

Tantrums



When children feel angry, frustrated or helpless, the result is often a tantrum. Little kids kick, scream and flop on the ground. Big kids yell and lose control. Tantrums are normal, natural and inevitable. But they aren't any fun!

How do parents usually deal with tantrums?

- a. they give in,
- b. they yell or threaten,
- c. they spank, or often,
- d. they throw a tantrum of their own!

Having a plan in advance is the best way to deal with tantrums. Like many aspects of parenting, the more prepared you are, the better you can handle the situation, and the easier it is to keep your own anger under control.

The Plan of Action

Step 1: Pick a tantrum place. Decide where all future tantrums will take place. Pick a private, small, safe room like a bedroom, bathroom or laundry room.

Step 2: Explain the new rule to your child at a calm and quiet time.

"Nathan, a 'tantrum' is when you are very angry and scream and cry and stamp your feet. From now on, when you have a tantrum we want you to do it in the bedroom with the door closed. No one will bother you while you have your tantrum. You can have as long a tantrum as you like, or may choose to read a book or play quietly. You can come out of the room when you are done."

Step 3: Follow Through. When your child has a tantrum lead him or guide him to the Tantrum Place. If an older child won't go, offer a choice: "You can go or lose a privilege." Then calmly say, "You may come out when you're done." Return him to the room if he comes out early saying, "Oh, you're not done yet." You may have to do this often at first, but the tantrums will die off quickly because of the lack of attention they get.

When it's over – it's over. Don't feel the need to lecture, teach, or moralize afterwards!

What about tantrums away from home?

Many children have learned to throw tantrums away from home because Mom and Dad don't enforce the rules out in public. You must bite the bullet a few times in order to put a quick end to this behavior. Take a deep breath, ignore the onlookers and follow this plan:

Step 1: Give a choice. "You can stop this behavior, or we can leave the store." Wait, just a moment, and then:

Step 2: Change the location. "I see you've decided to leave the store." At this point you have several choices, depending on the child's behavior, your schedule and your mood. You can either have a time out in the car [while you stand outside the car and ignore him] or you can go home.

One father of a three-year-old said that with his busy schedule this would be just impossible! I pointed out that he could take the time now or live through public tantrums until his daughter was sixteen!

[Tantrums need an audience to be effective.]

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of "Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting."

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