrums are a fact of life for anyone with young children. They usually start before age two, when children experiment with different ways to communicate with others and to get what they want. Tantrums become more infrequent around age four, but some children continue to “throw fits” for years after that—even into adulthood. Yikes! Don't worry, though. While tantrums are unavoidable to some extent, you can prevent many of them and help your child learn better coping mechanisms by following some simple steps. This article will help you and your child navigate the tantrum years with your sanity intact.

Steps

1. Remain calm enough to handle the tantrum properly. The worst thing parents can do is have a temper tantrum over their child's temper tantrum. Children need a calming influence, especially during a tantrum, and if you can't provide that, you can't expect them to calm down. Take a few deep breaths and wait at least a few seconds before deciding on a response.
2. Offer your child a choice of coping strategies. For example, your son wants ice cream, but it's too close to dinner. Say: "Johnny, you're really getting upset now. Calm down or you'll have to go to your room." You have given him a choice -- either control himself or, if he can't, retreat to a place where he won't influence others. If he makes the right choice (to calm down), remember to compliment him: "You asked for ice cream and I said no. I want to thank you for taking no for an answer." Conversely, have consequences and enforce them if he chooses to get upset. Guide him to his room and firmly insist that he remain there until he calms down, for example. This is easier with a two-year-old than with an eight-year-old, so the younger you begin the learning process the better.
3. Stem your own rising frustration level. Tantrums can raise blood pressure and stress levels in parents as well as children. If you really can't handle a tantrum, make sure the child will be safe and spend a few moments away from him or her. The time-out has a calming effect for both of you. Get your spouse or other responsible person to look after the child while you calm down. Put your child in his or her room with a gate in front of the door if necessary.
4. Try to determine the cause of the tantrum. Tantrums can be triggered by a number of things, and the cause of the tantrum should help determine your response to it. If a tantrum is caused by hunger or sleepiness, you should feed the child or allow him or her to take a nap as soon as possible. If the tantrum is triggered by frustration or fear, you need to comfort your child. If, however, your child is acting up because he or she can't get his or her way...
5. Do not reward the tantrum. If the parents give in, tantrums become a launching point for the child—a way to deal with the world socially. If you allow yourself to be held

hostage by tantrums, your child will continue to use them long past the age when they would otherwise cease. Even if the child is throwing a fit because he hasn't received enough attention, don't reward the behavior now. Instead, resolve to make long-term changes to avoid future outbursts. Try not to panic or make concessions, but leave the scene, even if just for a few minutes. Go to the crying room at church—that's what it's there for, after all—to the car, or even to the restroom to allow your child and you to regain control.

6. Take steps to prevent injury. Some children can become quite animated during a tantrum. If this occurs, remove dangerous objects from the child's path or steer the child away from danger. Try to avoid restraining a child during a tantrum, but sometimes this is necessary and comforting. Be gentle (do not use excessive force), but hold him or her firmly. Speak reassuringly to the child, especially if the tantrum is the result of disappointment, frustration, or unfamiliar surroundings.
7. Explain to the child that you will talk to him or her when he or she calms down. This will help your child to understand that you are ignoring her because her behavior is unacceptable, not because you don't care about her. When the child calms down, fulfill your part of the bargain by discussing the tantrum and the child's concerns.
8. Avoid trying to reason with any child who is in the middle of a full-blown tantrum, especially in a public place. Give him or her time to vent. Instead, give the child phrases to express the emotions that they are experiencing. Say phrases like, "You must be really tired after such a long day," or, "You must feel frustrated that you can't have what you want right now." This not only will help the child verbalize this later, but shows empathy for their feelings without having to give in.
9. Discuss the behavior with your child once the tantrum has ended. While there's no use trying to reason with a child in the midst of a tantrum, you both can learn a lot by discussing the incident afterwards. Explain that the behavior is unacceptable, but also make sure your child understands that you love him or her regardless. Try to discover the cause of the tantrum if you haven't already, and take the opportunity to discuss better alternatives with your child.

Tips

- Have a plan: When facing a trouble spot, such as the grocery store's checkout counter, discuss the situation with your child ahead of time. For example: "Susie, the last few times we've had trouble at the checkout counter. From now on, here's what we'll do: When you get to the checkout counter, I'll let you choose a package of gum IF you can behave yourself until then. If you scream and yell because you want more, then you won't be able to have any gum. Now, Susie, tell me what we're going to do?" (Child should then repeat the directions back to you.) Once the plan is understood by both of you, there's no need to explain it all again at checkout time. If Susie behaves, she will be rewarded as planned; if not, she loses out. She already knows the rules.
- It should be noted that children with developmental difficulties may not always understand verbal instructions. Children with developmental challenges can sometimes even repeat back the instructions but still have difficulties turning those instructions into actions. If you experience this, try making a visual chart of what you would like to have happen. Cut pictures out of magazines or draw a chart with stick figures and go over it with the child. The child may understand better if he/she can see the pictures in addition to the verbal instructions.

- Children need both positive and negative reinforcement. While it may be good idea to offer a pack of gum if the child behaves in the checkout line, they also need to understand that a punishment for misbehaving will also be in effect.
- Set your child up to succeed, not to fail. For instance, if you know that it's already been a long day and she hasn't eaten since lunchtime, maybe wait until the next morning to go to the grocery store. If that's not an option, try to engage your child while shopping, and get in and out quickly. Remember how small they are and that they're just still learning to be patient!
- If you're in a public place, sometimes the best solution is simply to leave, even if you have to carry your child kicking and screaming. Remain calm, and remember that your child is behaving from a place of huge emotions, not reason.
- A tantrum is not manipulation unless you let it become that. And often, the tantrum isn't even really about what just happened most recently; it can be the release of pent-up frustration over days' worth of the struggles of trying to do the right thing, and learning to be a socialized little person.
- Final word, never reprimand your child when you are upset at what they did. Calm down and call them afterwards explaining the situation. If need be let them pass judgment.

Warnings

- Don't frequently rely on providing a distraction to get a young child out of a tantrum. Teach the child not to throw tantrums, and he or she will more quickly develop other coping mechanisms.
- Don't expect behavior that's not age-appropriate. As the parent, you don't have to accept rude or hurtful behaviors and you should set limits, but be aware of what is normal for the age of your child. Remember that the phases will pass, and your job is to guide and love your child through them, not to force them to the next phase.
- Don't cave in just to avoid embarrassment, which also teaches the child to perform for a crowd. Although parents feel as though all eyes are upon them, when their child acts up in public, the reality is most onlookers are saying, "Go for it," when they see parents setting reasonable limits for their child.
- Never surrender to your child's temper tantrums at home. Learn to handle them at home, and you will have fewer occasions to be embarrassed in a public place.
- If you've tried the strategies listed in this article but you're still experiencing frequent tantrums, it may be time to seek professional help in understanding your child and knowing how to work with him/her. Children with developmental or other difficulties may require the skills and expertise of a specialist. Explain to the professional what you and your child are experiencing. Take an article like this with you and show the professional what tactics you've been trying and tell how they've worked. The professional may have other suggestions or may recommend further evaluation.