



Tantrums Summary

Why Tantrums?

There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and helping your children learn to deal with their most upsetting feelings constructively provides a perfect opportunity.

Tip These steps are done best when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *“When do you feel angry or intensely upset?”*
- *“What time of day?”*
- *“What people, places, and activities are usually involved?”*
- *“How does your body feel now? How does your body feel when you are angry?”*
- Use your best listening skills.

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

Tip If your child has recently thrown a tantrum, then use that example to reflect on what caused it at a time when you are both calm. You might ask, *“What made you so upset after school a few days back?”* Finding out what contributed to a tantrum can give you insight into your child’s triggers and also help raise your child’s self-awareness.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Respond with emotional intelligence. Stand aside and focus on your own deep breathing to calm down while you allow your child time to calm down.
- Learn together! Anger and hurt are important messages to pay attention. They mean needs are not getting met or necessary boundaries are being violated. Ask: *“Why am I feeling this way? What needs to change in order to feel better?”*
- Brainstorm coping strategies. Write a list to keep at the ready, such as, take a walk, get a drink of water, take deep breaths, count to 50, draw, color, and build something.
- Create a calm down space. Design a “safe base” where your child decides they would like to go when upset to feel better.
- Teach your child how to stop rumination. When you notice the same upset running through your mind, say, *“Stop!”* out loud. Then, try out one of your coping strategies to help you feel better and let go of those nagging thoughts.

- Ask yourself: *“What needs is my child not getting met? Can the issue be addressed by my child alone or do they need to communicate a need, ask for help, or set a boundary?”*
- Help your child repair harm when needed. A critical step in teaching your child about managing anger is learning how to repair harm when they’ve caused it. Ask, *“What could you do?”*

Tip Raising your voice and your level of upset in response to your child’s tantrum will only increase the intensity and duration of your child’s upset. Yelling only communicates that you are raising the level of emotional intensity not diminishing it. Leaving your child alone in their room will also escalate the tantrum at this age. They need you, and they may be fearful of themselves because they have literally been overpowered by their own feelings.

Tip and Trap The only way a calm down space serves as a tool for parents to promote their children’s self-management skills is if they allow a child to self-select the calm down space. Practice using it and gently remind them of it when they are upset. *“Would your calm down space help you feel better?”* you might ask. But if that space is ever used as a punishment or a directive - *“Go to your calm down space!”* - the control lies with the parent and no longer with the child, and the opportunity for skill building is lost.

Trap If you tell or even command your child to make an apology, how will they ever learn to genuinely apologize with feeling? In fact, apologizing or making things right should never be assigned as a punishment since then the control lies with the adult and robs the child of the opportunity to learn the skill and internalize the value of repairing harm. Instead, ask the child how they feel they should make up for the hurt they’ve caused and help them implement their idea.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use “Show me...” statements like, *“Show me how you use your safe base to calm down.”*
- Use “I notice...” statements like, *“I noticed how you took some deep breaths when you got frustrated. That’s excellent!”*
- Accept feelings. *“I hear you’re upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better?”*
- Practice deep breathing.
- Play turtle. The Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies curriculum encourages children to pretend they are a turtle.
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine. Ask, *“What happened today that made you happy?”* or *“What were the best moments in your day?”*

Trap Refrain from judging your child’s friends. You want your child to trust you with their friendship worries and problems. If you harshly judge their friends, they may lose some of that trust and may not confide in you.

Tip Have you seen the tiny Guatemalan Worry Dolls that you tell your worries to before going to bed and then, they take on your worries for you so you will be relieved of them and can sleep? Use this wonderful concept with your children. Assign a few stuffed friends or favorite action figures the job! Addressing worries can help alleviate feelings that are compounding and may be building up to an explosion.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's Development and Success

- Ask key questions. *"You are going to see Julie today. Do you remember what you can do to assert your feelings?"*
- Learn about your child's development. Each new age presents different challenges.
- Stay engaged. Ask yourself if you need to reteach or make changes.
- Follow through with logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes. *"I noticed when you got frustrated with your homework, you moved away and took some deep breaths. Yes! Excellent."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Consider a hug when the routine is accomplished.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child's success today and in their future!

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