

Dealing With Common Challenging Behaviours

Challenging behaviours can be stressful to deal with. As a parent or caregiver, you may feel that you've done something wrong. Or you may be reminded of a difficult situation you faced as a child.

But as your toddler grows and seeks more independence, it's normal for them to act out. They're learning about the world and what they can and can't do. Their behaviour is also their way of telling you that they need something, like rest, food, comfort or connection.

When your toddler's behaviour is difficult, your role is to assist them in recognizing their emotions and learning to manage them in a positive manner. This is an opportunity for you to respond in a way that shows understanding and strengthens a strong, respectful bond with them.



TRY THIS

You don't need to do something every time your child "acts out." If they're doing something minor that isn't putting them in danger or hurting anyone, you may want to overlook it. Don't overlook their good behaviour, though. Praising them regularly helps them learn how to express their feelings in a healthy way.

Biting

- ✓ State the limit clearly and simply: "No, please don't bite. It hurts." Then move on.
- ✓ If they bite while breastfeeding or chestfeeding, firmly say no, tell them it hurt and remove them from the breast or chest. Then try again. (See [Breastfeeding or Chestfeeding Your Toddler](#))
- ✗ Don't bite them back. It may frighten and confuse them, and it will tell them that biting is okay.
- ✗ Don't laugh.



DID YOU KNOW?

Most young children bite someone at least once, usually when they have a sore mouth or when they're excited, scared or frustrated.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Your toddler learns how to behave by watching you. If you're acting stressed, your child will, too. But if you deal respectfully with them and with others, they'll learn to do the same.

Tantrums

Before a tantrum happens:

- ✓ Keep to routines around rest, activity and meal and snack times. Take healthy snacks and water with you when you go out.
- ✓ Let them know ahead of time what's going to happen and what you want them to do: "We're going to the store for milk and fruit. You can help me choose the bananas."
- ✓ Find ways to help them deal with their feelings, like running fast or using words.
- ✓ Try not to say no to every request. Give them control over little things, like which shirt to wear.

If you see a tantrum coming on:

- ✓ Redirect them to an activity they're familiar with, try to change what's bothering them or distract them. If they don't want to go to bed, for example, tell them about something fun they'll enjoy the next day.
- ✓ Give them quiet time if they're tired.
- ✓ Give them food if they're hungry.

If they're having a tantrum:

- ✓ Take some deep breaths and stay calm. Don't scream or spank them.
- ✓ Try to comfort them: "I'm here and I love you." But don't try to talk about their feelings until later, when everyone is calm.

- ✓ Try holding them firmly but lovingly, but stop if it seems to make the tantrum worse.
- ✓ If you're in public, remember that most people will understand.
- ✓ Make sure that they won't get hurt, hurt others or damage anything.

When the tantrum is over:

- ✓ Cuddle and comfort them.
- ✓ Praise them for regaining control.
- ✓ Help them name the feelings they had before, during and after the tantrum.
- ✓ Let them know it's normal to feel upset, and talk about what they can do next time they feel bad – like telling you before the feelings get too big for them to handle.
- ✓ Talk to your health care provider if you have concerns.

What is a tantrum?

An explosion of anger and frustration. Your child may cry, scream, kick, fall down, run away, thrash around, arch their back, stiffen their arms and legs, hold their breath, break things or even vomit.



DID YOU KNOW?

Like many parents and caregivers, you may be uncomfortable when your child shows big emotions like anger or sadness. It might remind you of hard times in your life, or you may just be less comfortable sharing feelings. Understanding why you feel uncomfortable can help you respond to your child in a healthy and helpful way, instead of reacting out of your own sadness, anger or frustration.



BRAIN BUILDER

By staying calm when your child is having a tantrum, you're showing them how to respond to stressful situations.

Fighting With Other Children

- ✓ If you're worried about safety, step in right away.
- ✓ If safety's not an issue, stay back for a minute to see if they can solve the problem themselves.
- ✓ Suggest fair solutions, like sharing: "Amy really likes the truck you're playing with. When you're done with it, can you give them a turn?"
- ✓ Try to understand what led to the fight to help prevent it from happening again.



DID YOU KNOW?

Fighting is very common between siblings.

Whining

- ✓ Check if they're hungry, tired or uncomfortable.
- ✓ Offer a hug.
- ✓ Let them know you can't understand them when they whine, and help them find the words to express what's bothering them.
- ✓ Praise them when they're not whining.

Dawdling (Moving Slowly)

- ✓ Give them plenty of notice before changing activities.
- ✓ Build in extra time to do things, especially when you know that switching activities will be hard, like putting toys away to get ready for bed.
- ✓ Tell them what you need them to do clearly and simply: "Put on your coat now, please."
- ✓ Put away toys, turn off the TV and get rid of other distractions when you're in a hurry. And give them some control over the situation by giving them a job to do.

