



How To Handle

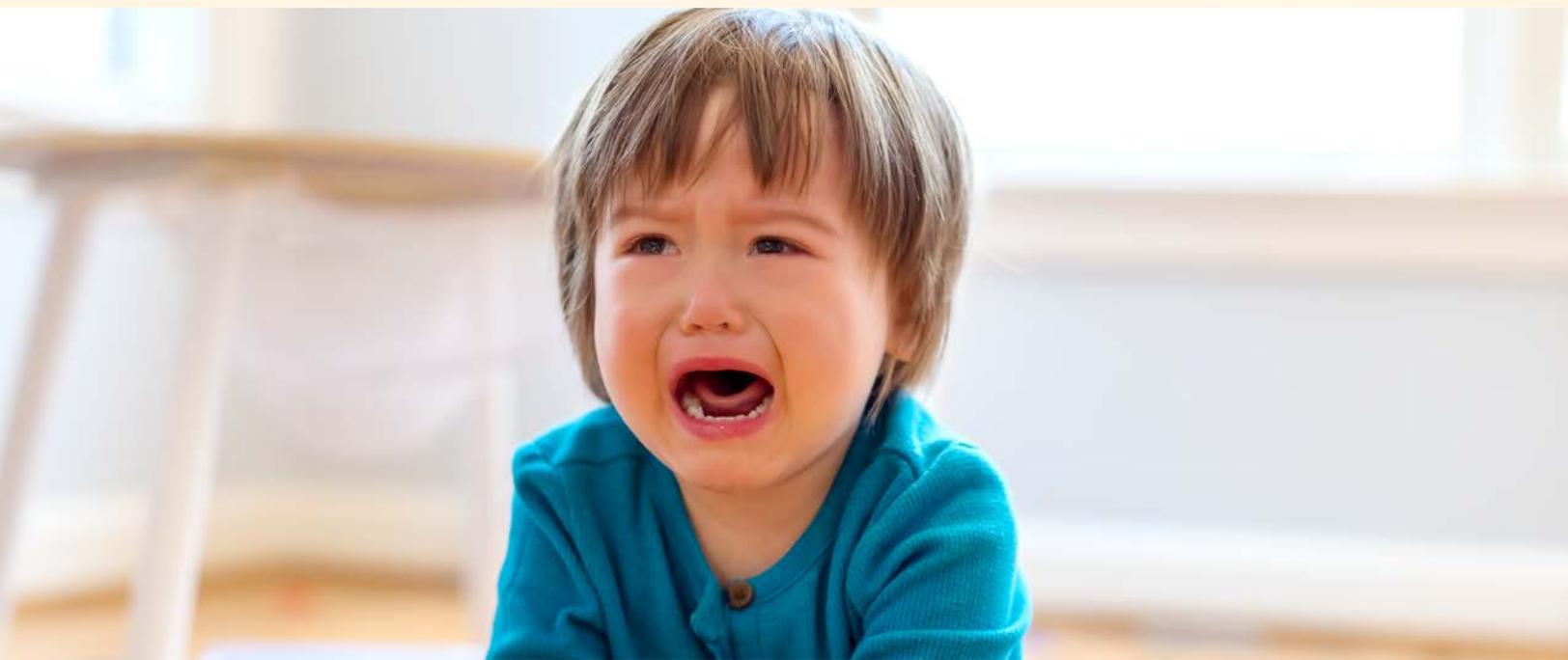
TANTRUMS

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The good news is they're completely developmentally appropriate and expected.

The bad news is that does not suggest they're easy to navigate...

...But we've got you covered!



Tantrums in early childhood occur between the ages of 1-4 years, and are developmentally appropriate responses to the challenges of navigating a complex and sometimes overwhelming world.

Tantrums are not just displays of emotion; they are also **deeply rooted in the developing brain.** Research shows that the prefrontal cortex, responsible for emotional regulation and impulse control, is still maturing during these formative years. This means that young children often struggle to manage their emotions effectively, leading to outbursts of frustration and distress.

