



Handling Tantrums

Tantrums happen for many different reasons, but all share one thing in common: stress causes the child to become overwhelmed and lose control. Stress can make it harder to stay in control, such as being tired, hungry, sick, frustrated, angry, or over-excited. Before you can expect your child to take responsibility for an action, learn from a mistake, or solve the problem that is causing the tantrum, try to help your child regain control.

Steps for Handling Tantrums

- **Remain calm.** Speak calmly and stay in control of your emotions.
- **Consider the underlying cause.** Think about why your child may be having a tantrum.
- **Recognize the emotion.** Name the emotion you see to let your child know you are listening, and you understand the need they are expressing. For example, say, “I understand you are frustrated because you want that toy.” Some children need to be touched or hugged at this point, while other children need to be left alone. Give your child attention without giving into their demands or rewarding them for the misbehavior.
- **Set reasonable limits.** After connecting with your child by recognizing the emotion that is being expressed, set limits on behavior. For example, it may be okay for your child to express emotion by crying, but not by hitting. You may redirect their behavior by offering safer ways to express themselves, or by encouraging them to use the stress reduction strategies such as the Cool Down Spot, Stop and Think, and Five Deep Breaths (see Stress Management sheet).
- **Talk about what happened.** Once your child is calm, ask what happened. Retelling the story helps your child move toward thinking logically instead of emotionally. When everyone is calm, lessons can be learned about how to make better choices in the future.



ChildBuilders. (2014). *Build to nurture: Early Childhood Curriculum*. Houston, TX: ChildBuilders.