

Tantrums

Does your child tend to engage in episodes of screaming and/or crying when they don't get their way? Do you find that it is hard to help them calm down? Tantrums are very common and even developmentally appropriate among toddler and preschool aged children. As your child matures and they learn to better regulate their emotions, the frequency, duration and intensity of their tantrum behaviour will often decrease. Some children require a bit more guidance and support to have fewer tantrums. If you are struggling with knowing what to do when your child engages in this behaviour, rest assured, there are some simple strategies you can use to decrease your child's tantrums.

What does a tantrum look like?

- Flopping to the floor
- Physical aggression (e.g. hitting, kicking, biting, hair pulling, pinching, scratching)
- Bouncing up and down
- Throwing items
- Destruction of items/property



What does a tantrum sound like?

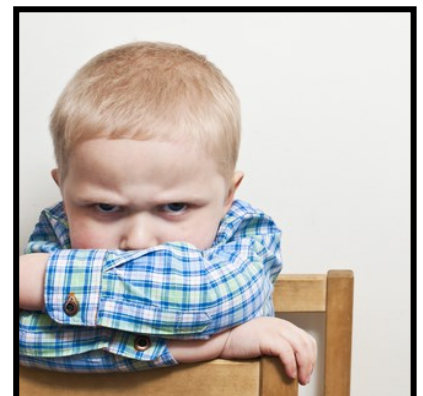
- Crying
- Whining
- Screaming
- Yelling
- Verbal refusal (e.g. "No!")
- Negative language
- Negative self-statements
- Inappropriate language (swearing)

Tantrums are a part of the developmental stage that children can go through. Tantrums can start as early as 12 months of age and tend to subside around three to four years of age with increased language development. A checklist such as the "LookSee" could be used to monitor that your child is meeting their milestones for development based on their age. If your child continues to have frequent, intense tantrums, follow up with your doctor to rule out possible medical, developmental or psychological reasons as to why tantrums might not be decreasing.

Where do I begin?

To understand why tantrum behaviour happens, you will have to do a little detective work. Following a few simple steps will help you to better understand your child's behaviour.

1. Observe the behaviour and the circumstances that surround it. What happens just before (the cause) and just after the behaviour (how it helped get your child to their goal).
2. Write down the information that you observe about the behaviour.
3. Look for patterns. Are there certain people that tantrums happen most often with? Are there certain situations, environments, or times of day that tantrums tend to happen?



Why do problem behaviours happen?

Behaviours occur for four different reasons (functions) to either get or avoid something.

Function (The Why)	Description	Example
Sensory/ Physical	Behaviour happens to fulfill an internal need.	Your child flaps their hands because it results in visual stimulation (which is pleasurable for them).
Escape/ Avoidance	Behaviour happens to escape people, places or tasks.	When asked to get dressed, your child drops to the ground and yells. Their behaviour results in them avoiding or delaying the task.
Attention	Behaviour happens to get a response/attention from parents, siblings, caregivers and/or peers.	Your child screams because it results in the parent giving him/her attention (it could be positive or negative attention).
Tangible/Activity	Behaviour happens to gain access to items/activities in the environment.	When your child is told it's time to leave the park they scream and refuse. Their behaviour results in them getting to stay and play at the park longer.

Prevention

- **Spend Time with Your Child:** Plan to spend at least five to 15 minutes with your child doing a preferred activity every day. Minimize instructions during this time. Let your child lead the play.



- **Set Limits:** Explain what the behaviour expectations are before activities begin and what the consequences will be depending on the outcome. Be sure to follow through with the stated consequence (e.g. "In five more minutes it's time to go. If you come when I call you, you can watch a TV show. If you don't, there will be no TV show.").
- **Offer Choices:** This allows you to give your child a sense of control over their environment while making sure that they stay within the limits you set. For example, "Do you want to leave the park in 10 minutes or 12 minutes?" or "Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the purple shirt?"