By recognizing tantrums as a normal part of childhood development, adults can **approach them with patience and compassion. Instead of viewing tantrums as intentional acts of defiance or manipulation,** we can see them as opportunities to help children learn how to manage their emotions and express themselves in more constructive ways.

The shift in perspective allows us to respond to tantrums with empathy & understanding, fostering a supportive environment where children feel safe to explore and express their feelings.



COMMON TRIGGERS OF TANTRUMS

- **Struggle to Verbalize Feelings:** Children are still developing their language skills, making it challenging for them to express their emotions effectively. When they can't find the words to express themselves, tantrums may occur as a way of communicating their frustration or discomfort.
- **Self-regulation & Decision-making are Developing:** Young children are still learning how to regulate their emotions and make decisions. When faced with overwhelming emotions or choices, they may feel a loss of control, leading to tantrums as a way of expressing their distress.
- **Wants and/or Needs Aren't Being Met:** Tantrums can also arise when children's needs or desires are not being fulfilled. Whether it's hunger, thirst, fatigue, or the desire for attention or autonomy, unmet needs can trigger emotional outbursts.
- **Triple "O": Overwhelmed/Overtired/Overstimulated:** Children, like adults, can become overwhelmed when they're tired, overstimulated, or facing too many demands at once. These overwhelming experiences can push them past their coping limits, resulting in tantrums.

TECHNIQUES TO NAVIGATE TANTRUMS

A tantrum can often be likened to a storm—an intense, sometimes overwhelming outburst of emotions that can seem uncontrollable and disruptive.

Just as with a storm, there are steps we can take to navigate through it. We can prepare by recognizing signs of impending distress, endure the storm by staying calm and present with the child, and patiently wait for it to pass.

Like a storm, a tantrum may cause temporary chaos, but with consistency and support, it eventually subsides. Afterward, just as after a storm, there is an opportunity to rebuild and strengthen connections.

We're going to break down these 7 techniques to better navigate tantrums:

1. Be cognizant of physical cues
2. Avoid rationalizing during the tantrum
3. Stay with your child
4. Establish safe boundaries
5. Take deep breaths and self-regulate first
6. Affirm unconditional love after tantrums
7. Be consistent and always follow-through



1. BE COGNIZANT OF PHYSICAL CUES

Being attuned to your child's physical cues is essential for understanding their emotional state and preventing tantrums.

Watch for signs like yawning, rubbing their eyes, or clutching their stomach, which may indicate hunger, fatigue, or discomfort.

Recognizing these signals early on, you can **proactively address underlying needs to avert potential tantrums.** Keep healthy snacks on hand and create a cozy area where children can rest if they're tired or hungry. During a tantrum, validate your child's feelings while providing a supportive space for them to express themselves. Once they've calmed down, gently guide them towards food or a quiet area to rest.

By responding promptly and empathetically to their physical needs, you can help children feel more regulated and secure, reducing the likelihood of tantrums triggered by unmet physiological requirements.



2. AVOID RATIONALIZING DURING THE TANTRUM

It's crucial to understand that **during a tantrum, children are not receptive to rationalization or negotiation.** Attempting to engage in lengthy discussions or explanations, or telling them to "calm down" or "use their words" will likely escalate the situation further. Instead, **keep your input brief, direct, and to the point.**

Validate your child's emotions by acknowledging how they feel, for example, "I understand that you're upset." Offer reassurance that you're there to support them, such as "I'm right here with you, and we'll get through this together."

Keeping your responses concise helps prevent overwhelming the child further and allows them to focus on managing their emotions.

After the tantrum has passed and your child has calmed down, you can then address the situation more effectively.



3. STAY WITH YOUR CHILD

Recognize that during a tantrum, **your child is experiencing a loss of control, which can be frightening and distressing.** In these moments, **children need our calm and reassuring presence** to help them feel safe and secure. Leaving them alone during a tantrum can exacerbate their feelings of fear and isolation.

While your child may need physical space and may resist being touched, **it's essential to stay nearby and offer verbal reassurance.** You can say something like, "I'm here for you, and I'm not going anywhere," even if your child expresses a desire for you to leave (e.g. "go away!").

