



Development and Behavior Toolkit for Children Birth to 5

Activities to Support Healthy Early Child Development

For more information, please contact the Cincinnati LEND program at LENDTraining@cchmc.org



Behavior Handouts



Behavior Strategies

To increase the chance the child will practice skills and follow your instructions, the following strategies can be used:

- **PRAISE!** Most children LOVE attention from their loved ones. Praise can be motivating for children. Praise works best when it is given right after the child does something you asked. Tell your child why you are giving them praise: *"Good job counting!," "Nice work drawing a circle!"*
- **REWARDS** can be used when asking children to work on challenging tasks. Rewards can include bubbles, snacks, tickles, and toys. Rewards work best when they are given right after the child does something you asked.
- **FUN!** Make working on different skills fun by turning the activities into games!
- **TIMERS** can help with transitions that are hard for children. You can set a timer for 2 minutes and let them know that when the timer goes off, it will be time to do something new. It can be helpful to give a warning when you are going to stop one activity and start another. Timers can be helpful when moving away from a fun activity like playground time.



Behavior Strategies

- **CHOICES.** Giving choices can be helpful. Instead of asking a “yes” or “no” question, give them a choice. You could say, “Do you want to draw or play catch?” If you are working on language skills you could say, “Do you want to play Simon says or read a book together?”
- **BEHAVIOR.** Children sometimes misbehave. This may be when asked to work on a challenging activity or to get out of working on skills. It's important that you do not let the child get out of doing work because they are misbehaving. Have them take one more turn and then take a break. If you end during the tantrum, it could make misbehavior happen more often (Reinforcement of that misbehavior). Children may also misbehave to “get a reaction” out of you. If they are misbehaving, ignore what they are doing by not talking about the specific misbehavior. Instead, redirect them to another activity or wait until they calm before giving more commands. Do not ignore your child if they are harming themselves or someone else.

If a child continues to have difficulty with tantrums and following directions which causes disruptions to daily life (and it is hard for caregivers to manage), consider behavior therapy. Behavior therapists, like psychologists or counselors, work with families to decrease meltdowns and improve behavior.



Temper Tantrums



Temper Tantrums

What does a typical temper tantrum look like?

For children between 1-3 years, temper tantrums may include whining, crying and shouting, flailing arms and legs, throwing things, holding their breath, tensing their body, or going limp. Temper tantrums usually last approximately 1-15 minutes. It is typical for children to have a tantrum on average once per day.

**Babies under 12 months can sometimes appear irritable, have inconsolable crying, or be unable to soothe. This would not be considered a temper tantrum. Talk to the primary care provider because there may be a medical reason for the behavior.*

Are temper tantrums typical?

Temper tantrums are common in young children, especially ages 2-3.

Children use tantrums as a way to express their emotions before being able to verbalize their feelings in a more acceptable way. It may appear as if the child is out of control (screaming, stomping, and falling to the floor), but this is age appropriate and a part of typical development.



Temper Tantrums

Why do children have more temper tantrums at home?

Temper tantrums happen more often with parents. Children have tantrums when trying to express their feelings with their most trusted caregivers.

Figuring out why the temper tantrum happened can help reduce them in the future.

When to be concerned and seek help for a child's tantrums:

Be concerned if temper tantrums:

- often last longer than 15 minutes.
- become violent.
- include harming themselves.

Consider talking to the child's pediatrician if:

- tantrums continue or get worse after 4 years of age.
- the child is not playing or acting like they typically do in between tantrums.



Temper Tantrums

Why do children have temper tantrums and how should you help?

All behaviors happen for a reason. Children may tantrum to get what they want, if they are unable to ask for what they want, or as a way to express strong emotions.

There are 5 common causes of tantrums including:

- **Medical/physical reasons:** A child engages in a behavior because something is physically wrong. Example: the child could be tired, hungry, and/or sick. They might have a tantrum if they can't communicate that they are hungry and want to eat.

How to help: Have pictures of the child's preferred food so that they can communicate that they are hungry.

