



# Tantrum taming

The tantrum phase is not an easy one. But understanding why your child is losing the plot and what you can do to help, makes the experience a little easier.

Some things in parenting are certain. Tantrum-throwing toddlers are one of them. In fact, you should probably be more worried if your child has never chosen to express themselves at 150 decibels or through a strange interpretive dance routine, because they will be finding some other, less obvious, way to regain some control over the big people in their lives.

But if tantrums are becoming a regular means of communication in your household, or you are reluctant to say no, or go to certain places because of the high likelihood of an embarrassing explosion of anger from your child, these tips may help. First, understand what you're dealing with. Tantrums will generally fall into one of two categories - panic/overload, or control.

**A panic tantrum** is caused by your child being tired, hungry, in pain, frustrated, scared, overwhelmed, or any combination of the above. There is only so much they can handle, especially when the tank is running low. When that happens even something completely normal, which they took in their stride yesterday, can cause a meltdown.

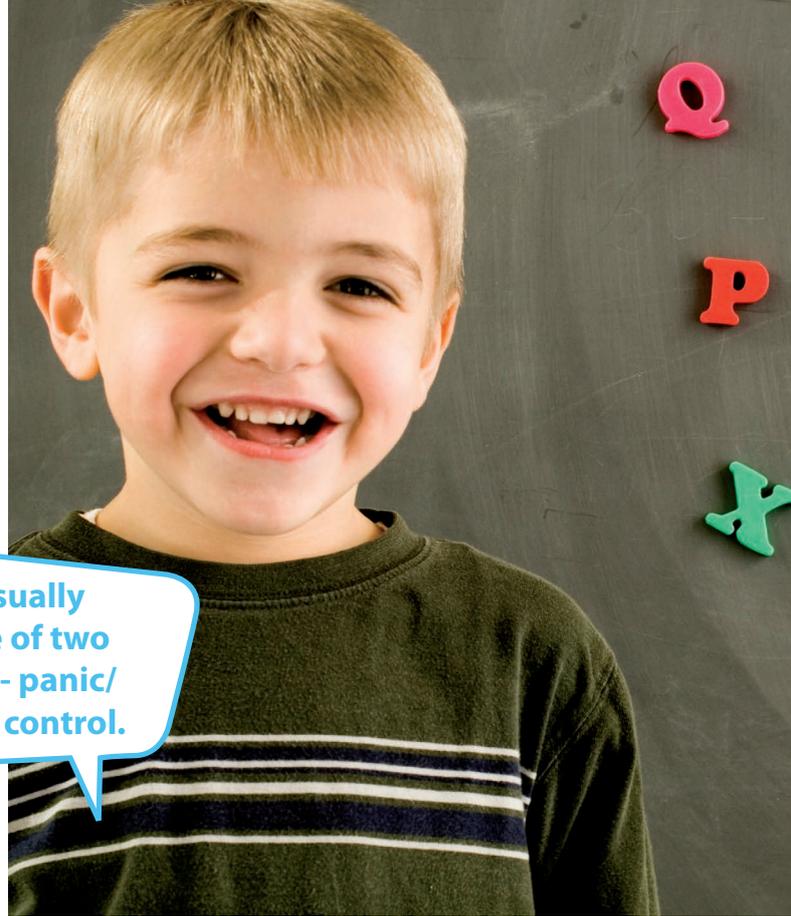
They are feeling bad and they don't know how to manage their feelings. So get down to their level and empathise. Offer a cuddle, and some help with what they're struggling with. Soothing words and reassuring hands might be all your child needs to get over this kind of tantrum. The key is to let them know that you understand their pain. Some children may prefer some space to themselves to recover, so let them know that you're available as needed.

**A control tantrum** on the other hand, is what ensues when 'child wants' and 'child doesn't get'. It requires a very different parental response – hence the importance of your diagnostic skill! It might help to think of control tantrums as panic tantrums that learned they had some power. Perhaps the first time it was all about the frustration of not getting that lollipop, but when the lollipop magically appeared after 10 minutes of screaming, it was all on.

The best way to determine which kind of tantrum you're seeing is to offer the cuddle/support you would to an overloaded child. If this seems to intensify the output of emotion, then you can be fairly certain that it's not your support the child wants, he is trying to bring you round to his way of thinking. And the only way to train your child out of this habit is to make sure you never give in to the tantrum. Let him know you're prepared to negotiate the issue, but not while he's still in tantrum mode.

## When you're out in public

You'll feel more confident if you can reassure your child, yourself, and concerned strangers that you have it under control. You can maintain emotional distance while staying physically nearby, holding your child or standing over them. Keep your cool using words such as, "Let me know when you're ready to talk nicely".



**Tantrums usually fall into one of two categories - panic/overload or control.**

Be prepared! Take snacks, limit the amount of time you're out, time visits wisely, warn ahead exactly what you're going to buy, and what you're not.

Enlist your child on a special mission. Begin the build-up before you even leave the house. A child who's hunting desperately for a can of baked beans or carefully steering the trolley for you is too busy to have a tantrum.

Make friends with embarrassment. I guarantee the majority of the people who turn to stare are thinking, "Thank goodness it's not my turn today!"

### Consistency

Being firm one day and giving in the next will probably create worse tantrums than always giving in. Kids want to know what works, and if they're confused they will find it hard to trust that you mean what you say.

If you threaten to leave the shop or skip an agreed treat if they have a tantrum, by all means do it! It will be hard for everyone that day, but next time they will know you mean it.

### Things you can do at home

Teach the language of emotions from an early age and encourage your children to tell you, rather than show you, how they feel. For very young ones, a wall chart with different faces to select from is a fun way of expressing how they feel.

When making a request, keep your tone, words, and posture positive and confident. All of these subtle cues send messages to our children about how we expect them to behave, and if we expect the worst, we will probably get it.

Are you using, "No" when, "Yes, later" would work just as well? When kids get demanding it is tempting to say "No" to everything, but they will quickly lose hope and motivation to behave well if they see no light at the end of the tunnel.

If your children are throwing tantrums regularly, check that it's not the only way they know to get your attention. If it's all that's available, negative attention will be just as attractive as positive attention to them.

## Try this...

#### With children

- You can't reason them out of a tantrum, so arguing and explaining in the heat of the moment is wasted energy.
- Children have varying tolerances for different kinds of stimulation. One child may have loved being out every day, but another one may need a bit more down-time to maintain energy levels.
- When the tank is nearing empty, children can be overwhelmed by the offer of too many choices. There are times when it's kinder for Mum or Dad to call the shots until the little one is fed and rested.

#### With adults

A parent who is comfortable and confident saying, "No" from time to time will have a child who can tolerate being denied occasionally.

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**hot tips**

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