This **consistent presence communicates to your child that you're there to support them through their big emotions,** providing them with the comfort and security they need during this challenging time.



4. ESTABLISH SAFE BOUNDARIES

It's crucial to recognize that during tantrums, **children are not in control of their physical or emotional reactions.** As adults, **our role is to provide support while ensuring everyone's safety.**

If your child starts to hit you or themselves during a tantrum, gently hold their hands or body to prevent any harm. While doing so, acknowledge their feelings by saying something like, "I understand you're angry, but I can't allow you to hit me/hurt yourself." **By setting these clear boundaries, you communicate that certain behaviors, such as hitting or self-harm, are not acceptable, while still validating your child's emotions.**

This approach **helps to maintain a safe environment for everyone** involved while also teaching important boundaries and coping skills to your child.



5. TAKE DEEP BREATHS & SELF-REGULATE FIRST

Tantrums can be emotionally challenging for parents, teachers, and caregivers, often triggering stress and frustration. However, it's **crucial for adults to remain calm and composed during these moments to effectively support the child.**

When you notice yourself becoming overwhelmed or agitated by a tantrum, **take a moment to pause and focus on your own breathing.** Inhale deeply through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth, allowing yourself to release tension and regain composure.

Remember that **your emotional state directly impacts your child's response to the situation.** By maintaining a sense of calmness and stability, you provide a reassuring presence for your child amidst their distress. Taking deep breaths also allows you to approach the situation with a clearer mind, enabling you to **respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.** This self-regulation technique not only benefits you but also models effective coping strategies for the child.



6. AFFIRM UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AFTER TANTRUMS

Following a tantrum, it's essential to **reassure your child of your unwavering love and support, helping them feel secure and valued** despite their emotional outburst.

Once your child has regained composure and is ready to reconnect, take the opportunity to **remind them of your unconditional love.** Offer gentle words of reassurance such as, "I understand you were feeling upset earlier. But no matter what happens, I want you to know that I love you very much. Your feelings are important, and I'm here to help you through them."

By reaffirming your love in the aftermath of a tantrum, **you provide your child with a sense of emotional safety and acceptance, fostering trust and resilience in your relationship.** This reaffirmation helps them understand that their emotions, even the challenging ones, do not diminish the love and support you have for them.



7. BE CONSISTENT AND ALWAYS FOLLOW-THROUGH

Consistency and follow-through are essential in managing and reducing the frequency and severity of tantrums, while fostering positive behavior in children. For instance, when a parent, teacher, or caregiver says "no" to a request or sets a limit, **it's crucial to stick with that decision**. If a child throws a tantrum in response and the adult gives in, it sends mixed messages and teaches the child that tantrums are an effective way to get what they want. **Children require clear and necessary boundaries**, so if they are not experiencing reliable limitations they will continue to subconsciously push for them.

On the other hand, if the adult remains firm and follows through with the initial decision, **it establishes clear boundaries which offers a sense of safety, reliability, and predictability**. This consistency helps **children understand expectations and builds trust in the adult's leadership**, leading to fewer tantrums over time.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT TANTRUMS

While tantrums are a normal part of child development, there are instances where they may indicate underlying issues that require attention. Parents or teachers should be concerned if tantrums:

- Persist beyond the typical age range (e.g., occurring frequently in older children)
- Are excessively severe or intense
- Pose a risk of harm to the child or others
- Interfere significantly with daily functioning or social interactions
- Are accompanied by other concerning behaviors or developmental delays

Differentiating Tantrums from Meltdowns:

Tantrums and meltdowns may appear similar but have distinct characteristics. Tantrums are often triggered by specific events or desires, such as not getting what the child wants, and are typically brief and reactive in nature.

Meltdowns, on the other hand, may occur in response to sensory overload, emotional dysregulation, or other internal factors. They tend to be more prolonged, intense, and overwhelming for the child, often resulting in a loss of control over behavior and emotions.

If concerned about the frequency or severity of tantrums persist, parents or teachers may seek professional guidance by consulting with pediatricians, child psychologists, or other qualified professionals to assess the child's development and behavior and determine if further evaluation or intervention is warranted.