

Parenting in Focus: Temper Tantrum Hints

Parenting a young child is special, but there are always some glitches to overcome.
(This article appeared in the Sequim Gazette on Wednesday, September 30, 2020)

Parenting a young child is special. Fortunately, most of it is positive and even fun. But there are always some glitches to overcome. One of those is how to handle your child's temper tantrums.

These are not one of parents favorite parts about raising their child, but there are some things you can do that will help.

Relax

Take a deep breath. In fact, waiting a few seconds might even make things a bit easier to handle.

Take control

He has lost control so when you take charge it helps. One easy way to show him you have control is to move him just a few feet away from where he is ... especially if that is the candy counter.

Don't yell

This will only make things worse. Keep in mind the goal is for him to regain control and the tantrum isn't the issue. Tell him you can see how upset he is. Try hugging him and perhaps the restraint of that hug will help him calm down. Speak calmly to him.

Don't give in

The worst thing you can do is give him the item he is having a temper tantrum about. Your child is smart and will quickly learn that throwing a tantrum is a good way of getting what he wants.

Offer him a choice

You can ask him if he would rather go to the car or stay in the store. You can talk with him about what book he might like to read this afternoon. The goal is for him to regain control — not to feel that you are bribing him to stop having the tantrum.

If all else fails, leave with him

Leave the place you are with him. Return to your car or your house. You will find that time will be on your side because temper tantrums take a lot of energy from both of you.

Remember, discipline is about teaching your child how to make good decisions so he can become self-disciplined. Discipline isn't just about eliminating bad behaviors with punishment — it also about rewarding correct behaviors.

The best way to lock in good behavior from your child is to notice and praise him when he has done something you want such as sharing a toy, minding you when you ask him to do something, helping a friend, or picking up his toys.

Recognizing positive actions and praising your child for those actions eventually makes nice deeds turn into healthy habits.

Yelling or removing him from the situation may temporarily change his ways but the lasting changes happen when his positive actions are noticed (excited voice of praise, high-five).

Help your child practice doing the right thing and then make a big positive deal out of it.

Cynthia Martin is the founder of the First Teacher program and former executive director of Parenting Matters Foundation, which publishes newsletters for parents, caregivers and grandparents.