

Tantrums



Many people think a two year old and “tantrum” automatically go together, however this is not the only age when a person has temper tantrums.

Young children’s temper tantrums usually occur because they are:

- Tired.
- Hungry.
- Need or want some attention.
- Cannot do what they want.

Tantrums shows that a child wants to become more independent. That doesn’t mean that you have to allow them. There are ways to handle a tantrum.

- Ignore, ignore, ignore. Don’t react.
- Walk by him, or go into the next room. If you don’t make a big deal over the tantrum, it will probably either not be repeated or the next time it won’t last as long.
- When he can talk, teach him how to tell you what he wants and to express his feelings.
- Practice how you want him to get your attention.

“Time out” may be appropriate. You probably will want to watch him while he is in time out so choose a place that is close by and where you can see him but he can’t see you. Let him know that you choose not to listen to the screaming.

If you need to go shopping or run errands and your child is having a bad day, consider leaving him with someone or cutting your errands short when you can see that he has reached his limit. Better yet, return home before he has reached his limit.

If your child throws a tantrum in public, remember that anyone who has ever had a two-year old will understand.

Always watch for times when he behaves appropriately. Praise him for his good behavior. Be specific, such as: “I liked the way that you let me know what you wanted.”

NO! NO! NO!

A Lesson on Temper Tantrums

Playgroup #17

Materials Needed

- Paper and pencils for discussion question if desired
- Various props for a Role Playing activity. (Toys, food, blanket, etc.)

Handouts

- Tips for Tantrums

Introduction

Gather the mothers around and discuss the following questions.

1. What is a tantrum?
2. Why do tantrums occur?
3. What should you do when tantrums happen?
4. How can you prevent tantrums?
5. How do *you* feel and react when you are frustrated?

Now imagine how it feels when you're determined to program your DVD player and aren't able to do so; no matter how hard you try, you cannot succeed because you do not understand how it works. This can be extremely frustrating. What do you do in a situation like this? Do you swear, throw the manual, walk away, and slam the door on your way out? This is the adult version of a tantrum. Toddlers, just like adults, are also trying to master their little world and when they aren't able to accomplish a task, they often use one of the only tools at their disposal for venting frustration — a tantrum.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives

- Understand what a tantrum is and why they happen
- Know when and how to react to your child's tantrums
- Know what you can do to prevent tantrums

What is a Temper Tantrum?

The National Library of Medicine defines temper tantrums as disruptive or undesirable behaviors or emotional outbursts displayed in response to unmet needs or desires. Tantrums may also refer to an inability to control emotions due to frustration or difficulty

expressing a particular need or desire. These acting-out behaviors are extremely common and natural during the early years of childhood development.

Temper tantrums can range anywhere from whining and crying to screaming, kicking, hitting, and breath holding. They are all equally common in boys as well as girls. Tantrums generally begin around the ages of 12-18 months and worsen between two and three years of age. Luckily as language skills improve, tantrums tend to decrease and usually stop by age 4. It is important to realize all children's temperaments vary dramatically; some kids may experience regular tantrums, while others have them rarely. Even the most good-natured toddler has an occasional temper tantrum. They are a normal part of development and do not have to be seen as something negative.

Why Do Kids Have Tantrums?

Strong emotions are hard for young children to hold inside; often the only way they know how to express their emotions are through tantrums. There are many things that cause children to have temper tantrums. It could be that the child is seeking attention or perhaps they are tired, hungry, or uncomfortable. In addition, tantrums are a way to express frustration and anger. At this age children are eager to take control and want to be independent.

Tantrums are especially common for toddlers because they generally understand more than they can express. Try to step into your child's shoes; this will help you understand why they are having a tantrum in the first place. It is important to understand and remember that your child may not know how to express their feelings and that is why they are having the tantrum. The more you understand this concept, the better able you will be to help your child and be able to *teach* them to express their feelings in different ways.

The following are some reason your child may have a temper tantrum:

- Your child may not fully understand what you are saying or asking, and may get confused.
- Your child may become upset when others cannot understand what she is saying.
- Your child may not have the words to describe her feelings and needs.
- Your child has not yet learned to solve problems on her own and gets discouraged easily.
- Your child may be hungry, but may not recognize it.
- Your child may be tired or not getting enough sleep.
- Your child may be anxious or uncomfortable.
- Your child may be reacting to stress or changes at home.
- Your child may be jealous of a friend or sibling.
- Your child may not yet be able to do the things she can imagine or wants to do.

Preventing Tantrums

Unfortunately there is no way to prevent all tantrums, but there are a few things you can do that may help reduce the chances of one. As a parent you will frequently be able to tell

when tantrums are coming. Your child may seem moody, cranky, or difficult or may start to whine and whimper. Finally, he may then start to cry, kick, scream, fall to the ground, or hold his breath. Other times, a tantrum may come on suddenly for no obvious reason. As their parent, try to be attentive and aware of the warning signs and do all you can to prepare yourself and your child for what is coming.

