

Getting Through the Tantrum

When a child has a tantrum, it means she needs help to calm down before any learning can take place. The following strategies can help you help your child learn to manage her feelings and develop self-control:

Stay calm. The calmer you are, the more quickly your child will calm down.

Recognize your child's feeling or goal and communicate it to them. Let your child know that you understand what he wants to do: *You want to stay longer at the playground, and are mad we have to leave. It's okay to be mad, but it is not okay to hit mommy. Hitting hurts.*

Use gestures along with your words to communicate with your toddler. Use a calm, firm (not angry) voice. At the same time, use a "stop" or "no-no" gesture. You might say, *No hitting, hitting hurts, Mommy ouch* as you take his hand and hold it by his side, firmly but not angrily.

Offer alternatives. Give your child acceptable ways to reach his goal. Instead of throwing balls in the house, offer your child a soft sponge ball to toss inside, or take him outside for "pitching" practice.



Try a distraction. Ignore your child's tantrum and instead, do something she doesn't expect: point to a bird outside, start to read a book she loves, or pick up an interesting toy and start to play with it. The bottom line is that young children want attention, and lots of it. When you ignore the tantrum, they tend to give it up much more quickly and accept one of the activities you are offering.

Suggest ways to manage strong emotions. When your child is really upset, suggest that he jump up and down, kick a ball, rip paper, cuddle with a teddy bear or use some other strategy *that you feel is appropriate*. This teaches your child to express strong feelings in healthy, non-hurtful ways.

Help your child take a break. Some children calm more quickly when they can be by themselves in a safe, quiet place. This is not punishment. It helps children learn to soothe themselves and regain control. When your child pulls herself together, tell her what a good job she did calming herself down.

For FREE parenting support, call the Health Department of Northwest Michigan at 1-800-432-4121 or visit www.nwhealth.org