

Dealing with 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.

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).

