

Temper Tantrums



What are temper tantrums?

Temper tantrums are a way a young child lets out strong emotions before they are able to express them in socially acceptable ways. A child having a tantrum may seem totally out of control. But these fits of rage, stomping, screaming, and throwing themselves to the floor are a normal part of childhood development. Temper tantrums often happen only with a parent. They are a way a child communicates their feelings. Parents can learn from their child by understanding what caused the temper tantrum to erupt.

Temper tantrums often start at about 1 year of age. They continue until age 2 to 3. They start to happen less often as a child becomes more able to communicate their wants and needs.

What causes temper tantrums?

As a young child learns more and becomes more independent, they want to do more than they can physically and emotionally manage. This is frustrating to the child. The frustrations are expressed in many ways. Temper tantrums are worse and happen more often when a child is hungry, tired, or sick. Some reasons children have temper tantrums include:

- Want to be on their own, and get upset when they can't do what they want
- Are in a transition, such as from day care to home
- Are trying to get attention to test the rules
- Have something taken away from them
- Have not learned all the words to tell you what they are feeling or want, and this upsets them
- Don't understand what you want them to do
- Are tired or hungry
- Are worried or upset
- Feel stress in the home

How to prevent temper tantrums

Temper tantrums sometimes happen without warning. But parents can often tell when a child is getting upset and about to have a tantrum. Knowing the times when your child is more likely to have a tantrum and thinking ahead may help. An example is not letting your child get overtired or hungry. Some suggestions for preventing or keeping temper tantrums to a minimum include:

- Stick to routines for meals and sleep times. Don't go on long outings, or delay meals and naps.
- Distract your child with a toy they are allowed to have.
- Be reasonable about what to expect from your child. Don't expect your child to be perfect.
- Help your child to prevent frustration. Prepare your child for changes or events by talking about them before they happen.
- Let your child know your rules and stick to them.

How to respond during a temper tantrum

Here are some helpful hints for the best ways to respond during your child's temper tantrum:

- Stay calm.
- Ignore your child until they are calmer. Keep doing whatever you were doing before the tantrum happens.
- Don't hit or spank your child.
- Don't give in to the tantrum. When parents give in, children learn to use inappropriate behavior to get their way.
- Don't bribe your child to stop the tantrum. The child then learns to act inappropriately to get a reward.
- Remove potentially dangerous objects from your child or your child's path.
- Use time-out for a short period to allow your child to get back in control.

What else should parents know about temper tantrums?

Temper tantrums generally happen less often as children get older. Children should play and act normally between tantrums. But talk with your child's healthcare provider if any of these things happen:

- Temper tantrums are severe, last long, or happen very often.
- Your child has a lot of trouble talking and can't let you know what they need.
- Temper tantrums continue or get worse after age 3 to 4 year.
- Your child has signs of illness along with temper tantrums or holds their breath to cause fainting.
- Your child harms themselves or others during tantrums.

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