

## Tantrums on Display

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When a young children are tired, hungry, over-stimulated, or having trouble adapting to rules and expectations it's not unusual for them to have meltdowns or tantrums. Unfortunately this often takes place out in public causing tired parents to be embarrassed or pushed to their breaking point.

**Question:** Sometimes when I'm at the playground, I see parents who are on the verge of losing it with their kids who are having a temper-tantrum. Do you have suggestions on what to do to help without appearing holier-than-thou, since we've all been there? And what can I do to explain what's going on to my fascinated 3 year old?

**Answer:** After you finish saying to yourself, "Boy, am I glad my son isn't hollering like that," you can see if there's something needed. Perhaps this parent has a baby in his arms as the 2-year-old is pounding on the ground. You could say something like, "This looks familiar, can I give you a hand?" The parent may not want your attention or help, and if that's the case don't stand around staring. Tell your son that it looks like the other child is having a lot of feelings and probably needs to go home where he'll feel better. You can also ask your 3-year-old if she sometimes feels that way, and what she thinks the other child wants.

### Some tips to prevent or manage toddler tantrums:

- Understand your child's temperament so that you can prevent situations that trigger tantrums. For example, if your child is sensitive to loud noises and bright lights, don't stay too long at a shopping mall.
- Bring healthy snacks with you when you go out since hunger is a tantrum trigger.
- Notice what gets your child frustrated and take the time to help her face challenging situations with empathy and guidance.
- Track frequent tantrums and see what time of day they happen, where you are, and whom your child is with. You may get some clues as to what your child is dealing with. Remember that tantrums are often a way to express and let go of feelings.
- When you give into tantrums you are reinforcing the idea that children can get what they want by yelling and stomping. Stay calm, acknowledge what you think your child is feeling, and if possible remove him to a quiet place.
- Use a timer when a child needs to stop playing or leave the park. Give a five-minute warning to reduce meltdowns.

You know your child best, so experiment with different ways to respond. Some children need you close by while others do better when they have some space to cry. When the tantrum is over don't hold a grudge. Connect with your child and move on to other things. And don't worry what other people think, after all being a parent is the hardest job there is. If you don't know what to say when people are staring you can always tell them that a Martian has abducted your child. A good sense of humor always helps.