



### THE DOS AND DON'T'S

1. Do not give in to unrealistic demands. Draw the line.
2. Be calm, confident and never guilty while handling the child during tantrums.
3. Be consistent. Kids know your weakness better than you.
4. Be a good role model. Don't throw tantrums in front of your children.
5. When going out, give your child clear instructions on what you expect from him/her. Don't say something vague like 'be a good child.'
6. Give positive attention and reinforce positive behaviour.

# Taming the tantrums

## Giving in to your child's every demand could be a never-ending cycle. City experts provide solutions

Nasrin Modak-Siddiqi  
mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com

TWEETS @MumbaiMirror

**W**hile most parents feel they know exactly how to control their child's behaviour, there are times that children completely forsake authority. They roll on the floor and bawl till you give in to their demands. Be it the new console game or new animated movie they can't watch, throwing tantrums to achieve what they want is a common phenomenon for many toddlers. Dr. Kersti Chavda, Consultant Psychiatrist, Hinduja Healthcare Surgical, Khar, believes most children start throwing tantrums from the age of two or three and that it's seemingly not something worth fretting over. He explains, "At that age, children are kings of their universe. Their every whim is fulfilled instantly by their parents. As they grow, throwing tantrums becomes a way of asserting themselves when their desires are not met."

Avoiding tantrums entirely may not be possible but you can minimise it with gentle but firm handling and uniformity in parenting techniques. One can't

generalise every disciplinary situation or behavioural issues, but once you become a parent, you know your child best, so any decision you take will definitely be with appropriate intent.

When teacher-educator Priti Ambekar's nine year old daughter Aashna showed her first signs of anger tantrums, she was four. "That's when they start associating reasoning with appropriate communication. Any argument is clubbed with mood swings, back talk and sulking. The reasons could be as simple as 'this is the way I want to comb my hair, or that's the dress I will wear, or this is what I want to eat'," she says. Though a child development professional, things were different when it came to her own children.

"Like normal mothers, I did worry initially, but at the same time, I was empowered with the right knowledge. I began communicating with other family members, including my husband, about the tantrums. That way, my children could not manipulate other family members. Then, once they calmed down, I firmly made it clear that they can come and communicate their thoughts," says Ambekar who made her daughter write down the causes of her anger right after an episode would occur.

"Tantrums are often seen in toddlers when they are in the process of gaining control of their surrounding or are learning a new skill. When they realise that they are not able to do it, frustration sets in. In case of slightly older kids (around 4), it is mostly a learned response based on previous experiences," says Vile Parle clinical psychologist Dr Manasi Bhat.

### CALMING THE STORM

Here are a few pointers that can help you discipline your child and keep the tantrums under control:

### MANAGING IT SINGLE-HANDEDLY

When children throw tantrums, they anticipate reactions. They can be unreasonable and the attention they get from other family members is needless. The more the handlers in the family, the more the discrepancy in handling the situation. Ambekar feels it is best if only one person handles the situation.

### LAY THE RULES

Right from the beginning, screaming, slamming doors and any other destructive behaviour should be condemned with silence and subtle disapproval. Let the child calm down before you can have an open dialogue. Ask them to justify their need before fulfilling them.

### TRY AND REMAIN NON-CONFRONTATIONAL

When the child gets aggressive, parents shouldn't reciprocate with aggression. Ambekar says that not allowing her temper to rise has helped her the most. "If the child is ready to talk, try to listen and understand their perspective. Then as a parent, make the child understand why it isn't appropriate to throw a tantrum in that particular situation. Provide a solution and praise their ability to understand the situation. This can help calm things down."

### FIND THE ROOT CAUSE

Dr Chavda suggests parents ensure that the child is fit, eats well, is physically active and gets sound sleep. "A significant number of tantrums are because of the hunger which a young child is yet to recognise."



Check whether the child is hungry or thirsty first. Offering a lump of jaggery helps raise the blood sugar level quickly and a tantrum can be avoided," says Dr Anuja Pethe, Consultant Pediatrician, Nanavati super speciality Hospital. Her now

five-year-old daughter showed her first signs of aggression when she was two. As a paediatrician, she knew what to expect. "I had to keep reminding myself to be patient and calm while handling tantrums. One has to get down to the child's level and let them know that you are willing to give them time and that you want to understand what they want to convey," says Dr. Pethe. In case of older kids, tantrums are mostly conscious and planned attempts to reach a goal. Children can't distinguish between good and bad attention. As long as they get attention, tantrums continue. "Sometimes



kids learn from watching parents throw tantrums to get things done. It works as negative model and must be avoided," says Bhat.

### MAINTAIN YOUR CALM

It's easy to get worked up but it would only aggravate the situation. Be patient, give a hug and divert attention. "Pay more attention to your child during his well-behaved times. Get them to do lots of physical activity to channel some of their aggression," says Dr. Chavda.

### LOOK FOR WARNING SIGNS

Signs to watch out for, says Bhat, can vary from crying, whining to kicking, screaming, biting, hitting and breath holding spasms. Generally kids overcome tantrums by the age of 4-5. But if they increase in frequency, duration and intensity, professional help must be sought.

### NEVER GIVE IN

Giving in to a child's tantrums will only reinforce and strengthen negative behav-

our. Think from a child's perspective. Why would he attempt to change his behaviour when tantrums are getting him what he wants? The anger pays off. If parents think they always end up giving into their child's demands, they need to work on themselves. "If you often feel angry and lose control when dealing with their tantrums, eventually it will affect your relationship with your little one," says Bhat.

### FOR TINY TOTS

For most toddlers, tantrums

are reactions to frustration, so they are themselves scared. Children develop logical reasoning by the age of 8-9 years. Before that, they use only their five senses to understand the world. Use the tone of your voice, the way you look at your child and most importantly, touch instead of lecturing them on their irrational behaviour. Avoid instructions like 'put that thing down' or 'get up'.

### OUT IN THE OPEN

Kids are likely to throw a tantrum when there is a high probability of success of fulfilment of demand — in the presence of guests, at a party etc. Focus more on your child's needs than on a stranger's opinion when a child embarrasses you in a public space. "When your child is rolling on the floor and is inconsolable, that doesn't reflect on your parenting or your child's

manners. It is just a situation and you have to handle it. Take the child out of the scene and take time out. It would help them to calm down and think about their behaviour," suggests Bhat.

### TAKE AWAY

When we are angry, our mind stops working and emotions take over. Think of alternative methods to deal with situations like this. When it's over, and the child is calm, talk to him. That is when learning takes place. Teach them how to express negative emotions instead of acting on it. For example, instead of throwing a fit, teach your child to say that he or she is angry. "Set certain dos and don'ts in your family which will be consistent in all situations at all times and in front of anybody. This will give a clear signal and tantrums will eventually reduce," says Bhat.