TEMPER TANTRUMS

What are temper tantrums and why do they occur?

Temper tantrums are a normal part of childhood development, although they can vary a lot from one child to the next. Some children can have daily temper tantrums, while others might have them very rarely. Temper tantrums occur equally in boys and girls and typically occur between the ages of 1 and 3 years old.

Temper tantrums can range from crying, to screaming, biting, hitting, thrashing about, head-banging, and even breath holding. These are just a toddler's way of getting attention or expressing their emotions. They can be simple emotions such as being tired, hungry, or uncomfortable. Most commonly, the child is frustrated. During this period of a child's life, children are learning about themselves, as well as other people, objects and things in their world. They also are typically able to understand spoken language better than they are able to speak it themselves. Due to this uneven balance between understanding and speaking, children often resort to physical ways to communicate emotions, which can lead to temper tantrums. Therefore, temper tantrums tend to lessen as a child's language skills improve.

Children of this age are also very focused on learning how to do things for themselves. As they are finding their independence, they are often faced with power struggles. These power struggles are typically related to a child thinking they are able to do something that they are not capable of or believing they can have something that is not intended for them. When a toddler understands they cannot do everything on their own and that they cannot have everything they want they experience great disappointment, which is often expressed in the form of a temper tantrum.

What can I do when my child has a temper tantrum?

- Keep calm! This is often hard to do during a tantrum, but it is extremely important. Children can sense your frustration which will make the tantrum worse.

- Hitting and spanking do not help. These physical tactics can lead to worse behavior over time and teach the child that physical aggression is okay.

- Try to figure out why the tantrum is occurring. If you can understand the cause of the tantrum you can try to avoid it in the future.

- Ignore the behavior. If your child is safe and not hurting themselves or others, let them have their temper tantrum. Always keep them in your eyesight to ensure their safety but do not give them attention for their behavior. Eventually it will stop.

- If they are in danger of hurting themselves or others, you should physically remove the child from the environment and go somewhere quiet for them to calm down.

Additional Resources

http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/tantrums.html
http://www.nasponline.org/resources/behavior/tantrums_ho.aspx
http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/tantrum/HQ01622

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