

Toddlers' Tears and Tantrums: Guide for Training Child Care Providers

Overview:

The *Toddlers' Tears and Tantrums* materials contain information about the reasons why toddlers get upset and frustrated, the differences between crying and tantrums, and how to respond based on the type of tantrum. Some information about routines is provided, but more detailed information about routines is available in *The Power of Routines* materials.

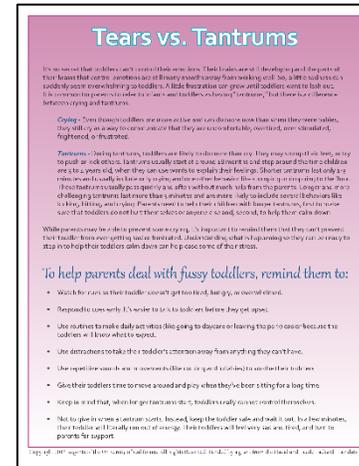
Materials:

- ◇ Video – Tears and Tantrums
- ◇ Provider Handout (single-sided) 
- ◇ Parent Handout (double-sided, see page 2 of this guide)

To access the materials, visit

Website: <http://lactation.ucdavis.edu/baby-behavior-in-child-care/>

Password: BBCC2017



Tips for sharing with childcare providers

- ◇ Begin by asking the provider about how they perceive parents handle their toddler's tantrums. Discuss how stressful it is when babies and toddlers are upset and how it is common for parents to misinterpret the child's behavior.
- ◇ Share video and Provider Handout with the provider. Talk about the tips and concepts in the materials that might be most useful to the parents of the children that they care for.
- ◇ Offer copies of the Parent Handout for the provider to share with parents. Point out the tips that are given to make caring for toddlers easier.
- ◇ Help provider identify specific opportunities that they have to share messages with the parents of the children that they care for, such as pick up and drop off times, when updating parents on the activities of the day, in newsletters or calendars, or when parents ask questions.

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Highlights

- Toddlers use cues to communicate, just like babies do
- Toddlers don't understand why they can't have or do what they want
 - Toddlers get upset when they can't communicate effectively, can't have what they want, can't move how they want, and when overwhelmed or tired
- A toddler isn't developmentally capable of controlling their own emotions
- Tantrums start at about 18 months old and consist of crying with additional behaviors like stomping, throwing things, hitting, etc.
- When a tantrum starts, toddlers need help to stay safe
- There are two types of tantrums:
 - **Shorter:** 1-3 minutes, only one behavior, and toddler can usually calm themselves
 - **Longer:** Longer than 3 minutes, can involve several behaviors, need parents to provide comfort and help calm down
- Toddlers grow out of tantrums usually between 3 and 4 years old

Toddlers' Tears

Your toddler has grown and changed so much since he was born. Although he has many new skills, your toddler is a lot more like a baby than an older child. He still uses "cues" to tell you what he needs and wants. Just like when he was much younger, your toddler is still learning cues that work – including how to get what he wants when you say no.

Toddlers tend to get frustrated or upset when they:

- Can't communicate what they want
- Can't have something they want
- Can't move the way they want
- Are overwhelmed or tired

Remember, toddlers are still too young to understand why they can't have something they want. For example, if you won't let her hold a toy that she reaches for in the store, she will think that you don't understand what she wants, so she'll use a bigger cue. She'll jump at you, lean her body toward the toy, and make more noise. She may start to climb out of the cart as she gets louder and louder. As hard as it is to deal with a screaming toddler, if you let her hold the toy when she's screaming for it, she will learn that screaming and getting out of the cart is the best way to get toys.

Because your toddler is just starting to understand what's happening around her and not planning or thinking ahead, your own response can have a big effect on your toddler's behavior.

You can prevent some crying by:

- Watching for cues so your toddler doesn't get too tired, hungry, or overwhelmed
- Responding to early cues to prevent your toddler from using more extreme behaviors like crying
- Using distraction to take her attention away from something she can't do
- Using rejection to soothe her help her calm down if she starts to cry
- Explaining what is coming next so she knows what to expect
- Giving her time to move around and play when she's been sitting for a long time

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Toddlers' Tantrums

Does it ever seem like your toddler gets overly upset about little things? You aren't imagining it; your toddler really can't always control her emotions. Her brain is still developing and the parts of her brain that control emotions aren't fully functional yet. A little sadness can suddenly seem overwhelming to her. A little frustration can grow until she wants to lash out. This doesn't mean that you have to prevent her from being sad or frustrated, you just have to understand what is happening so you can be ready to step in to keep her safe or help her calm down.

Tantrums are more intense than typical crying

Occasionally your toddler may cry and try to throw things. Around 28 months, many children have crying bouts that follow a pattern typically called "tantrums." During tantrums, your toddler is likely louder than crying, he may stomp his feet, or try to push or kick you.

Shorter Tantrums:

- Last only 1-3 minutes and he may be able to calm himself down.
- Usually include only crying and one other behavior like stamping or stomping to the floor.
- Still require your attention to prevent your toddler from hurting himself.

Longer Tantrums:

- Last more than 3 minutes and are more likely to include several behaviors like kicking, hitting, and crying.
- Require your help - make sure that he does not hurt himself or anyone else, then help him calm down.
- Are not in your toddler's control and are not intentional.
- Will cause your toddler to literally run out of energy. He will feel very sad and tired, and turn to you for comfort and support.

You can prevent some but not all tantrums

While making sure that your toddler doesn't get too tired or hungry when you are busy or going out can help prevent some tantrums, you can't prevent all tantrums. Your toddler will have better control over his emotions when he can use words to tell you how he feels. Until then, you can help by keeping him safe when he is upset. As he gets older, you can help him learn to use words to tell you how he feels.

While it may seem like it takes forever, your toddler should outgrow tantrums by the time he is about 3 or 4 years old, right about the time when he can use words to express his emotions.

Ideas for Sharing Opportunities

- When updating parents about daily activities, can bring up any incidents that occurred and explain how you dealt with it and why did it that way.