



Top Tips for Surviving Tantrums

By: Wendy Sue Swanson, MD, MBE, FAAP

Tantrums are a normal part of development. They happen most between ages 1 and 3 years, but as so many of us know, some kids are huge tantrum throwers, and some are not. You can't avoid every tantrum, but here are some ideas to help you survive them more gracefully.



1. **Give your child enough attention and "catch them being good."** Provide specific praise in successful moments. However, don't feel that if one child tantrums more than another that you aren't providing enough attention. Personality is infused in behaviors, including tantrums.
2. **During a tantrum, give your child control over little things** (offer small, directed choices with options rather than yes/no questions).
3. **Create distraction.** Move to a new room. Offer a safer toy. However silly, sing a song.
4. **Choose your battles** and accommodate when you can. Sometimes you have to give in a little to settle yourself; that's OK. However, your consistency from day to day is key in reducing the level and frequency of tantrums. So is time.
5. Know your child's limits. Obviously, some days are harder than others. Sometimes we don't get to finish the to-do list.
6. **Do not ignore behaviors like hitting,** kicking, biting, or throwing. Have a zero-tolerance policy.
7. **Set your child up for success.** If tantrums peak when your child is hungry, have a healthy snack with you when you're out of the house. If they peak when your child is fatigued, prioritize sleep/nap time even if you miss things. Sometimes it's far better on all of us.
8. **Give yourself a break when you need it.** Take turns with another parent or friend when your frustration escalates.

When you can't ignore your child's tantrum

Sometimes it's really hard for us to stop tantrums. There are a couple of times when you can't ignore your child in a tantrum.

- If your child is physically at risk of running into the street or in danger, grab them tightly and hold them or make it very clear to them.
- If your child is hitting or biting, stop it immediately and make sure that you let them know that it's absolutely not acceptable by moving their body out of a situation or taking away a privilege.

The light at the end of the tunnel

Know this: Tantrums do tend to get better after the age of 3. Although they don't go away entirely. Your child will do tantrums to get things that they need normally and naturally between the ages of 1 and 3 years.

Talk with your pediatrician if you're concerned about some of those behaviors. Do your best to remain calm. Use your friends and family around you to help understand how to stand back and wait for tantrums to dissolve on their own so you can come back to your child with great comfort.

More information

- [How to Ease Your Child’s Separation Anxiety \(/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-Separation-Anxiety.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-Separation-Anxiety.aspx)
- [What's the Best Way to Discipline My Child? \(/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx\)](/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx)
- [Aggressive Behavior \(/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Aggressive-Behavior.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Aggressive-Behavior.aspx)

Last Updated 4/21/2021

Source Mama Doc Medicine: Finding Calm and Confidence in Parenting, Child Health, and Work-Life Balance (Copyright © 2014 Wendy Sue Swanson)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.