

# Every child will throw a tantrum at some point. But there are ways to deal with tantrum episodes and prevent them from happening again...

## Prevention:

- ‘Toddler-proof’ your home by placing dangerous or breakable things out of reach.
- Have clear routines to your child’s day, for example regular lunch, nap, bath and bedtimes.
- Plan ahead, keeping an eye on frustration levels so you can step in before they go over the top.
- Provide lots of opportunities to let off steam every day – running around outside, at the playground, dancing to music.
- Give children **some** control and choice over what to eat, wear or play with, but choices with limitations ie a choice of 2 “ would you like cheese and crackers or a sausage roll?”
- Use distractions and diversions for as long as they work – a new toy, a changed activity, a song or game.
- Be consistent about boundaries and what is acceptable – if parents have differing rules this can lead to inconsistency and insecurity
- As children reach pre-school age, discuss how you want them to behave in different situations and have clear, simple rules.
- Give them a 2 minute warning “In 2 minutes I want you to come and have your nappy changed”. This gives them time to finish what they are doing and prepare them for the change.

## Top Tips for Cutting Down Tantrums

- Aim for some happy, relaxed times every day – reading a story, visiting the park, playing a game.
- Show a good example by remaining calm when times are stressful. Role modelling a calm demeanour will encourage your toddler to do the same in the long run.
- Cut down negatives – constantly saying ‘No’ will add to a toddler’s frustration. Instead, use phrases like ‘later’, or ‘after lunch’.
- Ask yourself – “Do I often say no, then give in later?” If you do you are sending the message that No means nothing because they will get their own way anyway.
- Don’t give children too much control or too many choices. This makes them insecure.
- Keep aware of new stresses (potty training, starting nursery) that may need more sympathy.
- Respect your child’s feelings. Feeling understood will reduce your child’s need for tantrums. Try saying, ‘I know that makes you mad’ or ‘That must have made you feel sad, but it’s not a nice way to behave’ Your child will see that their feelings matter and can gradually learn to put them into words, saying “I’m angry” instead of acting it out.
- Use positive parenting – plenty of praise and attention for behaviour you do want, trying to ignore as much as possible behaviour you don’t.
- Avoid harsh discipline – shouting and punishments only make tantrums worse. Don’t make threats of punishments you can’t or aren’t prepared to follow through with. (ie Father Christmas won’t come, we won’t go on holiday, the policeman will come and get you).
- If you get it wrong – ie shout and escalate the situation it’s okay to say sorry and let them see you are human too. Learning humility and being sorry is all part of the process too.
- Use humour to defuse tricky situations – silly songs, laughter, making a game of tidying toys can all work brilliantly! A hug or a tickle at the right moment can also change a child’s mood.

- Most children do grow out of the need for tantrums when they have more language and understanding. But the way you deal with them in the toddler years is important. If they are handled harshly, with responses like yelling and smacking, or if you constantly ignore their feelings and need for comfort, they may well become worse and carry on for longer. Equally if you reward them for it by giving in to their demands you are teaching them that “this is the way to get what I want”, and they will never learn to deal with their feelings appropriately.

**With all the previous strategies in place, parents are likely to have a relatively tantrum-free life. But it makes sense to have a few ideas up your sleeve for how to deal with them.**

### **For a minor episode...**

- Try ignoring, by walking into another room or just carrying on with your own tasks
- Use calming techniques to lower your own stress levels – deep breathing, relaxing your muscles, positive talk inside your head: ‘I will keep calm’.
- If ignoring hasn’t worked, some children can be cajoled out of an episode. Say something like, ‘Time to stop now – I’ll count to 10’, then give plenty of praise and cuddles if the tantrum stops.
- In the supermarket, it is sometimes best to just pick up your child and go outside to cut down your embarrassment.

### **For a really major tantrum, different tactics are needed...**

- Speak calmly, saying things like “I know you’re cross, but you need to stop now’.
- Hold your child tightly, preferably making eye contact. This is to keep them safe, it should NOT be a cuddle
- Sometimes you just have to weather the storm till your child calms down.
- ‘Time out’ can help if you find it impossible to stay calm. Time out involves putting your child somewhere safe but boring (for example a playpen, pushchair or the bottom step) for a couple of minutes. It should never be forced in anger and is not really understood by under 2’s. It may work best for parents to take it themselves!
- If they ask or demand something during a tantrum, you should not give it to them as this is rewarding inappropriate behaviour, say things like “When you stop shouting at me and ask me nicely/calmly you can have ....”

**AND FINALLY:** Remember **you** are the adult, be calm, firm, fair and consistent and your children will learn to deal with their frustrations and grow up to love and respect you. If you wouldn’t allow an adult to speak to you in a certain way – don’t allow your child to.