

Dealing with a Temper Tantrum

The Long Version

Why is this temper tantrum happening?

Temper tantrums in young children are quite normal but must be dealt with in an effective and consistent manner to prevent them from becoming a habit. There are multiple reasons the tantrum is happening:

- Your child is **angry** and cannot control that emotion
- Your child is **overly-tired** and/ or **hungry** and isn't able to clearly think things through
- Your child **doesn't like your response** and is attempting to change your mind
- Your child has **learned to use temper tantrums** to get what he/ she wants because it has worked before
- Your child has **learned to lose his/ her temper** from you or another adult

Steps To Success:

Regardless of the reason, take these steps to handle the temper tantrum first:

1. Ensure your child's physical safety

Make sure that your child cannot severely hurt themselves or you. The actual tantrum only lasts around 3 minutes. If you are in a public place, move your child out of 'traffic'. If at home, ensure they are as close to the floor level as possible. DO NOT attempt to restrain your child unless they are about to severely hurt themselves.

2. Wait and watch

Your child is going to expel a lot of emotion and energy for a few minutes. Be present but don't say anything, if at all possible. Your child is in a 'fight or flight' state, and in no position to process any kind of information. Watch for a slackening of muscles. It's almost over!

3. Give some love and comfort

Although you might be angry (or embarrassed) yourself, do this step before you do anything else. Once the physical part is over, your child will be a bit 'spent'... still crying, whiney and upset, but in a less volatile state. Take the opportunity to reconnect with some physical contact – hugs, sitting in your lap, a cup of water. Provide some quiet words of comfort, "Ok, good job calming down." "Deep breaths, very good!" (this step also helps you calm down)

4. Activate the thinking brain

Now, give your child a small and easy task to do. The reason for doing this is to re-engage your child's 'thinking brain' (prefrontal cortex), and this task will

help you get there faster. It could be doing a puzzle for a few minutes, reading a book, a few minutes of playdough. It feels counter-intuitive, but stick with it. Some children need just a few minutes, some need longer to get back to normal. Allow them the time – it will pay off at the end.

5. Provide guidance and discipline

The last step, once your child is fully calm is to deal with the issue that caused the tantrum and any fallout from it. Talk firmly (not sternly) to your child and:

Provide clear boundaries of behavior: "I know this makes you angry, but **you may not** hit me/ throw toys around/ scream and yell in the store, etc. Do you understand that?"

Provide an alternative – and if your child is old enough (three and older), ask for their input. "When you get angry, you **can go to the couch/ your room/ and control your body there.**" "When you want something, and I say no, you can say I don't like that, and I will explain it to you again", "What could you do instead of screaming?"

Calmly give a logical consequence for the behavior – "You hit me. Now what are you going to do to make me feel better?" "I asked you to put your shoes on. What are you going to do now?" "You took your brother's toy from him. Please give it back. If you still want to play with it, ask him first."

Deal with any mess and destruction that your child may have caused during the tantrum. If they threw toys around, or dumped their food on the floor, they need to fix that. Have them pick up their messes, and if necessary provide calm directions, and help a little (not a lot)

WELL DONE, YOU DID IT!

Dealing with a Temper Tantrum

The Short Version

1. Ensure your child's physical safety – then back away!

Stay in visual and auditory

Say NOTHING!

2. Wait and watch

Wait for the a decrease in intensity

Say Nothing!

If you must say something, try this: "I see you _____, I'm right here."

3. Give some love and comfort

Hugs, hold hands, back rub, water, damp face cloth

Say Nothing!

If you must say something, try this: "Ok, good job calming down", "Deep breaths, very good!"

4. Activate the thinking brain

Give your child something to do on his/ her own that causes thinking: puzzle, playdough, lego, block, paper and crayons, easy stuff

No television or electronics!

Watch for your child's normal state, then say: "Let's talk about what just happened"

5. Provide guidance and discipline

- Provide clear boundaries of behavior
- Provide an alternative
- Calmly give a logical consequence
- Deal with any mess and destruction

WELL DONE, YOU DID IT!

Using these steps teaches your child that you are not focused on the actual tantrum, but rather on helping them calm their bodies, emotions, and minds, and then dealing with the behavior.

Additionally, consider all the reasons mentioned for tantrums happening in the first place, and...

- Work to avoid extreme hunger, thirst and tiredness.
- Don't over-stimulate or create unrealistic expectations
- Control your own temper if you want your child to do the same
- Give your child 'down time' where they can find their equilibrium and happy place at least once a day. Even young children need to de-stress!
- Avoid using the TV/ Tablet as the calming down tool. It can lead to more tantrums when you ask the child to stop watching or playing.