

Toddler Tips

Tips from Dr. Talmi, Early Childhood Psychologist at Children's Hospital Colorado

The meltdown: what's appropriate and how can parents handle emotions?

Meltdowns don't happen out of the blue. It may seem like toddlers have lots of tantrums, it's one way they express their feelings because they can't do it any other way. Throwing a tantrum says:

- a) Something happened
- b) I don't like it
- c) I need a grown-up to pay attention to me
- d) I'm tired, hungry, sad, scared, frustrated, disappointed, confused, etc.
- e) I don't have any other way to let you know how I feel or I can't quite get myself to a place to use other tools.

When tantrums happen, you can do the following:

- Take a deep breath and choose a response carefully.
- Figure out why your child is melting down. Are they tired? Hungry? Over-stimulated? Address that basic need before trying to consequence the tantrum.
- If the meltdown is about wanting a toy at the store, for example, there are many good responses. If your child is safe, can you ignore your child? Paying attention to any behavior increases that behavior, even if it's negative attention. Toddlers learn that things that don't get attention aren't worth the trouble.
- If you need to remove your child, don't threaten them with something you aren't willing to act on. If you threaten to leave the store but don't intend to leave, that toddler learns that you don't mean what you say. They also learn that the meltdown worked because they got what they wanted.
- Validate the feeling. Say something like, "I can see that you're really mad that you aren't going to get this toy." Don't try to talk them out of their feelings, but do guide them: "When you can calm down, we'll be able to go back in the store."
- Consider whether certain things are more likely to result in tantrums. If there are patterns to your toddler's tantrums, think about things that can help decrease the tantrums. For example, you can bring a fun toy from home for your child to have only when you get to the checkout line at the grocery store or you can have your child start an activity before you make a phone call.

What are some good strategies for discipline?

- Ignoring the behavior is an excellent choice to stop behaviors, as long as your child is safe. If your child is making annoying sounds, ignore them. As soon as your child stops making those sounds, give them a lot of positive attention. When the sounds start again, ignore it again.
- Behave the way you'd like your toddler to behave. Toddlers do what they see. They imitate and copy, and at the same time, figure out the rules of the world.
- Put your child in timeout. When your child is in timeout, you're not paying attention to the them. When a timeout is done right, it's a straightforward process of "You did x, you need to take a timeout." When timeout isn't done right, you and your toddler talk about it, maybe argue a little, and all of a sudden, you're giving attention to the very behavior you were trying to stop.

When should you reward children and what are some good rewards?

Rewards, like punishment, make behaviors happen. If you want to see a behavior happen, give your child a reward- like verbal praise or a star on the sticker chart or an M&M- each time it happens. To keep a behavior going, switch to giving your child a reward at a different time, so that they don't know when they will get the reward. Sometimes they get a reward after one time, sometimes after four times. They continue the behavior because they know they will get a reward, but they don't know when. Toddlers are motivated to get the reward. Parents should think about natural and doable rewards, like verbal praise or stickers on a "good behavior" chart. The best reward for children is getting attention from their caregivers, such as special time or an extra story at night.

What are some ways parents can encourage toddlers to express themselves in constructive ways?

Be a sportscaster in your child's life by narrating everything they do. Caregivers want to teach, ask questions or give commands to young children. "Put the blue block on the red block. What color is that? Count to 10." These interactions teach important academic skills and increase knowledge, but they can limit exploration, creativity, and self-expression. It's different than if someone says, "Wow, you're building a tall tower. You put that red block on the blue block." What matters is that someone is paying attention, listening and that they experience what it's like to lead. By following your child's play, you let your child know that they are important and effective. It is pretty cool when you're a young child and you have an adult following you, one-on-one and you get to be the boss.

Anschutz Medical Campus 13123 East 16th Ave. Aurora, CO 80045 | 800-624-6553 | childrenscolorado.org

Author: Radiology | Approved by Patient Education Committee | Valid through 2021

The information presented is intended for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of your personal doctor's advice and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. The information should not be used in place of a visit, call or consultation or advice of your doctor or other health care provider.

Children's Hospital Colorado complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. • ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-720-777-1234. • CHÚ Ý: Nếu bạn nói Tiếng Việt, có các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí dành cho bạn. Gọi số 1-720-777-1234.