



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Temper Tantrums: A Guide for Parents

Tantrums are normal in the toddler years. They often start when your child gains new skills and wants more independence. Some kids have many tantrums, while others have fewer. Tantrums can be mild or intense. But they are to be expected. Tantrums are usually most frequent at age 3, but it is different for every family.

Tantrums tell you that your child has lost control and needs help. They can't stop themselves from acting out when they feel frustrated. **The part of the brain that helps them regulate their feelings is still growing.**

Before they lose it

Tantrums are more likely when children are frustrated, hungry, tired, or getting sick. You can avoid some tantrums (but not all) by taking action *before* your child loses it.

- ❑ **Pick your battles**, and get clear on what really matters. Can you live with an outfit that doesn't match if your child picks the shirt?

- ❑ Do a little detective work, **and change your schedule when you can**. Does your child do better at the store after a nap?

- ❑ **Give a heads-up before an activity ends**. Try, "When this book is finished, we are going home."

- ❑ **Try a change of pace**, like singing a silly song or letting them play with water.

- ❑ **Give choices**, like, "Do you want the blue or red cup?" Don't ask if there is no real choice.

- ❑ **Offer a way to get the mad out**. Try ripping paper, stomping feet, pushing the wall, or punching a pillow.

- ❑ **Set your limit with a few words**. Talk in a low, steady voice. Make sure your face and body also show a sense of calm.

- ❑ **Be clear about what you want**. Try, "Keep your feet on the floor," instead of "Stop kicking."



When they lose it

- ❑ **Stay calm and steady**, because a big reaction makes things worse. Stay close, share your calm, and keep them safe.
- ❑ **Save your breath**. Don't try to reason with your child during a tantrum, because it will not work. Your child cannot hear you or learn from you when they are out of control.
- ❑ **Honor your child's feelings while holding the limit**. Try, "I see you are upset. I will not let you hit."
- ❑ **Give them a safe place to be upset**, like hitting a pillow or stomping their feet.
- ❑ **Try a soothing activity once they start to settle**, like kneading play-dough, taking a walk, or singing a song.

Reconnect after

You may be tired or upset, but **reconnecting helps your child feel safe again**. This is not rewarding bad behavior; it is helping your child learn how to get calm. Kids learn how to soothe and regulate themselves over time, with your support.

When to ask for help

Tantrums are never fun. Try to see them as a chance for your child to learn about rules, feelings, and self-regulation. These are important life skills. If you feel stuck or worn out, talk to your healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family for help.

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