



Kiwi Pediatrics

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Temper Tantrums

What are temper tantrums?

Temper tantrums are the way toddlers and young children express strong emotions before they have the skills or vocabulary to express them in other ways. They typically occur between ages 1-3 years old and then begin to occur less often as the child gets older. Common triggers are hunger, being tired, transitions between places or activities or a child wanting to be independent/make choices when they are not yet able to do so.

What can parents do?

The best thing parents can do is react as minimally as possible. If a parent gives in to what the child is demanding then the child learns that this is an effective method to get what they want. Likewise, if a parent becomes very angry or upset the child learns this is a way to get a reaction or attention. Surprisingly this can actually reinforce the behaviour almost as much as giving in. Try to stay calm (easier said than done sometimes!). Trying to distract or redirect can sometimes be effective. Parents may also choose to just ignore the behaviour. This can be a good choice particularly if you find yourself getting very angry when your child has a tantrum. As long as your child is in a safe space, stepping away for a moment or two to collect yourself can be very helpful.

Can tantrums be prevented?

No parent is going to be able to prevent all tantrums all the time. However, over time you may notice a pattern of particular triggers for your child. Being proactive by avoiding triggers may help avoid some tantrums. For example, if a child tantrums more often when hungry having a set routine for snacks and meals may be helpful. If a child tantrums when having to leave daycare then perhaps bringing a special snack or toy for the care could be useful. Over time and through trial and error you will learn what works for your child.