- **Avoid doing something (Escape):** A child engages in a behavior to end or avoid something they don't want to do or that is hard for them to do. Example: the child may have a tantrum because the puzzle is hard for them to finish. **How to help:**

Make sure the child knows they can ask for help. Using a picture of a helping hand can be a signal that help is available.



Temper Tantrums

3. **Attention/Connection:** A child engages in a behavior to receive attention or to try to connect with others. Example: the child screams when the grown up is talking to another child. **How to help:** Ignore the screaming and let the child know you will talk to them when they quiet their voice.
4. **Wants something (Tangible):** A child engages in a behavior to get something they want. Example: the child yells and screams while grocery shopping because they want candy. **How to help:** Let the child know what to expect from the shopping trip before going in (pre-teaching). Redirect their attention to holding something in the cart or helping scan at check-out.
5. **Sensory/Automatic:** A child engages in a behavior because it feels physically good or relieves something that feels bad. Example: the child crashes into furniture to gain deep sensory input because it comforts them. **How to help:** provide the child with activities to get deep pressure input in a more appropriate way, such as a trampoline, bear hugs, massage, etc.



Temper Tantrums

Figuring out the reason for the child's behavior- The ABCs

Try to figure out what happened right before the tantrum (antecedent) to potentially cause it and what happened right after the tantrum (consequence). You can do this by writing them down on a chart. See the chart below for examples.

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
The child asks for a sucker but told not until after dinner	The child screams and drops to the floor	Parent gives child the sucker to avoid a scene
The child asks for a sucker but told not until after dinner	The child screams and drops to the floor	Parent continues making dinner and doesn't talk to child about sucker
The child asks for a sucker but told not until after dinner	The child screams and drops to the floor	Parent reminds the child they can have a sucker after dinner

The first example where the parent gives the child the sucker may mean the tantrum will happen more often in the future. This means the parent reinforced the behavior. The child may learn that screaming and dropping to the floor will get them a sucker. In the next two examples, the child does not get the sucker immediately so the parent's response is not as likely to reinforce the tantrum behavior.



Temper Tantrums

How to avoid tantrums?

- ☐ Alert children to upcoming changes in schedule or switching activities

Example: provide 1 or 2 warnings before a change in activity

- ☐ Reduce distractions

Example: before providing instructions, make sure to turn off TV/electronics

- ☐ Engage child's attention

Example: kneel down to your child's level when sharing plans or expectations

- ☐ Phrase necessary instructions as statements, not questions

Example: "Eat your dinner, please" instead of "Would you like to eat dinner?"

Remember- giving choices is good, but not when it is something a child must do

- ☐ Prioritize important instructions and follow through

Example: Stick to what you've asked, but offer help as needed

- ☐ Keep it simple

Example: Use short statements and limit extra words, "Put away the toy, please" instead of "Come on, Hakeem, I need you to stop playing, turn off the toy, and put it back in the bin."

- ☐ Avoid repeating instructions over and over

Example: Give an instruction and wait 2-5 seconds to see how the child may respond. If he/she does not respond, think about a way to help them get started on the instruction with your help.



Temper Tantrums

What should grown ups do when a child is having a temper tantrum?

- Stay calm
- Find a distraction
- Ignore the tantrum by not talking to the child about the tantrum
- Keep the child in sight
- Keep the child and others safe

It is important not to give in to tantrums by giving the child what they are tantruming to get, whether that be attention or an item. Avoid changing your mind mid-tantrum and never hit, bite, or kick your child back.

What should be done after a child's tantrum is over?

- Offer praise for slowing down - "You slowed your body so well."
- Acknowledge their feelings - "It is frustrating to not get what we want."
- Teach your child to label emotions - "Feeling mad brings big emotions."
- Teach your child how to handle strong emotions - "When you feel mad, I can help you count to 5 or take deep breaths."
- Set good, positive examples - Model healthy coping skills like breathing, listening to music, or taking a break in a quiet place

Are tantrums the result of poor parenting?

NO. Tantrums are a result of children's personality and current situation.

Typical tantrums, as outlined above, are an expected part of development.

