

Tantrums

ACTIVITY SHEET



Your toddler is learning how to assert their autonomy and independence. However, with a limited understanding of how the world works, they may end up feeling challenged and confused when things don't go their way. As such, nearly 90% of toddlers will have the occasional tantrum (with the number and severity of tantrums peaking around age two, due to a surge in cognitive development). With undeveloped emotional and social skills, toddlers can express emotions such as anger or frustration by screaming, crying, falling to the floor, thrashing limbs around, hitting, kicking, throwing items, and in some children, holding their breath. But with insight and strategy, you can learn to defuse explosions and calm the storm.



PROGRAM DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES SUMMARY

This session is designed to help you:

- (a) understand why tantrums take place and what you can do to pre-empt them
- (b) develop a strategy to respond when your child is having a tantrum
- (c) Deconstruct past tantrums and prevent future ones


Why Tantrums?

Tantrums can occur for a myriad of reasons – some of which will seem completely irrational. Because your toddler’s behaviour is largely governed by emotion, not reason, they’re not yet able to provide a logical rationale for their explosive conduct. However, if you carefully examine both the signals prior and the expressions during a tantrum, you may come up with some rational explanations of your own.



What might be some of the reasons your toddler has tantrums? ✓

Avoid something they don't want		Hungry (but perhaps not aware)	
Sensory processing issues		Overly tired and grumpy	
Needing attention		Child is unwell (not feeling themselves)	
Frustrated with their lack of ability		When things don't go their way	
Anxious, afraid or worried		Developmental or learning delay	
Unable to get something they want		Poor impulse control	

