

How To Temper Those Tantrums

TANTRUMS:

They're a young child's natural response to life's frustrations.

Parents often feel angry, embarrassed, confused or scared when their child has a tantrum. But tantrums are not a sign of "bad parenting". On the contrary, tantrums say more about your child's struggle with herself, than about anything you have or haven't done. Understanding why children have tantrums makes it easier to cope with these normal childhood moments.

- **Tantrums are a child's way of saying, "I'm so frustrated!"**

Outbursts are typical from about 15 months old to five years, but tantrums are most often seen from 2-3 years old. At this age, children want to do more things on their own than they're able to. They're frustrated by limitations they run up against -- whether they're limits adults set for them, or just their own limited skills. This is part of developing independence and assertiveness, which is a critical piece of healthy growth.

- **Tantrums are a release of the tension that comes with daily life.**

They're more likely to happen when children are tired, hungry or overexcited. Also, tantrums are more common during periods of added stress, like the transition to a new child care program, the birth of a sibling, or parents' divorce.

- **Tantrums are part of a developmental, learning process.**

They're a young child's way to practice releasing stress, developing self-control and pulling himself back together. Gradually, children learn how to do this more easily.

- **Can tantrums be prevented?**

Parents can often tell when a tantrum is coming. Your child may be irritable or sulky. Holding her or playing with her doesn't seem to cheer her up. She pushes the limits and becomes more demanding. She's overloaded and needs a release. You can't always prevent a tantrum, but you can minimize the conditions that lead up to them.

- **Be sure your child gets enough rest.**

Keep consistent bedtime routines. If your child doesn't nap, be sure he has a quiet time each day. Create opportunities for calm activities like looking at books or listening to soothing music.

- **Let kids know about the day's plans ahead of time.** "We're going grocery shopping after lunch, and then to the park." Don't cram too much activity into one day.

- **Create a safe environment for your young child to safely explore in.** Set only necessary limits, but be firm and consistent about them.

- **Put words to your child's feelings.** "You look frustrated. Sometimes it's really hard to decide which puzzle to play with."

- **Teach relaxation.** Even toddlers can learn to take a deep breath to relieve stress.

- **Involve children in routines.** Make trips to the grocery store fun. Ask them how many red items they can find.