

Tantrums, Fussing, and Whining

Elizabeth Pantley, author of The No-Cry Discipline Solution (used with permission)

If you ask parents to list the most frustrating discipline problems during early childhood, you would find that these three items appear on every list. All children master their own version of these behaviors – every parent has to deal with them!

Controlling their emotions

Most often these behaviors are caused by a child's inability to express or control his emotions. Tiredness, hunger, boredom, frustration and other causes that ignite The Big Three can frequently be avoided or modified. When your child begins a meltdown, try to determine if you can tell what underlying issue is causing the problem. Solve that problem and you'll likely have your sweet child back again.

Handling tantrums, fussing and whining

No matter how diligent you are in recognizing trigger causes, your child will still have meltdown moments. Or even meltdown days. The following tips can help you handle those inevitable bumps in the road. Be flexible and practice those solutions that seem to bring the best results.

Offer choices

You may be able to avoid problems by giving your child more of a say in his life. You can do this by offering choices. Instead of saying, "Get ready for bed right now," which may provoke a tantrum, offer a choice, "What would you like to do first, put on your pajamas or brush your teeth?" Children who are busy deciding things are often happy.

Get eye-to-eye

When you make a request from a distance your child will likely ignore you. Noncompliance creates stress, which leads to fussing and tantrums – from both of you. Instead, get down to your child's level, look him in the eye and make clear, concise requests. This will catch his full attention.

Tell him what you DO want

Instead of focusing on misbehavior and what you don't want him to do, explain exactly what you'd like your child to do or say instead. Give him simple instructions to follow.

Validate his feelings

Help your child identify and understand her emotions. Give words to her feelings, "You're sad. You want to stay here and play. I know." This doesn't mean you must give in to her request, but letting her know that you understand her problem may be enough to help her calm down.

Teach the Quiet Bunny

When children get worked up, their physiological symptoms keep them in an agitated state. You can teach your child how to relax and then use this approach when fussing begins.

You can start each morning or end each day with a brief relaxation session. Have your child sit or lie comfortably with eyes closed. Tell a story that he's a quiet bunny. Name body parts (feet, legs, tummy, etc.) and have your child wiggle it, and then relax it.

Once your child is familiar with this process you can call upon it at times when he is agitated. Crouch down to your child's level, put your hands on his shoulders, look him in the eye and say, let's do our Quiet Bunny. And then talk him through the process. Over time, just mentioning it and asking him to close his eyes will bring relaxation.

Distract and involve

Children can easily be distracted when a new activity is suggested. If your child is whining or fussing

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try viewing it as an “activity” that your child is engaged in. Since children aren’t very good multi-taskers you might be able to end the unpleasant activity with the recommendation of something different to do.

Invoke his imagination

If a child is upset about something, it can help to vocalize his fantasy of what he wishes would happen: “I bet you wish we could buy every single toy in this store.” This can become a fun game.

Use the preventive approach

Review desired behavior prior to leaving the house, or when entering a public building, or before you begin a play date. This might prevent the whining or tantrum from even beginning. Put your comments in the positive (tell what you want, not what you don’t want) and be specific.

When it’s over, it’s over

After an episode of misbehavior is finished you can let it go and move on. Don’t feel you must teach a lesson by withholding your approval, love or company. Children bounce right back, and it is okay for you to bounce right back, too.

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