

How to deal with your toddler's tantrums without using time-outs and punishments

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The Curious Frugal

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Do you want to know how to deal with your toddler's tantrums without using time-outs and punishments? Here is one simple trick to help your toddler when they're having a tantrum.

I have been working a lot this week. I work part-time out of the house but it's not spaced regularly throughout the month. And there was a special project that meant I had to put in long hours this week. I was out of the house for 10 hours a day, so basically most of Squish's awake time.

Since she's used to having me around a lot more, this did not go over well.

I got home a bit before her bedtime last night and did the unwinding routine with her. All seemed good. Then suddenly a switch got turned on and unleashed a loud, emotional toddler tantrum.

Distraction didn't work. Singing her favorite songs didn't work. Offering her favorite stuffed animal to cuddle didn't do a thing. Even her beloved soother (try not to judge us too much, she only gets it rarely now!) didn't stop the tantrum.

I felt stuck and the tantrum was not letting up. Everybody parents differently but I don't like leaving her to deal with those big out of control feelings by herself. We don't do time-outs or put her in her room by herself to finish the tantrum alone.

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How to deal with your toddler's tantrums

So I took a deep breath and said to her "I think you missed mama today."

The screaming decreased by a couple of decibels.

"I think you're mad and sad because I haven't been home very much."

She was starting to listen a tiny bit now (while the tantrum was still happening).

"I can understand you feeling upset. I missed you too. I'm here now. I will stay with you. I'm not leaving you when you're feeling this way"

At that she cuddled into me and cried. The tantrum had crested and was receding.

One simple trick to help your toddler when they're

having a tantrum

When your child is having a tantrum and distraction and other techniques aren't working, or even before using those other techniques, try **empathy**. Toddlers brains are developing so quickly. They don't have the ability yet to think things through and express how they're feeling. But as their parent we can try to help them by saying we understand.

I try to remind myself when we're in the throes of a tantrum that **she's not trying to be difficult, she's having a difficult time.**

There are many things in a toddler's life that could lead to a tantrum:

- You just had a baby and your toddler is adjusting to the new addition and their new place in the family
- A parent has been working longer hours
- The toddler started daycare or preschool

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And there are the simple everyday events such as:

- You gave your toddler milk when they really wanted water
- You gave your toddler milk and they wanted milk but now they changed their mind
- They wanted to dress themselves but then couldn't do it and got frustrated

Final thoughts on how to deal with temper tantrums

There is a lot in a child's life that is out of their control. Instead of punishing or withdrawing from a tantrum, do the opposite. Lean in. Tell them you love them. Tell them you are there and you will stay with them until they're feeling better. This isn't enabling them or "encouraging bad behavior". They will learn to control their emotions with time as their brain develops, and with support. During a tantrum is not the time for explaining or teaching or having a rational discussion. They just need to feel like someone is there.

—> Quick note: If you as the parent are getting way too frustrated or even angry from their tantrum then by all means make sure they are in a safe space to flail and kick and remove yourself until *you* calm down.

If I had thought that my daughter's tantrum was only about something trivial and left her in a time out until she calmed down, how would this have made her feel? She was missing her mama, that was a likely underlying feeling. A time-out would have exacerbated her feelings of me not being there.

There is no single magic bullet that will stop every toddler tantrum in its tracks. I know this won't work every single time. But staying with them and supporting them through it will make them feel less alone with their big scary feelings. And it just might shorten the length of their tantrum.