



## Coping with Temper Tantrums

### **What are temper tantrums?**

Temper tantrums can put fear into the heart of any parent but they are in fact just a normal part of growing up and all children, even the most good-natured, will have them at some point as unlike adults children do not have the same control and inhibitions as adults. Temper tantrums can range from simple whining and crying to screaming, biting, kicking, hitting and breath holding and can happen for all sorts of reasons. Some children may only have a few tantrums while others will have them regularly depending on their temperament and how the tantrums are handled.

### **When do they happen?**

While most babies will cry a lot they do not have temper tantrums as such. True temper tantrums usually occur between the ages of 1 and 3 yrs but can carry on until 3/5 especially if not handled well.

### **What are the causes of temper tantrums?**

Causes of temper tantrums can vary from attention seeking to simply being tired, hungry or uncomfortable but the most usual cause is frustration.

From the age of 1 yr onwards your toddler is coming to terms with a lot of changes both in their own development and the world around them. Until now your baby has assumed that the world revolves around them and they can have their own way all the time. Unfortunately they now have to learn that this is not the case and other people now come into their world. They suddenly learn that they cannot do everything they want or what they want when they want. It is also a frustrating time for communicating. As your toddler learns more about the world around him he wants to tell you and others about it. But how does she do this? Her language skills are not yet advanced enough to allow her to talk to you so she gets frustrated. They also have few problem solving skills at this age.

Toddlers also have an increasing need for autonomy-they want a sense of independence and control over their environment but do not always have the skills and knowledge to achieve this.

You may want to study your child's tantrums to understand when, where and why they happen so you can work out how to avoid or deal with them. You may see patterns of behaviour

### **Dealing with temper tantrums**

#### **Before the tantrum**

If possible try to avoid the tantrum happening in the first place.

- Reward your child for positive behaviour-to a small child your attention is paramount and if he gets it for being naughty then it is still your attention. If he only gets attention for being 'good' then that is how he will act.
- Remove any forbidden items from reach/sight where possible
- Try to pick your battles-offer options where possible to give your child some control over his life and make sure you honour her choice.
- Avoid fighting over little issues-save 'No' for things that really matter and do not be too quick to say the word 'No'.
- Give a few minutes warning for any change in activity.
- Although your toddler needs challenging activities make sure they are not too challenging that he cannot do them and so gets frustrated.

#### **The tantrum itself**

If your toddler has a tantrum then try to remember to keep calm and pause before you act. Screaming or lashing out at your child will just make things worse. Set your child a positive example by remaining calm and in control and take at least 30 seconds to decide how you will handle the situation. There are four possible ways to do this:

- *Distract:* try to focus your child's attention on something else//replace an unsafe object with a safe one.
- *Remove:* Take your child to a quiet private place to calm down. Stay nearby until they calm down.
- *Ignore:* If the tantrum is being thrown to get attention then just ignore it-if possible go to another room
- *Hold:* If your child is 'out of control' then physically hold them to calm them down. Being out of control is scary to a child and they need the adult to take charge.

#### **After the tantrum**

Sometimes a toddler will have a hard time stopping a tantrum without your help. Say 'I will help you settle down now' but do not reward the behaviour by giving in, simply verbally praise your child for gaining control.

Once your child has calmed down you can talk to them about the situation. Use this as an opportunity to talk about appropriate behaviour and offer comfort and reassurance. Most children are often not able to understand the reason for their tantrums and will feel shaken. They need to know that you do not approve of their behaviour but you do still love them no matter what

## **When to seek help**

Occasionally there are underlying physical problems that may be contributing to the tantrums. These may be hearing or vision problems, a chronic illness, language delays or a learning disability.

You should consult a doctor if:

- You are uncomfortable with your own responses
- The tantrums increase in frequency, intensity or duration
- Your child frequently hurts himself or others
- Your child is destructive
- You have a question about what you or your child is doing.
- Your child displays mood disorders such as negativity, low self esteem, or extreme dependence.

**Remember, tantrums are usually not a cause for concern and will diminish on their own. As children mature developmentally and their grasp of themselves and their world increases, their frustration levels decrease. Less confusion and more control means fewer tantrums-and happier families!**