



# The art of handling toddler tantrums – Parenting strategies for calm and connection

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“NO!” screamed my three-year-old, his small fists clenched as he threw himself on the floor.

After a week of fatigue of packing, unpacking, and shifting house; finally, we spared the whole day to spend together as family at beach to relax.

Now since morning while we were getting ready, he was continuously irritated and showing tantrums.

First, it was about an old broken toy that we threw away during shifting (he wanted to take that broken toy guitar to play with it at beach).

My wife handled that well and talked him through it, which involved a lot of sobbing (from him).

Then, he did not want to wear his shirt.

We did what most of parents would do in this scenario. We decided to let him wear his choice shirt (a formal shirt that suddenly became his favorite shirt) and thought that later at beach, we will talk him into changing.

Now when we were about to leave, he refused to wear his shoes and was demanding to wear a formal wear (for the beach).

I tried to talk him out with logic but his screams grew louder, and his tears only intensified.

We felt helpless, frustrated, and already exhausted, even before the start of our journey.

For most of the parents, a scene like this is all too familiar.

Toddler tantrums are those universally challenging episodes that come hand-in-hand with the joys of parenting young children.

In one moment, your little one is full of laughter, playing happily, and in the next, they are overwhelmed, unable to articulate their feelings, and locked in a battle of screaming, kicking, or throwing anything within reach.

It is enough to test even the calmest parents' patience.

I have seen parents literally dragging their bawling kids out of play areas or amusement parks. I have seen parents losing patience and screaming at their kids in public.

We know many parents succumb to pressure and buy that toy or chocolate just to avoid the meltdown.

Most of the parents (guilty myself) have used carrot and stick strategy, first offering an alternate (will take you to some place fun) or threatening to take away something (will not take you to your favorite place).

All of these strategies may work for short term but they do not fix the "problem".

If we take a step back, tantrums are more than just an inconvenience or an act of defiance.

They are a window into your child's emotional world, a signal that they are navigating big emotions and struggling to communicate their needs, desires, or frustrations.

Experts in child psychology tell us that tantrums are a completely normal and even healthy part of toddler development.

Just as toddlers are learning to walk, talk, and understand their environment, they are also learning to recognize and manage emotions - and sometimes, those emotions can feel as big and unmanageable to them as a mountain.

As Dr. Daniel Siegel, co-author of *The Whole-Brain Child*, explains, “Tantrums are part of a child’s brain development process, where they’re learning to handle overwhelming feelings.”

In other words, your child’s brain is in training mode, building the pathways that will help them regulate emotions and think through responses (later when fully developed), rather than reacting on impulse (while developing).

The way we respond to these episodes can profoundly influence their emotional growth, teaching them valuable skills for calming down and expressing themselves more effectively.

#### The Unseen Side of Tantrums: What is Really Happening?

Imagine you are a toddler.

The world is vast, exciting, but utterly confusing and just little things make sense if at all.

You are flooded with new experiences and emotions every day, but you lack the language and self-control to express what you are feeling.

You want something, but your parent says no. Alternatively, maybe you are simply tired or hungry.

For a toddler, these situations can feel catastrophic.

When children cannot process what is happening or what they want, the only option left is an emotional outburst.

Fun fact: many people do not out grow from this stage even as adult and we often see emotional outbursts from adults on seemingly trivial issues.

Tantrums are simply the manifestation of this internal storm.

They are not about manipulation or trying to “win”; they are about release and coping.

Research suggests that tantrums peak between the ages of 18 months and 5 years, the very stage when children are developing their communication skills but have not yet learned to fully express or control their emotions.

This is why, for a child, something as simple as not getting a second cookie can spark a meltdown — it is not about the cookie itself, but about the overwhelming emotions that come from being told “no.”

#### Why It's Important to Handle Tantrums Calmly?

When children throw a tantrum, they are usually feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, or unable to express their needs.

In our earlier situation where our child was throwing tantrum, we ourselves were anxious and extremely exhausted from a week's fatigue that comes with shifting house.

Our kid caught our anxious energy (yes, energy or vibes whatever you prefer to call, do pass on to people close to us but more on that in some other blog).

Along with his own fatigue, neglect from us during that time and not being able to fully process huge change.

That all was coming out as emotional outpouring on “trivial” issues (definitely not trivial issue for him).

Nonetheless, how we respond to their meltdowns can either reinforce those feelings or help them navigate and soothe their emotions.

Besides, while it is tempting to respond with frustration or give in to their demands just to stop the crying, these reactions can have unintended consequences.

Giving in to tantrums might reinforce negative behaviors, while reacting with anger can increase your child's distress and create a cycle of power struggles.

As clinical psychologist, Dr. Laura Markham puts it, "When we meet a child's tantrum with calmness and compassion, we're teaching them that emotions can be managed constructively."