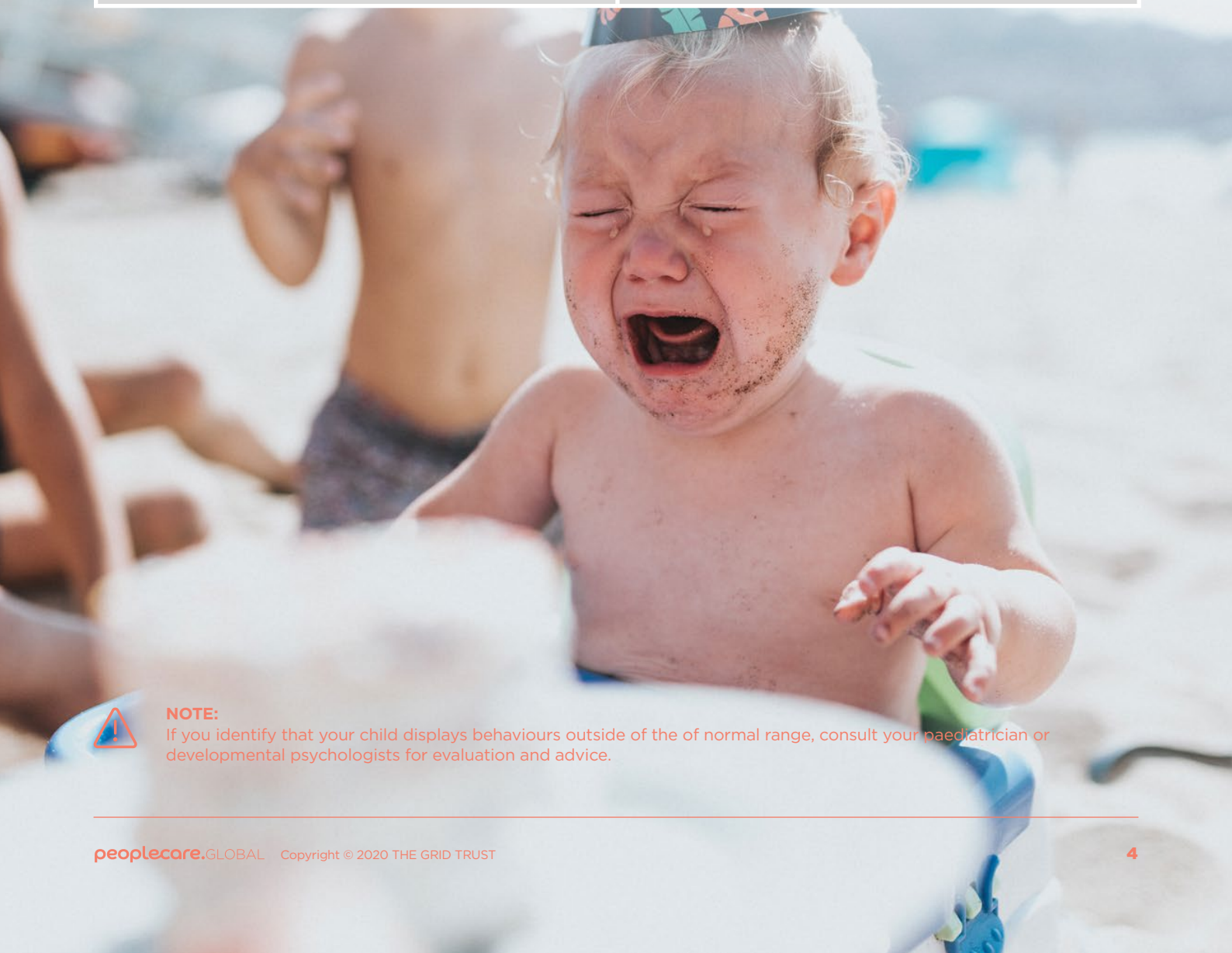


Figuring out why your toddler has had a tantrum may help you avert or better prepare for future events. But, just as important as knowing WHY, is knowing HOW to manage it.

What's Normal and What's NOT?

Almost all toddlers will have a temper tantrum at some stage. For the most part, tantrums are considered to be a normal part of child development. However, approximately 7% of toddlers will exhibit 'abnormal' tantrums which consist of more extreme behaviours. Among these children, more than half will have an underlying behavioural disorder or developmental delay. How do you know if your toddler's tantrums are "normal" or not?

NORMAL	ABNORMAL
Occur less than twice a day	More frequent than twice per day
Episodes last for less than 15 minutes	Episodes last longer than 15 minutes
Escalates voice and throws limbs around (but not objects)	Displays destructive behaviour (e.g., throwing toys, damaging property)
There's no injury to self or others	Engages harmful behaviour (e.g. banging head, hitting others, holding breath)
Mood returns to normal when it's over	Difficulty calming down; mood remains low between tantrums



NOTE:

If you identify that your child displays behaviours outside of the of normal range, consult your paediatrician or developmental psychologists for evaluation and advice.

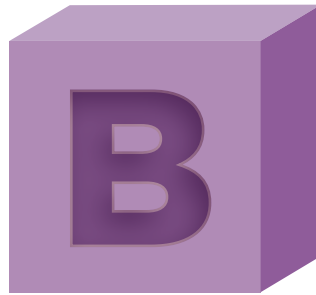
The ABC's of Tantrums

One effective way of managing your child's tantrums is to reflect on the all-important ABC's (Antecedents, Behaviours, and Consequences). By deconstructing the moments before, during and after the tantrum, you may be able to identify things that trigger or reinforce tantrums.



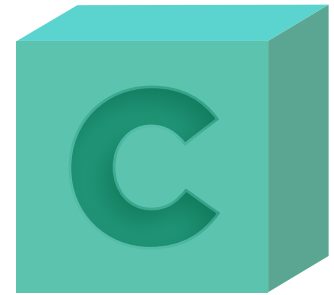
ANTECEDENTS

What happened immediately prior to the tantrum?



BEHAVIOURS

What behaviours were displayed during the tantrum?



CONSEQUENCES

What happened immediately following the tantrum?

By identifying things that trigger and reinforce your toddler's behaviour, you can intentionally make changes to prevent or extinguish future tantrums.



Think of a recent tantrum your toddler may have had. Use the ABC model to identify what happened and how it may have been reinforced. If your toddler faced the same situation in the future, could you do anything differently to prevent a tantrum from happening again?

A = ANTECEDENT	B = BEHAVIOUR	C = CONSEQUENCE
<p>What was the trigger for your toddler's tantrum?</p> <p><i>EXAMPLE: Was your child seeking attention, hungry, tired, unable to get their way, confused by an instruction?</i></p>	<p>What were the standout features of their tantrum?</p> <p><i>EXAMPLE: Was their display within the normal or abnormal range of behaviour? Did you have any specific concerns?</i></p>	<p>How did you manage the situation?</p> <p><i>EXAMPLE: Were there any unintended consequences like attention; not having to face fears or follow instruction?</i></p>
<p>If presented with the same antecedent in the future, what could you do to prevent a tantrum?</p> <p><i>EXAMPLE: Distract your child with another activity; Feed your child; Give more simple instructions; Offer a choice; Find motivating incentives</i></p>	<p>What can you do to ensure your child's tantrum stays within the normal range of toddler behaviour?</p> <p><i>EXAMPLE: Validate your child's feelings, give them room to express themselves, yet ensure their behaviour stay within appropriate boundaries.</i></p>	<p>What could you do differently in the future so as to not reinforce the tantrum?</p> <p><i>EXAMPLE: Not give the child attention; Shift attention to encourage desirable behaviour; Create a reward chart for managing emotions</i></p>

Proactive versus Reactive

Although tantrums can be irrational, there may be factors beneath the surface that are causing your little one to become dysregulated. The four most common causes include a change in routine, feeling tired, hunger or lack of attention. As well as these factors, triggers such as emotional overload, too much sensory stimulation, fear/anxiety, frustration, and difficulty communicating can all lead to tantrums. If you can identify and address these factors, you may be able to prevent tantrums altogether.

