



Tips for Working Through Tantrums with your Child

Toddlers can become upset when they don't get their way, when they don't feel like they have control, or when they can't verbally express their needs. These big emotions might trigger a temper tantrum. Here are some ways you as a caregiver can help your toddler work through these reactions.

Prepare for potentially stressful situations, like the grocery store.

Grocery stores can be stressful and stimulating places for your toddler. There's a lot to see, and you will be distracted by shopping and perhaps running across friends and acquaintances. Your child will likely ask for foods he or she wants that might not be on your list. Tell your child, "Let's write that down," and then present a few of the healthier ideas to your child at the end of the trip and have him or her pick one or two things. The promise of a reward will forestall a tantrum. Make sure your toddler has eaten and is well-rested before you go to the store, and avoid going when it's close to nap time.

Give concrete, advance warnings.

Tell your toddler well in advance that you will need to leave the playground or a friend's house. Saying concrete things like, "You can ride your bike two more times around the block, and then we will have to leave," will let your toddler know what to expect.

Give choices.

Likely, your toddler will have a tantrum because he or she doesn't feel in control. Giving choices between two things you'd like your toddler to do, such as saying, "Which would you like to do first, put on your pajamas or brush your teeth?" will help your toddler feel more in-control of the situation.

Leave your toddler be.

When a tantrum erupts, remember that your toddler is having such a strong reaction because they cannot cope with big emotions yet. Whenever possible, leave them be and ignore the tantrum. They might need time to burn off steam. Afterward, it will be like the tantrum never happened.

Remember not to try to solve the problem.

When your toddler is in the throws of a tantrum, making suggestions or trying to solve the problem will not be helpful. Your toddler might also resist hugs and other signs of affection and comfort. This is okay. Your toddler is trying to work through big emotions and might be experiencing more stimulation than he or she knows how to handle. Leave your child be until he or she has worked through the tantrum.

Remember that tantrums are a part of development. If your toddler has a tantrum, it does not mean you are a "bad" parent or caregiver. Keep calm, take a deep breath, and remember that your toddler is working through emotions or is stressed and unable to express his or her needs.