Skill building

- **Teach and Practise Relaxation Techniques:** When your child is calm, teach them new skills to learn to relax. Ideas such as smell the flower and blow out the candle (deep breathing) or tracing a square with your finger (breathing in and out at each corner) can be effective. Consider using a visual of these actions to make them more concrete.
- **Teach and Practice the Appropriate Behaviour:** Identify why your child tantrums, and practise teaching them what they should do instead (e.g. if they tantrum instead of using words, when calm, practise having them ask for items and reinforcing them with praise).
- **Model Strategies:** Use the relaxation strategies in front of your child, and describe what you are doing (e.g. "Mommy is going to smell the flower/blow out the candle to stay calm.").



Preventing tantrums in specific situations

Scenario	Possible Strategies
Your child is tired.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the task easier. • Adjust expectations (e.g. your child only has to tidy up a few items versus everything). • You can offer to help with the task.
Bedtime routine is difficult.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep routine consistent from beginning to end (i.e. time routine starts and ends). • Establish preferred activity your child can get when the routine is complete (e.g. favourite books, song etc.).
Your attention is elsewhere (e.g., important phone call).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a bin with activities your child can do on their own. • Let your child know the expectation (e.g. “First do activities quietly for 10 minutes and then we can do an activity together.”). • Ensure to follow through with what you say.
Meal times are difficult or your child is hungry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize waiting (e.g. offer small snacks before the meal or don't call your child to table until the food is ready). • Offer choices (e.g. “Do you want three carrots or four?”). • Keep meal times consistent. • Involve them in the preparation (e.g. setting the table).
Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your child warnings that change is coming and when they can next access the item they are having fun with. • Set up a visual schedule for the task. • Use a first/then board to motivate and show what your child can earn for a successful transition.

How to respond to tantrum behaviour.

Try to stay calm (e.g. take a couple of deep breaths) and acknowledge your child's feelings (e.g. say: “It looks like you are sad/angry. Can I help?”).

If your child is showing a low level behaviour (whining):

- Model a more appropriate way for your child to request what they want (e.g. “When you need help you can say: help please.”).
- Have your child repeat the verbal statement/request (e.g. “You try. Say: help please.”), and then help them complete the task since they asked appropriately.

If your child is showing a high level behaviour (tantrum):

- Do not comment on the behaviours during the tantrum (e.g. throwing toys, hitting).
- Ensure you and your child are safe.
- Minimize the amount of attention given during the tantrum.
- Tell your child “When you are calm, we can talk.”
- Model a calming strategy that you taught your child when they were in a calm state.
- Ensure all caregivers are consistent in responding to your child's tantrum behaviour.
- Once your child is calm, explain the expectations for appropriate behaviour (e.g. “When you want something you need to use words that I can understand.”).
- Return to the reason why the tantrum began. If you asked your child to complete a task, make sure they are still expected to complete the task before moving forward.

Tips and tricks for managing tantrums:

- Reduce demands if your child is having a difficult day or not feeling well.
- Use preferred items/activities to help motivate their behaviour. Only offer items/activities that you have available.
- Whether you are at home or out in the community, have a plan and stick to it.
- Timers can be used to help indicate it's time to change activities or complete a task.
- Advise your child of the behaviour expectation before starting new activities (e.g. "The cars stay on the floor, they are not for throwing. If you throw them, they will be all done."). Be sure to follow through with praise for appropriate use of the cars or the stated consequence for inappropriate use of the cars.
- Provide praise to your child for:
 - using appropriate communication skills rather than tantrum behaviour
 - engaging in appropriate behaviour
 - compliance when asked to complete tasks

Some things to consider:

- If attention is the reason for your child's tantrum behaviour, when you begin to decrease the amount of attention they get, the tantrum may get worse before it gets better. If this happens, it is a good indication that you are on the right track.
- Behaviour that once worked for your child to get them what they want, no longer works and therefore they try harder to make it work again.
- As long as all caregivers are responding to the behaviour in the same way, the escalation should be temporary. If a behaviour no longer works to get your child what they want, there is no reason for them to keep doing it.
- Remember that your child is not engaging in behaviours to frustrate you. They are engaging in these behaviours because they work.
- Be patient and be consistent.

Resources and information have been taken from the following source:

www.lookseechecklist.com/Default



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