By acknowledging their emotions and modeling calm responses, we guide children in managing their feelings without resorting to meltdowns. This teaches toddlers' self-regulation, a critical skill that will serve them throughout their lives.

### Why Empathy and Patience Are Key

It is natural to feel frustrated or helpless in the face of a toddler's tantrum, especially if it happens in public or disrupts a planned activity.

However, remember, your child is looking to you as a source of calm and security.

Every time you respond with anger or frustration, it adds on to child's distress and longer exposure to such anger leads to childhood trauma. But if, every time you respond with patience and empathy, you are helping to build their capacity for emotional resilience.

As research shows, when children feel supported during difficult moments, they are more likely to develop the self-control and emotional awareness they need to navigate challenges, as they grow older.

### Setting the Stage for a Tantrum-Free Future

No parenting technique will eliminate tantrums, but certain strategies can help reduce their frequency and intensity.

The key is to be proactive, setting clear expectations, and creating routines that help toddlers feel secure.

Small adjustments such as preparing your child for transitions, ensuring they are well-rested and fed — can make a world of difference.

In this blog, I will share practical, proven strategies for handling toddler tantrums effectively and compassionately.

You will learn ways to understand the causes of tantrums, implement preventative measures, and use calming techniques when meltdowns happen. With these tools, you will not only reduce the number of tantrums but also build a stronger, more trusting relationship with your child.

In addition, as you help your little one navigate their emotions, you will also be equipping them with the skills they will use throughout their lives to handle stress, frustration, and other big feelings.

By approaching tantrums with understanding and patience, you are setting your child up for a lifetime of emotional strength.



As Dr. Siegel says, “The more we can teach our children to understand their feelings and impulses, the better equipped they’ll be to respond to life’s challenges with resilience and empathy.”

So, let us dive in, explore the nature of toddler tantrums, and learn how to turn these challenging moments into opportunities for growth and connection.

The main issue behind toddler tantrums is that young children are still developing the skills to understand, express, and regulate their emotions.

They are at a stage where their emotional world is vast, but their verbal and self-control abilities are limited. This combination of intense emotions and limited tools to handle them often leads to emotional outbursts.

Several factors contribute to this:

→ Limited Emotional Vocabulary:

Toddlers do not yet have the words or ability to describe their emotions accurately.

So, when they feel frustrated, sad, angry, or overwhelmed, they struggle to express these feelings in words, which can quickly escalate into a tantrum.

→ Developing Self-Control:

Self-regulation — the ability to manage impulses and delay gratification, is still forming at this age (some parents themselves even lack self-emotional regulation which is transferred to their next generation and the cycle continues).

When they want something immediately, it can be difficult for them to wait or accept a “no,” triggering emotional outbursts.

→ Striving for Independence:

Toddlers are eager to assert their independence, often leading to power struggles.

When they feel like they do not have control over decisions or situations, a tantrum can become their way of expressing frustration or reasserting control.

You might have noticed that oftentimes toddlers flex power move (hilarious word in this context to be honest) by looking directly into our eyes and doing exactly what we told them not to do.

→ Difficulty Managing Disappointment:

Toddlers are learning about boundaries and limits, but they do not yet have the coping skills to handle the disappointment that comes with them.

Hearing “no” or being asked to stop an enjoyable activity can feel overwhelming.

→ Basic Needs and Routine Disruptions:

Hunger, fatigue, overstimulation, or changes in routine can all contribute to tantrums. This was case with our son’s tantrums on above-mentioned day. We were all fatigued due to huge change, our routines got disturbed. All this affected us and definitely had a toll on him as well.

In addition, when their physical or emotional needs are not met, toddlers may resort to meltdowns as a way of coping.

In essence, toddler tantrums are a normal, albeit challenging, part of child development.

They are a signal that a child is navigating new emotions and boundaries and needs support from caregivers to learn healthier ways to express and manage their feelings.

Once we understand the reasons for our toddler's tantrums, it becomes easier to approach them.

Let us dive into some ways we can soothe our toddlers while they are showing outbursts of emotions.

First thing is that always try to identify what has caused the emotional outburst (above-mentioned factors can be used as a guide). Then approach it accordingly.

- ➔ If the basic needs have not met then cater to those needs like hunger, fatigue etc.
- ➔ If there is routine disturbance, soothe them by talking to them about it (and keep your energy positive around them as they catch on our energy, so if we are visibly distressed no amount of words will have any impact on them).
- ➔ If there is huge change coming, prepare them mentally by talking about it from few days before (even if you feel they will not understand it properly).

Involve them in small things so they feel part of it. Ask for simple suggestions about things that matters to them.

If for example you are shifting house, you can prepare them mentally by telling them that we are moving.

