

# Managing Challenging Childhood Behaviours

Managing the behaviours in a young child can be challenging and exhausting for parents. Every child is different as a result what works for one child does not necessarily work for another. Parents also have their own unique personalities and this may make it a challenge to manage their child's budding personality if it is different to theirs, or maybe more so if it's the same. Parents also have the additional responsibilities such as work, other children, relationships with partners, and it can be difficult to find time for their own basic needs to be met. Challenging childhood behaviours can make parenting seem quite overwhelming. The tips below can help parents to navigate three common childhood behaviours.

## Tantrums



Temper tantrums are every parent's nightmare, especially when they occur when they feel that they haven't got the emotional energy or time to deal with a tantrum or when they occur in public, exposing a parent to embarrassment or judgment by others. Remember that the only perfect parents are people who have no children, and also understand that the children of good parents can have tantrums. Having established that, let's look at some ways to manage tantrums.

Understand that tantrums are designed to get a parent's attention, and at times to achieve a goal. Sometimes even children who are able to speak are unable to explain what they are feeling or what they want. Tantrums can be triggered by hunger, tiredness, or other incidents, and attending to the underlying need can help to calm a child and end a tantrum.

**Keep calm and talk to your child** - Even children who cannot yet talk can be positively affected by speech from a parent that is calming and empathetic. Your child is not the enemy, and young brains cannot sort through all of the emotions and experiences that may be causing a tantrum. Try to understand what is happening to your child, and respond calmly. If you should, scream or lash the child, it will only make things worse.

**Offer the child a choice** - and not "shut up or I'll smack your bum!" In the moment, especially if the tantrum is related to a child not receiving that they want, prevented from doing something unsafe, or having to do a task that they find undesirable, it may seem to the parent that the child has no choice to comply. That is not necessarily true. With toddlers, a choice between two options can help a child to feel as if they have some measure of control, and this is important. So being nude at school is not appropriate, but allowing a choice between two outfits can achieve that goal. Leaving the supermarket

with all of the sweets isn't happening, but being allowed to choose one healthy snack at the end of the shopping trip if behaviour has been good is reasonable.

**Anticipate and avoid triggers for tantrums** - if you know that our child is more likely to have a tantrum if he or she is overly tired or hungry, plan for them to have breaks, meals/snacks instead of waiting for them to have a tantrum. If you know that they struggle with going to the grocery store or toy store and wanting everything in sight, set boundaries, state expected behaviours and reasonable rewards for those behaviours before going to the store. Little reminders along the way are often important.

**Routine and consistency are key** - having a routine for yourself and your child is important, as it can prevent some of the triggers for tantrums. This relates to meeting basic needs for things like food and rest, but also to the performance of tasks that your child may find less desirable such as tidying toys, having a bath or eating vegetables. Children ought to be able to expect that these things will happen every day, or that certain good behaviours are expected all of the time, not sometimes. So leaving the toys in a mess is not OK one day, and unacceptable on another. Having a routine and being consistent can reduce a child's anxiety and yours, and allow for a calmer existence for you both.

**Do not give in to demands** - this may seem obvious, but once you give in to the child's original demand, even if you were calm and appropriate in your response, you have lost the battle of wills, because getting what they want through having a tantrum has been reinforced. Even if a child is given acceptable choices, if there was a demand made with the tantrum, giving in to that demand cannot be one of the options.

