## DEFINITION

A temper tantrum is an immature way of expressing anger. No matter how calm and gentle a parent you are, your child will probably throw some tantrums. Try to teach your child that temper tantrums don't work and that you don't change your mind because of them. By 3 years of age, you can begin to teach your child to verbalize his feelings ("You feel angry because . . ."). We need to teach children that anger is normal but that it must be channeled appropriately. By school age, temper tantrums should be rare. During adolescence, tantrums reappear, but your teenager can be reminded that blowing up creates a bad impression and that counting to 10 can help her regain control.

## RESPONSES TO TEMPER TANTRUMS

Overall, praise your child when she controls her temper, verbally expresses her anger, and is cooperative. Be a good model by staying calm and not screaming or having adult tantrums. Try using the following responses to the different types of temper tantrums.

1. **Support and help children having frustration- or fatigue-related tantrums.** Children often have temper tantrums when they are frustrated with themselves. They may be frustrated because they can't put something together. Young children may be frustrated because their parents don't understand their speech. Older children may be frustrated with their inability to do their homework.

   At these times your child needs encouragement and a parent who listens. Put an arm around her and say something brief that shows understanding such as "I know it's hard, but you'll get better at it. Is there something I can do to help you?" Also give praise for not giving up. Some of these tantrums can be prevented by steering your child away from tasks that she can't do well.

   Children tend to have more temper tantrums when they are tired (e.g., when they've missed a nap) because they are less able to cope with frustrating situations. At these times put your child to bed. Hunger can contribute to temper tantrums. If you suspect this, give your child a snack. Temper tantrums also increase during sickness.

2. **Ignore attention-seeking or demanding-type tantrums.** Young children may throw temper tantrums to get their way. They may want to go with you rather than be left with the babysitter, want candy, want to empty a desk drawer, or want to go outside in bad weather. They don't accept rules for their safety. Tantrums for attention may include whining, crying, pounding the floor or wall, slamming a door, or breath holding. As long as your child stays in one place and is not too disruptive, you can leave her alone.

   If you recognize that a certain event is going to push your child over the edge, try to shift her attention to something else. However, don't give in to your child's demands. During the temper tantrum, if her behavior is harmless, ignore it completely. Once a tantrum has started, it rarely can be stopped.

   Move away, even to a different room; then your child no longer has an audience. Don't try to reason with your child—it will only make the tantrum worse. Simply state, "I can see you're very angry. I'll leave you alone until you cool off. Let me know if you want to talk." Let your child regain control. After the tantrum, be friendly and try to return things to normal. You can prevent some of these tantrums by saying "no" less often.

3. **Physically move children having refusal-type tantrums.** If your child refuses something unimportant (such as a snack or lying down in bed), let it go before a tantrum begins. However, if your child must do something important, such as go to bed or to day care, she should not be able to avoid it by having a tantrum. Some of these tantrums can be prevented by giving your child a 5-minute warning instead of asking her suddenly to stop what she is doing. Once a tantrum has begun, let your child have the tantrum for 2 or 3 minutes. Try to put her displeasure into words:"You want to play some more, but it's bedtime." Then take her to the intended destination (e.g., the bed), helping her as much as is needed (including carrying).

4. **Use time-outs for disruptive-type tantrums.** Some temper tantrums are too disruptive for parents to ignore. On such occasions send or take your child to her room for 2 to 5 minutes. Examples of disruptive behavior include

   - Clinging to you or following you around during the tantrum
   - Hitting you
   - Screaming or yelling for such a long time that it gets on your nerves
   - Having a temper tantrum in a public place such as a restaurant or church (Move your child to another place for her time-out. The rights of other people need to be protected.)
   - Throwing something or damaging property during a temper tantrum

5. **Hold children having harmful or rage-type tantrums.** If your child is totally out of control and screaming wildly, consider holding her. Her loss of control probably scares her. Also hold your child when she is having tantrums that carry a danger of self-injury (such as if she is violently throwing herself backward).

   Take your child in your arms, tell her you know she is angry, and offer her your sense of control. Hold her until you feel her body start to relax. This usually takes 1 to 3 minutes. Then let her go. This comforting response is rarely needed after 3 years of age.