

MANAGING NORMAL TANTRUMS

10 TIPS FOR PARENTS



1. Minimize the need to say No by storing breakable items and, where possible, dangerous furniture.
2. Use distraction: When frustration begins to mount, redirect the child to a less frustrating or more acceptable activity.
3. Present choices within the limits of what is acceptable: “Do you want to wear your red pajamas or your blue ones?”
4. Pick your battles carefully. The more important the issue -- e.g., safety precautions -- the more likely you are to be firm and consistent.
5. When a preschool child throws a tantrum, stay within the child’s sight, carrying on normal activities without talking to him. Some preschoolers need to be held in order to regain control.
6. For the older child, establish the rule that he must go to his room until he calms down. When a tantrum occurs, tell him to leave, but do not lecture, threaten, or argue. Model self-control.
7. Take into account your own emotions that may interfere with effective management of a tantrum. Never let a child hurt himself, or others, including you, during a tantrum. A child who is in danger of hurting himself (by thrashing around on a hard floor, for example) should be moved to a safer place.
8. Use words like “out of control” instead of “bad child” to describe tantrum-throwing behavior, and praise the child’s ability to regain control after a tantrum. You might say, “You did a good job getting yourself under control.”
9. Once a tantrum is over, the child is entitled to start over with a clean slate. Comfort may be given, but any original demands the child had should not be fulfilled. Otherwise, tantrums will become a way of life.
10. Try to establish an environment of positive reinforcement in the household, by commenting on and praising desirable or neutral behavior every few minutes as a general habit.

“Temper Tantrums: When to Worry,” Robert Needham, MD, Barbara Howard, MD, and Barry Zuckerman, MD, Contemporary Pediatrics, Vol. 6, August 1989



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