

# Special Foster Care & Therapeutic Respite Care

## Tips, Tools & Resources

### Temper Tantrums

No matter how sweet your child is or how good a parent you are, meltdowns are a fact of toddler life. Tantrums aren't a reflection of your parenting skills; you simply have a frustrated little kid.

#### What Causes Tantrums

It may seem like your child's having a meltdown for no reason (or for a silly one). But there are real causes:

**Toddlers can't express themselves very well.** Your 2- or 3-year-old may know a lot of words, but he doesn't yet have the ability to construct complex sentences or put words to all the emotions he's feeling. That's why instead of saying, "Mom, I'd really like orange juice with my toast, but only in the red cup because it looks weird in the blue one," he screams bloody murder when you gave him apple juice in the blue cup.

**They are easily overwhelmed.** Toddlers thrive on routine, and a change can really throw them off. That means adding an extra errand or missing nap time by 15 minutes can spell disaster. Certain places, like busy stores, can be overwhelming, too.

**They want to do more than they can handle.** Toddlers are naturally very curious and are thrilled to discover they can suddenly do so many things on their own. Unfortunately, your child's physical prowess doesn't keep pace with his curiosity, so he gets frustrated when the block tower falls or he's not allowed to climb the kitchen stool.

**They don't understand delayed gratification.** Little kids live in the here and now, not in our cookies-are-for-after-dinner world. Not getting what they want, when they want it, is a top tantrum producer.

**They think they're the center of the universe.** In the me-me life of a toddler, no one else's needs matter as much as his own. That's why sharing is so difficult.

#### Defusing Tantrums

**Acknowledge that he's frustrated.** Your best first defense is to look your child in the eye and let him know you feel his pain. By saying "I know you want a cookie," or even "I know you're upset," you're telling him you're there to help him feel better.

**Be silly.** Laughter can be a great tantrum buster. If your child starts to pitch a fit about getting into the tub, try singing a goofy song—anything to bring a giggle.

**Try a distraction.** Give him something else to think about. Try saying, "Let's finish shopping by picking out bananas together." Or if it's time to leave the park, "How many dogs do you think we'll see on the drive home?"

**Ignore it.** Sometimes, tantrums escalate because your toddler thinks he'll get what he wants if he screams loud enough. If you don't react, he may give up.

**Leave the scene.** When all else fails, get out of line, off the slide, whatever. But do it without making a fuss—you'll be modeling



calm behavior. It may be inconvenient, but it shows who's in control: you.

#### Preventing Meltdowns

**Avoid the triggers.** Try to figure out what sets your child off. Does he lose it when he's hungry or tired? Plan ahead to stave off tantrums: Carry a snack, make sure he's rested or stop for a break.

**Offer options.** When toddlers feel overwhelmed, they need your help, but they still want to have a say in things. That's why offering two options (more is just confusing) can prevent a meltdown. Try saying, "Would you like to see the polar bears or the monkeys?" instead of "Which animal do you want to see first at the zoo?"

**Give fair warning.** If you have to tear your child away from something fun or drag him somewhere he'll hate, preparation can nip frustration in the bud. Say, "We're going to go home after one more trip down the slide." Little kids are more likely to behave if they know in advance what they can/can't do.

**Show your child how you want him to act.** Since one reason kids scream is that they don't know what else to do, teach your child to use words to express himself.

Adapted from <http://www.parenting.com/parenting/child/article/0,19840,1587426,00.html?topic=11366>

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Parent Training Exercise

What are three things that might cause a temper tantrum?

Describe two ways you might diffuse a temper tantrum, using real life examples other than those given in the article.

Describe two ways you might prevent a temper tantrum, using real life examples other than those given in the article.