

TODDLER TANTRUMS

Why toddlers throw tantrums

Tantrums are a normal part of a child's development and often caused by their inability to communicate their needs/desires quickly enough, resulting in intense frustration and a tantrum. Many children will start to display these behaviour patterns before their first birthday and continue in varying degrees until they are approaching four. However, with sensitivity, understanding and a firm approach many can be avoided or at least minimised! Whatever you do, don't take them personally!

What triggers a tantrum?

Common triggers are tiredness, boredom and conversely over-stimulation, hunger, pain or discomfort, fear or another emotional reaction. Attention seeking is another common reason. If you are able to identify what the triggers are for your child, you can often diffuse a tantrum before it gets into full flow by distracting them with something else. Watch for the signs and listen to your child. Sometimes an explanation of a situation in clear and simple language will give a child sufficient confidence to prevent a tantrum that may have been due to emotional anxiety. It may be that you child has been trying to tell you something quietly in their own way but you have missed their cue or simply not listened and now they are telling you in the only other way they know – a way that will surely grasp your attention!

Keep cool

A child's tantrum may not faze you unduly at home where you haven't got an audience, but they have a habit of inducing stress and embarrassment to most sane adults in public. However, if you aim to treat all tantrums in the same, passive way then the outbursts will hopefully be short lived. The most effective way to treat a tantrum is to ignore it and not establish eye contact. If necessary, remove your child from the situation. For example, in a supermarket you may decide to calmly carry your child to a quieter and less public location - perhaps to your car - to let off steam and calm down. Once your child has stopped their tantrum, it is then time to give them attention and eye contact and distract them with something else. If you 'reward' the tantrum either by giving in to their demands or by giving them a strong negative reaction by losing your calm, they have identified a behaviour that is guaranteed to give results and they are sure to practice it again. Some children do need to be held when they lose control to prevent them from hurting themselves. This is fine – tell them that you are going to hold them because you love them and because you know that they are angry. You'll let them go when they regain control. When they do give in, you'll both appreciate the closeness.

How to avoid tantrums

Build strong communication links with your child. Always try to establish eye contact with your child when you are talking to them – they will then know that you are listening to them and conversely, they will be obliged to listen to you too. Take time to talk, interact and play with your child regularly throughout the day. This will foster a strong relationship based on love and cooperation. Listen to your child and respect them for the individual that they are. If they feel valued and know that you are trying to understand what they are trying to tell you, they are more likely to respect and listen to

you in turn. Set consistent boundaries and guidelines for your child and have a routine so your child knows what to expect and what is expected of them.

What if it's a result of sheer frustration?

If your child is throwing a tantrum as a result of their inability to complete a task, for example build a tower or put their sock on, then empathy is required. Soothe your child by acknowledging their feelings, ask them to tell you what it is that they want and assist them in achieving their goal if they'll let you. Use such a scenario as an opportunity to connect with your child, tell them that it is okay and turn the negative situation into a positive one.

Remember, it's not just your child who throws a tantrum – usually other parents are quick to empathise with you as opposed to judging you – it's always a relief when it is 'someone else's child and not your own' having the paddy. Hold your head up, take a deep breath and stay calm!