A few more prevention tips:

- **Be consistent** and *do not give into a tantrum*. When tantrums do not accomplish anything for your child, they are less likely to continue.
- **Encourage** your child to use words to tell you how he is feeling, such as “I’m really Mad.” Try to understand how he is feeling and suggest words he can use to describe his feelings.
- **Set reasonable limits** and don’t expect your child to be perfect. Give simple reasons for the rules you set, and don’t change the rules.
- **Keep a daily routine** as much as possible, so your child knows what to expect.
- **Set a good example**. Avoid arguing or yelling in front of your child.
- **Let your child choose** whenever possible. This is a time where they are trying to be independent and take control. Help them in that process by giving them decisions that you approve of both results.

For example, if your child resists a bath, make it clear that he will be taking a bath, but offer a simple decision he can make on his own. Instead of saying, “Do you want to take a bath?” Try saying, “It’s time for your bath. Would you like to walk upstairs or have me carry you?”

- **Avoid** situations that will frustrate your child, such as playing with children or toys that are too advanced for your child’s abilities.
- **Avoid** long outings or visits where your child has to sit still or cannot play for long periods of time. If you have to take a trip, bring along your child’s favorite book or toy to entertain him.
- **Be prepared** with healthy snacks when your child gets hungry.
- Make sure your child is **well rested**, especially before a busy day or stressful activity.
- Try to use an **upbeat tone** when asking your child to do something. This way it sounds more like an invitation than an order.
- **Don’t battle over unimportant things**, choose what things are most important for you to enforce.
- When you see your child starting to get worked-up, try to **divert their attention** to a new activity.

Tantrum Tactics

The most important thing to keep in mind when you're faced with a child in the throes of a tantrum, no matter what the cause: **Keep cool**. Getting frustrated yourself will only complicate the problem. Kids can sense when parents are becoming frustrated and this usually make their frustration worse; then you will have a more exaggerated tantrum on your hands.

Instead of getting frustrated take deep breaths and try to think clearly. Your child relies on you to be the example. Hitting and spanking don't help; physical tactics send the message that using force and physical punishment is OK. Instead, have enough self-control for both of you.

Try to understand what's going on. Tantrums should be handled differently depending on the cause. Try to understand where your child is coming from. For example, if your little one has just had a great disappointment, you may need to provide comfort.

When the tantrum stems from a child being refused something it is a completely different situation. Toddlers have fairly rudimentary reasoning skills, so you aren't likely to get far with explanations. **Ignoring the outburst** is one way to handle it — this is only a good method if the tantrum poses no threat to your child or others. Continue your activities, paying no attention to your child but remaining within sight. Don't leave your little one alone, though, otherwise he or she may feel abandoned on top of all of the other uncontrollable emotions.

Kids who are in danger of hurting themselves or others during a tantrum should be taken to a quiet, safe place to calm down. This also applies to tantrums in public places.

Older kids are more likely to use tantrums to get their way if they've learned that this behavior works. Once kids are school age, it's appropriate to send them to their rooms to cool off. Rather than setting a specific time limit, parents can tell them to stay in the room until they have regained control. The former option is empowering — kids can affect the outcome by their own actions, thereby gaining a sense of control that was lost during the tantrum.

After the Storm

Although tantrums can be a frustrating experience for you as a parent, it is very important that you are *especially supportive* after they are over. Children are often especially vulnerable after a tantrum when they know they've been less than adorable. Now is the time for a hug and reassurance that your child is loved, no matter what. However, it is also important to **not** reward your child after a tantrum by giving in. This will only prove to your little one that the tantrum was effective. Instead, *verbally praise* your child for regaining control.

When to Call the Doctor

As you now know, tantrums are a natural part of childhood; however, you should consult your child's pediatrician if:

- The tantrums increase in frequency, intensity, or duration.
- Your child frequently hurts himself or herself or others.
- Your child is destructive.

- Tantrums get worse after age four
- Your child holds his or her breath during tantrums, especially if he or she faints
- You have questions about what you're doing or what your child is doing.
- You're uncomfortable with your responses.
- You keep giving in.
- The tantrums arouse a lot of bad feelings.
- Your child displays mood disorders such as negativity, low self-esteem, or extreme dependence.

Your doctor can also check for any physical problems that may be contributing to the tantrums, although this is not common. These include hearing or vision problems, a chronic illness, language delays, or a learning disability.

Activity

To help us better understand the child's perspective, pair up the mothers and assign them a scenario/topic to Role Play a temper-tantrum. Have one of the mothers act as the child and the other act as the parent. Encourage mothers to implement things they learned from the lesson into their Role Play.

- Toys
- Food
- Naps
- Clean up
- Bath time

Suggested Reading

The Temper Tantrum Book by Edna Mitchell Preston

The Quarreling Book by Charlotte Zolotow

Andrew's Angry Words by Dorothea Lackner

The Chocolate-Covered-Cookie Tantrum by Deborah Clumenthal

References

National Library of Medicine, National Institute of Health: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/>

The American Academy of Pediatrics: <http://www.aap.org/>

Kids Health for Parents: <http://kidshealth.org/>