



Toddlers and Temper Tantrums

What is a temper tantrum?

Toddlers (babies who can walk without help – usually between 12 and 30 months) have temper tantrums when they are very upset. During a tantrum, children are angry and out of control. They may cry, scream, kick or hold their breath.

Usually children between 15 months and four years old have tantrums. More than half of all two-year-olds will have tantrums at least once a week. Most children have at least one tantrum by age three.

Don't worry, tantrums don't last forever! Preschoolers can usually control themselves better.

Why do young children have tantrums?

Young children are naturally self-centered, easily frustrated and they like to say "no".

- they are curious, they want to explore and get frustrated if they are stopped
- they want things they can't have
- they want to do things, but may not have the skills yet
- they are learning to talk, but may not be able to say what they want
- they may be tired, hungry, feeling ill or they may be reacting to stress in the family.



Preventing tantrums

You can try these ways of preventing our child's temper tantrums:

- Make a note of when and where the tantrums happen. There may be a pattern.
- Don't take trips right before nap or meal times. Don't try to do too much in one day. Tell your child what you're NOT going to do before you leave home, e.g. "Today we are going grocery shopping. We will not be looking at toys or candy."
- Tell your child how you want her or him to behave. Give choices when possible, e.g. "We're going for a walk now. Do you want to wear your red coat or your blue coat?"
- Take time each day to play with your child. Give your child lots of opportunity to express himself, e.g. games, musical toys, paint, play dough. Buy toys that are right for your child's age.
- Set consistent and reasonable limits and praise your child's good behaviour, e.g. "I like the way you're playing quietly while I'm on the phone."
- Help children to feel good about themselves and about what they can do. Get them to help with chores around the house. If they want to do something they can't do, give them something easier to do. Give the child enough time to finish; don't expect your child to do things perfectly. Teach children to say "Help, please" when they need help.



What to do about temper tantrums

It doesn't matter what you do, some tantrums will happen. You can try these ways of dealing with your child's tantrum:

- Some children do well if you hold them during the tantrum. You may keep him safe by holding him on you lap. Tell him, "You are angry because...and I'm holding you so you won't get hurt." If he fights you, don't use force. Just make sure he is in a safe spot.
- Other times, it's best to ignore the tantrum. Make sure the child is safe, and then do something else. Don't even look at her. Don't beg, get angry, or try to give your child something so she'll behave. This puts her in charge. Don't argue or nag. Your child is not being reasonable. Welcome your child back when the tantrum ends. Act as if it never happened and don't even talk about it.
- If your child has a tantrum in public, don't get embarrassed into dealing with it the wrong way. Take the child to the quietest place you can find, e.g. a dressing room or the car. Then wait until the tantrum stops.

Remember: don't take tantrums personally. All young children have tantrums. You can get help by talking with other parents and people who take care of young children. A good place to meet other parents of young children are Health Centre parent groups, Family Places, Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres.



Other Fact Sheets in the *Parenting Your Preschooler* series include:

- Positive Discipline for Preschoolers
- Separation Anxiety
- Toilet Training
- The Morning Struggle, 2 - 5 Years

Helpful books

- **The Emotional Life of the Toddler**
by Alicia F. Lieberman
- **Raising Your Spirited Child**
Book and workbook
by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka
- **Time-In When Time-Out doesn't Work**
by Jean Illsley Clarke

.....

**For more information, contact a
Public Health Nurses at
Vancouver Coastal Health
www.vch.ca
or visit the VCH Parenting Website
<http://parenting.vch.ca/>**

.....

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca> or email phe@vch.ca and quote Catalogue No. **GK.722.T63**

© Vancouver Coastal Health, January 2017

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team.
www.vch.ca