Tell them some good things about new house; making new friends, nice location, and park is nearby etc.

Get some suggestions on how to set their room (this will be a learning opportunity for them as well and you do not have to necessarily act on all their advice but they will feel involved).

→ If they are coping with some kind of “No” like don’t do this, don’t eat candy now, oftentimes it is better to give them options (like instead of throwing blocks, let us throw and catch ball together or let us eat food first and then candy.

→ Increase their emotional vocabulary and encourage them to express their feelings.

This will help them better express their feelings with words. (On side note, make sure you practice and teach emotional intelligence to your kids. This one skill will go a long way in your child’s life and will be a key contributor to their success).

Here are some of the points that are general approach towards calming a toddler.

1. Pause and breathe:

Make a “ritual” sort of at home and inform them earlier that whenever anyone starts to get angry, others will use magical word “pause and breathe” and you have to take 4 deep breaths.

Show them before how to do it and tell them this applies to us parents as well, they will happily oblige (it will be equally useful for parents as well).

Do not expect these words to do wonders and would stop the tantrums immediately.

In fact, you will see a lot of resistance in beginning (as if when you say these words first time on sign of beginning of emotional outburst, your child will say “no, I will not breathe” or react with more anger).

However, what will happen is that their mind will start accepting it and resistance will start becoming less and less.

One important point to remember is that aim is not to suppress the emotions, rather just to give a pause. You still need to address the issue afterwards.

Another point to remember is that you do not have to lose your calm in all this. Whatever their response is, you need to understand that it is very hard for them to process their emotions.

## 2. Get down on your knees and hold their hand:

Sit on your knees or get down on floor, main thing is to get down to their level so you can look them in eye from same level.

You can also give them a hug or hold their hand while sitting (but if they resist, do not force). Gently pat their hand or back and ask them in soft voice.

If they do not respond, it is okay. If they are crying, sobbing after the tantrum, just hug them and do not talk.

Main point is to be down with them, assuring them that you are there and let their emotions flow.

### 3. Acknowledge their emotions:

Recognize and name your child's emotions.

Saying "I see you're really upset" can help them feel heard and understood, which often defuses anger or frustration.

For example, your child wants a toy in supermarket, so you tell them, "I know you are disappointed that you cannot get this toy. It is really hard when we cannot get what we want".

Just acknowledging their emotions oftentimes soothes them. They may not stop crying or whining but they will not have super charged emotional outburst.

### 4. Redirect their energy:

Toddlers often need something constructive to focus on, so redirecting their attention to a new activity can diffuse the situation.

Like if they are throwing blocks, tell them let us build something with blocks or ask them to bring ball so you both can play catch the ball.

You channel their energy to something or somewhere else, which is productive.

5. Offer choices to give them a sense of control:

Give them two positive choices related to their situation to empower them with feeling of control.

If your toddler has a meltdown because they do not want to leave the park, you could say, "Would you like to walk to the car holding my hand, or would you like me to carry you?"

6. Set up predictable routines:

Predictability helps toddlers feel secure.

Establish routines, and give them advance notice of transitions to prevent tantrums triggered by sudden changes.

Like if you feel your toddler shows tantrums before bedtime, make a routine that helps them transition smoothly like 15 minutes book reading, then lights off for story time.

When same routine is practiced every day, their mind gets conditioned to it.

7. Use gentle consequences and must follow through:

For repeated behaviors, calmly and consistently implement gentle, logical consequences to help toddlers understand the impact of their actions.

This way they also learn early about actions, consequences and responsibility.

If your child throws toys after being asked not to, explain that the toys will be put away for a little while. Say, “We don’t throw toys. If you throw them, we’ll have to put them away.”

Important point is that then you must follow through otherwise, it will not have any impact and whole thing will be a futile effort.

Caution: Harsh consequences like grounding, beating, screaming or ignoring as punishment are never good as this is the time they want more attachment not detachment.

#### 8. Praise Positive Behavior and Celebrate Small Wins:

When your toddler shows patience, manages disappointment, or responds calmly, praise them.

For example, when you asked them to breathe and they listened and responded calmly, praise their efforts.

Positive reinforcement helps toddlers feel proud of their actions and encourages them to repeat good behavior.

In the journey of handling toddler tantrums peacefully, every calm response, validating word, and gentle redirection teaches a child invaluable lessons in self-regulation, empathy, and patience.



By approaching these challenging moments with understanding rather than frustration, we help toddlers build emotional resilience, teaching them that big feelings are manageable, and that they are supported in learning to navigate them.

While peaceful handling of tantrums requires patience and consistency, the rewards are immense: we are not just ending a meltdown; we are laying the foundation for a lifetime of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and compassion.

Remember, each peaceful response is an investment in their future – and in the peaceful, connected family dynamic we all hope to foster.