

# Tantrums

## What is the concern?

Tantrums occur when children are frustrated or angry. They often occur when children experience:

- Being told “No”
- Being overtired or hungry
- Changes in routine
- Tasks that are hard for them
- Being unable to express their emotions
- Things not going their way
- Inability to complete a task on their own

Tantrums sometimes happen for no clear reason. Parents can help prevent tantrums and guide children in calming down. Learning to deal with disappointment and frustration and learning to calm down are important skills for children to learn from their parents.

## How can I prevent my child from having tantrums?

- **Stay calm** - When you tell children “No” do it simply and calmly.
- **Keep an eye on the clock** – A child who is tired, hungry, or thirsty is more likely to get upset over something small. A missed meal or nap can cause a tantrum.
- **Routines** – As much as possible, keep a routine or schedule. If you have to change something, let your child know ahead of time and use visual reminders about the changes—such as a calendar with pictures—as much as possible.
- **Be clear and brief in giving directions** – If a child is having a hard time doing a requested task, break it down into easy steps. For example, if it is time to clean up and put toys away, tell her specifically what to do: “Pick up the red car and put it in the blue box, thank you.” Make sure to praise if she follows the steps; she will be more likely to continue to follow directions.
- **One-on-one time** – Make sure you spend some one-on-one playtime with your child.
- **Redirect** – Redirection, or moving a child’s attention to something else, can go a long way to preventing an outburst. “No, you can’t have that right now, let’s do this instead.”
- **Independent play** – Find activities that your child can do by herself so she can practice doing something independently. Be sure to commend her for trying.

## What should I do if my child is having a tantrum?

Once a child starts crying, becoming angry or throwing himself on the floor, *selective attention* and *selective ignoring* can help him calm down as long as he is safe and unable to harm himself.

- **Selective attention** – Wait for your child to have a quiet moment in the middle of the outburst. You can then talk to her, tell her what a good job she is doing at being calm. Do not worry if she starts to cry again; wait for another teachable moment.
- **Selective ignoring** – During the tantrum, ignore, turn your head, and look the other way. Wait for a few seconds of quiet before you speak. If your child hangs on to you, gently take his hands off of you and continue to ignore him.



## Tips to Remember:

- Keep consistent schedules and routines. Share any changes in the schedule or routine ahead of time.
- Have one-on-one play time every day.
- Keep an eye on the clock for meal and nap times.
- Practice selective attention and selective ignoring if your child is having a tantrum.
- Teach how to label and express feelings.
- If these suggestions do not work, please talk with your pediatrician for more ideas.

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- **Stay calm** – No matter how upset your child becomes, you need to remain calm as a way to show appropriate behavior and to keep from making the tantrum worse.
- **When it's over** – After your child is calm, let her know that she was angry or upset. This labels the feelings and helps her learn how to express herself the next time. Suggest something else she can do in the future if she starts to get upset again: “When you feel upset, you can take a walk with me outside, count to three, or say the alphabet.” It is important to comfort your child because she feels out of control during a tantrum.