Consider the following prevention strategies:

01

PRE-EMPT BEHAVIOUR

Wherever possible, pre-empt high-risk scenarios that may result in a tantrum (i.e. being denied a lolly or toy while grocery shopping). Establish boundaries and consequences in advance, staying focused on motivating positives (i.e. staying calm and happy during the grocery shop = go to the park for a play when shopping is complete).

02

PREPARE FOR TRANSITIONS

Toddlers are more likely to have a tantrum if there is a sudden or unexpected change in their environment or routine. Try to give your little one (a) plenty of windup warnings before a transition, (b) incorporate transitional objects (such as a comforter toy) when going somewhere new, and (c) use distraction if you can see your little one becoming distressed.

03

PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES

For some, just hearing the word “no” is enough to trigger a tantrum. The antidote is not saying “yes” to everything. Rather, tantrums can be avoided when toddlers are given a choice. For example, when asking for ice cream, instead of saying “no”, you can say “you may have yoghurt or fruit. Which would you prefer?”

What is the best way to deal with “normal” tantrums? Ride out the emotional rollercoaster or take active measures to deal with the tantrum?

BOTH!

TO AN EXTENT, TANTRUMS ARE INEVITABLE. THEREFORE, LEARN TO TAKE A BREATH, RIDE THE WAVE AND MINIMISE THE FALLOUT. HOWEVER, WITH THE RIGHT KNOWLEDGE AND STRATEGIES, PARENTS CAN LEARN TO ANTICIPATE AND DE-ESCALATE TANTRUMS SMOOTHLY AND SWIFTLY, AND ACTIVELY PREVENT FUTURE MELTDOWNS.

Taming the Tantrum

You may not be able to pre-empt or prevent all tantrums, but you can de-escalate, educate and regulate your child's behaviour. In this way, you may circumvent similar situations in the future.

Consider the following de-escalation strategies:

01 REHEARSE

Teach your child emotional management skills include breathing exercises, walking away and counting. These skills can be learned and repeatedly practiced in the absence of tantrums - getting ready for when that moment arrives. Keep it light-hearted and fun. Take turns roleplaying the rehearsal of emotional management skills in response to tantrums.

02 RELAX

If you respond to mounting frustration with your own frustration, you'll end up escalating the situation. Therefore, take a few slow controlled breaths and model being calm. At the first sign of a tantrum brewing, de-escalate your toddler's emotions and behaviour by helping them to relax and calm down. Ideas include stretching, star jumps, going for a walk, having a drink, singing a song or playing a thought-provoking game (i.e. "I spy").

03 RESPOND

Lower your voice (the louder they yell, the softer you should speak). Be sure to talk and move slowly. Never give in to your toddler's demands or reward them with your attention. Where appropriate, lead them to a new location for a 'team huddle'. Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings (i.e. "I can see that you are feeling angry and frustrated; I can understand how this might be upsetting for you"). Give them the space to express their emotions and a time frame in which to calm themselves down. Provide an opportunity for your toddler to implement the emotional management skills they've been rehearsing. Offer incentives for success (i.e. "If you are calm by the count of five, we can go back and play") and consequences for continuing to meltdown (i.e. "If you are still too upset, we'll have to finish up for the day").

04 REVEAL

Once the situation has de-escalated and your child has calmed down, turn it into a teachable moment. Reveal the lessons that can be learned from the experience. Problem-solve and model appropriate emotional and behavioural responses to future frustrations of a similar nature.

05 REGULATE

If your child has displayed inappropriate behaviour during their tantrum (e.g. hitting, yelling, throwing things, slamming doors), it is important to point this out and implement appropriate consequences. A simple way of talking about appropriate and inappropriate behaviours is to label them as "red behaviours" and "green behaviours". Red behaviours use anger to hurt themselves or others, or damage property. Green behaviour is the activation of calming strategies and emotional management skills, as well as communicating feelings using words (instead of emotions/behaviour).



NOTE:

If tantrums are a frequent occurrence, consider creating a "calm-down toolbox" or "calming cards" (visual prompts to help your child to identify calming strategies in the heat of the moment).

Triggers and Treatments



Q. What emotional reactions are triggered in you when your toddler has a tantrum?

Q. What calming strategies could you employ when next feeling triggered?

MANAGING THE INEVITABLE TANTRUM CAN TRIP UP EVEN THE MOST COMPETENT OF PARENTS. HOWEVER, IF TANTRUMS ARE WITHIN THE NORMAL RANGE OF TODDLER BEHAVIOURAL EXPRESSION, THE GOOD NEWS IS...

THIS TOO SHALL PASS!