

Top Tips for Preventing Tantrums

Have Realistic Expectations

As toddler's skills develop and they become increasingly independent it's easy to fall into the trap of expecting too much too soon. Try to be mindful of whether your expectations are developmentally appropriate for your child.

Disguise No's

Like adults, toddlers don't respond well to "no"; especially when it's a word they hear all the time. Next time your toddler asks for something see if you can find a way to say no without actually using the word no. For example, try saying "you can ride your bike after lunch, right now we can do a puzzle or play with your Lego" instead of "no you can't ride your bike right now"

Offer a Choice

Helping children to develop autonomy is important for their social and emotional development. Where appropriate offer a choice – "would you like juice or water with lunch?" Just make sure you're happy with the choices you offer; offering juice and then renege on this will escalate rather than de-escalate your child's frustration.

Know Your Child's Early Warning Signs

Tantrums can often be prevented with early intervention so know your child's early warning signs. Be especially watchful for early warning signs if your child is sick, tired, or hungry.

When you notice early warning signs – intervene. Re-focus your child's attention elsewhere or, if your child is frustrated empathise with their struggle – "I can see your having a hard time with the puzzle. Puzzles can be pretty tricky. Would you like some help?"

Give Time Warnings

Switching between tasks requires cognitive flexibility, a skills that many toddlers don't yet have. Help your toddler to cope by letting them know when they have 10-, 5-, and 2-minutes left of an enjoyable activity and prepare them for what's next – "we have 5-minutes left on the swings and then we're going home to have some lunch"

Give Instructions Instead of Making Requests

Next time you're asking your toddler to do something listen to see whether you've given an instruction ("please pick up your books now") or made a request ("can you please pick up your books now?"). Requests imply a degree of choice, but instructions help toddlers to clearly understand what's expected. Help your toddler to meet your expectations by giving clear instructions.

Temper Tantrums

Toddlerhood is a time of rapid growth and development. As toddlers develop new skills they are eager to assert themselves, communicate their likes and dislikes, and function independently.

At the same time, toddlers are limited by their developing skills including skills for self-control and skills for communicating with words and this can be a source of frustration for them.

Until their emotion regulation skills are better developed, toddlers express their frustration through tantrums.

Tantrums are a normal part of toddlerhood but 'normal' encompasses a wide range of variability in terms of the severity and frequency of tantrums.

Some toddlers lose their cool only occasionally, while others have a much harder time staying calm when things don't get their way. Kids who struggle to stay calm will need more help to learn to resist tantrums.

Toddler meltdowns are stressful. Until your toddler develops the skills they need to cope with frustration, there are a number of things you can do to support them and help them keep their cool.

If your toddler's behaviour continues to be difficult to manage, consider speaking to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist.