

# Parenting Revolution

Toddler Edition

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# Strong Willed

## ACTIVITY SHEET



Do you have a toddler whose favourite words are “mine” or “no”? As your toddler learns ‘independence’, they discover their autonomy (independent thought, choices and actions). This can certainly have its benefits, but inevitably will also lead to difficult, and at times, defiant behaviour. It’s quite common for toddlers to be impulsive, irrational, emotional and determined. It’s just the way their developing brains are being wired. Rather than naughty, toddlers are often just learning who they are and how social interactions work. As they experience complex emotions, they don’t yet typically have the skills to articulate needs and desires. As a result, they can become fixed in mind, loud in voice and non-compliant in conduct. This session examines ways to harness the energy of your strong-willed child.



### **PROGRAM DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES SUMMARY**

#### **This session is designed to help you:**

- (a)** understand the factors that drive the strong-willed toddler
- (b)** learn when to step in and when to step back
- (c)** establish strategies to harness your toddlers strong-willed energy

# A Fresh Perspective

When dealing with a strong-willed toddler, it's easy to exclusively focus on their negative traits. However, if you're not careful, this can lead to a negative perspective of your child (not just their behaviour). If you automatically find yourself assuming the worst about challenging circumstances, you may stop enjoying (or even starting dreading) spending time together. Therefore, it's crucial to gain a fresh perspective and find meaning amid the mayhem.

Consider the following perspective-shifting strategies:



**A FRESH PERSPECTIVE:  
BECAUSE YOUR TODDLER'S PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX IS STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION, YOU MAY NEED TO 'LEND THEM YOUR BRAIN' ON OCCASION TO HELP THEM PROBLEM-SOLVE. FOR THIS REASON, IT'S IMPORTANT FOR MUMS AND DADS TO STAY 'LEVEL-HEADED'.**



Pair each response to the scenario below with its matching 'perspective-shifting strategy':

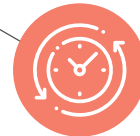
You first put your toddler to bed over an hour ago. The first time they climbed out of their cot/crib or bed was because they were "thirsty", the second time because they had "a question", and the third time because they "needed to go to the toilet". As your frustration levels grew, so did theirs. They called out for different drink because the colour of the bottle/sippy-cup was wrong, protested because they wanted a different teddy, and complained you forgot to read them a bedtime story. After a long battle of the wills, they FINALLY fell asleep. Feeling exhausted, you now find yourself standing over their cot/crib or bed watching them sleep. Instead of being overwhelmed with feelings of hopelessness, you think to yourself...

They look so precious. They're such a little miracle. Tonight, was not so pleasant, but I wouldn't trade this moment for anything.



BE GRATEFUL

"That was tough, but I'm so glad I kept my cool. I want to be the kind of parent that's level-headed and loving; firm, but fair."



BE IN THE MOMENT

"I'm grateful for the fun day we had together. I have to admit, tonight was tough. I am glad they are finally asleep."



RE-FRAME

There's got to be a better way. I realise they are still learning this bedtime routine, so tomorrow we'll roleplay and practice.



ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

"It was such a full day today, it's no wonder they were so demanding tonight... they were probably over-tired."



LET VALUES GUIDE YOU

TODDLERS WITH A STRONG-WILL HAVE CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS IN COMMON WITH EFFECTIVE LEADERS (E.G. A STRONG MIND, INQUISITIVE, THE DETERMINATION TO PURSUE A GOAL, AND THE DESIRE TO INDEPENDENTLY TACKLE PROBLEMS HEAD-ON). AS THE SAYING GOES...



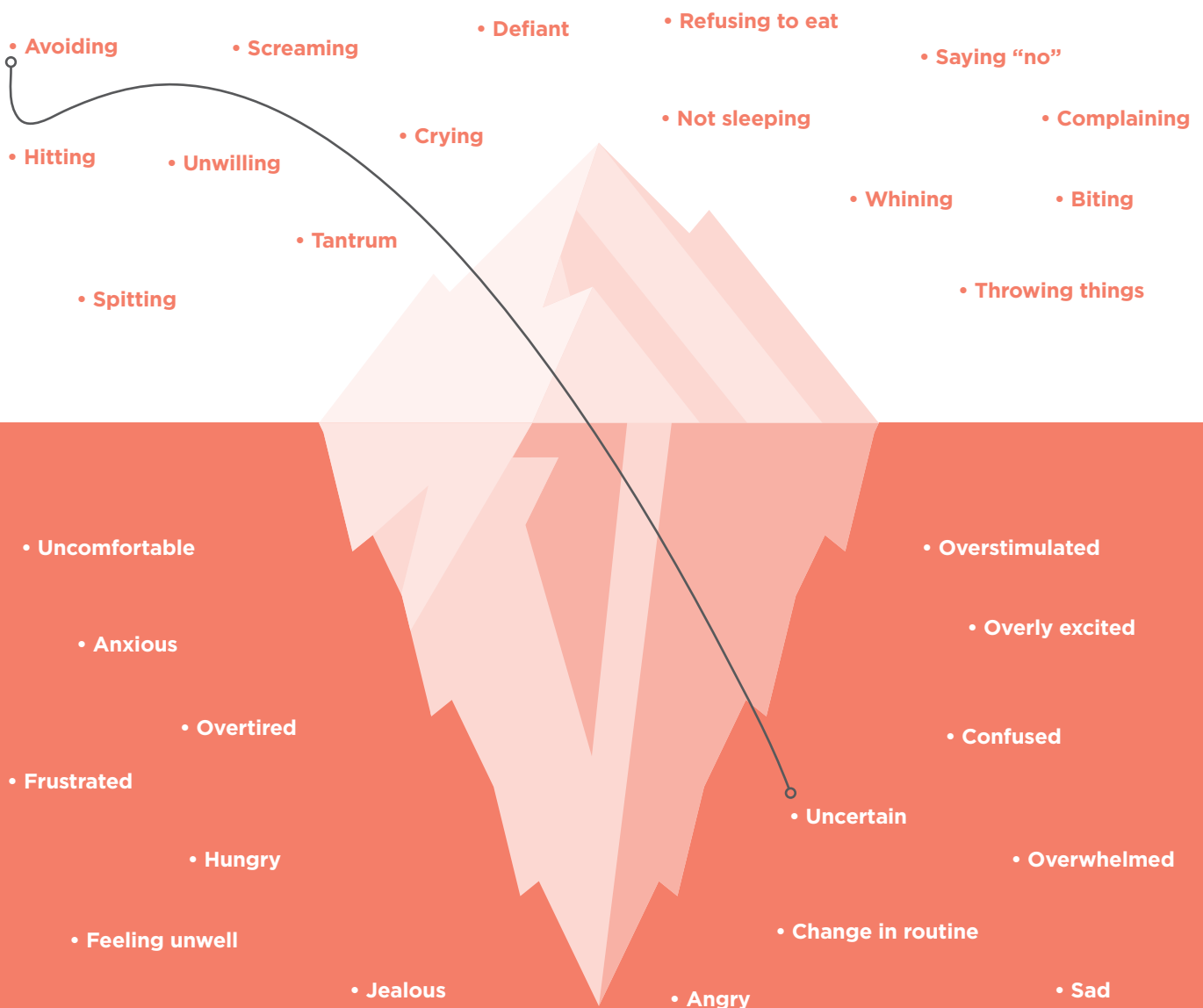
**“you might be raising a world-changer”**

# What Lies Beneath the Surface

The various strong willed, defiant or demanding behaviours you see your toddler display, aren't necessarily the whole story. When your toddler has a meltdown (hits, throws or yells), don't rush to simply categorise this as "bad behaviour". The behaviour your child displays on the surface may be a symptom of more complex needs or emotions deep down below that they may simply be having trouble in communicating. Just like an iceberg, what you can see may only represent 10% of the picture, begging the question, what lies beneath the surface?



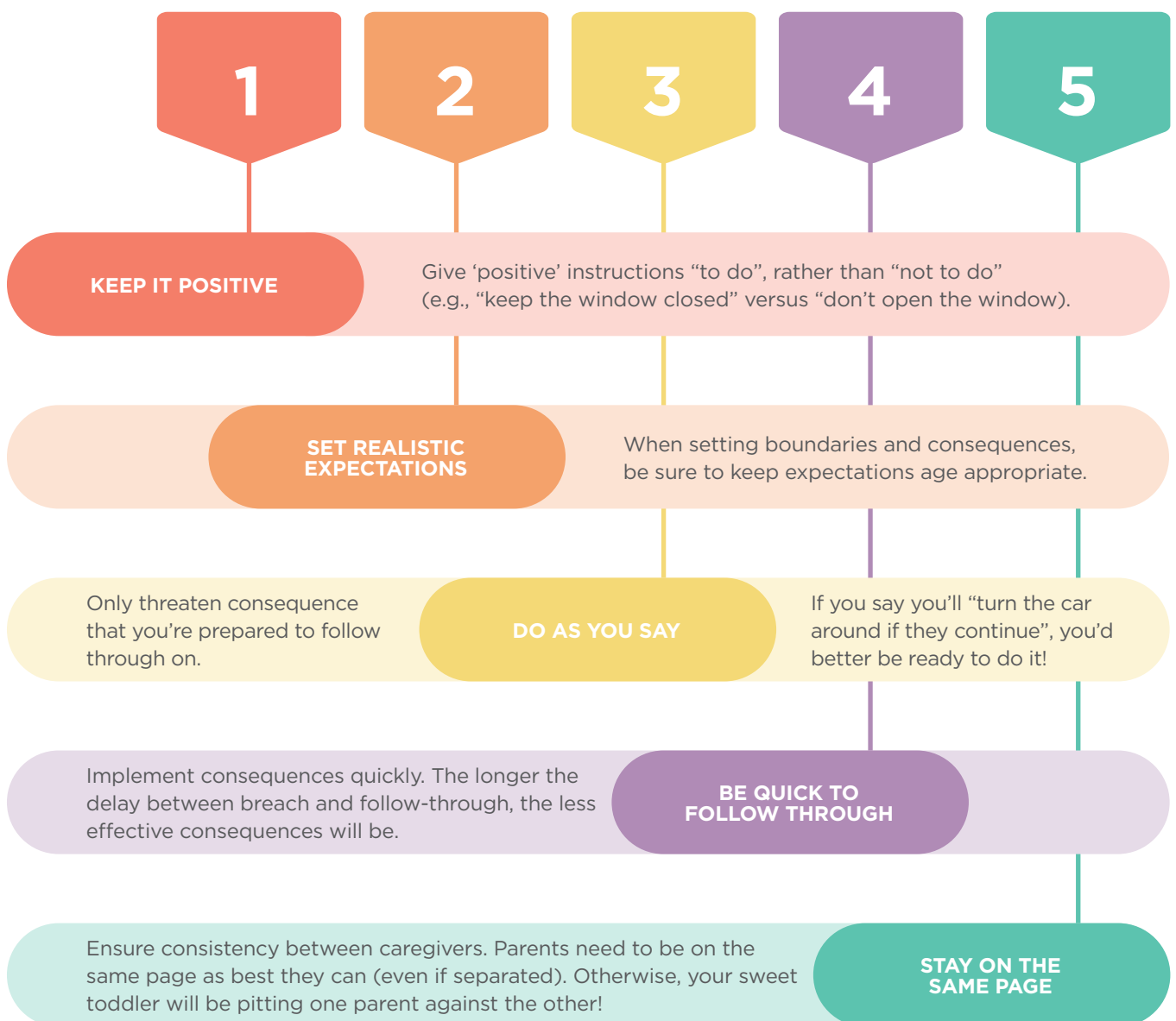
Pair the undesirable behaviours that your toddler may display from time to time (represented above the surface) with possible 'underlying' triggers - (complex emotions or needs represented beneath the surface):



# Consistency is Key

We've all had parenting moments of 'all talk, no follow-through'. Being consistent with boundaries and consequences is a difficult task which can be impaired by busyness, fatigue or trying to avoid a public meltdown. But toddlers are incredibly smart, and even just one instance of not following through on a threat will teach your child that there is a 'glitch in the parenting game' and possible loophole to get their own way. This is a game you don't want to lose. So, remember: if you say it, you must do it.

Consider the following behavioural intervention tips:



# Positive Reinforcement

Toddlers naturally crave attention. When you're intentional about providing praise for positive behaviours, your child is likely to repeat that specific behaviour more frequently. Positive reinforcement is not only a highly effective behaviour modification technique, but it also has the potential to enhance parent-toddler bonding.



In each of the following settings, identify one specific behaviour you'd like to see more of:

PLAY TIME	NAP TIME
BATH TIME	DINNER TIME
STORY TIME	DRIVE TIME
SOCIAL TIME	SLEEP TIME

## EXPERIMENT:

Discover for yourself the power of praise. Over the course of the next week, focus on 'catching the positive'. Every time you see your child demonstrating any of the desirable traits listed above, give your child plenty of praise and encouragement. Then come back and evaluate whether you have seen an increase in these specific behaviours.

**PRAISE TO A TODDLER IS LIKE WATER TO PLANTS.  
WHATEVER YOU WATER IN YOUR GARDEN**

# WILL GROW



# The Power of Choice

Strong-willed toddlers can be quite obstinate – exercising their new-found independence by doing the opposite of what you tell them. If you try to dictate, control and demand what they do, you'll likely face considerable pushback. Conversely, if you give them too much freedom (or give in to their demands) you'll lose control altogether. The solution is to give your toddler a choice between two options. This gives your toddler the perception of being in control, while maintaining your authority. For best results, keep your options simple and straightforward.



**Consider the following scenarios: What two options could you present your toddler with?**

Child is resistant to going to bed.	<i>EXAMPLE: "It's bedtime sweetheart. Tonight, would you like to take your funny bunny or blind-baa-timaeus (the sheep with no eyes)?"</i>
Child is fussy about what to wear, and resistant to wardrobe recommendations.	<i>EXAMPLE: "Good news. You get to choose your outfit today. Would you like to wear your green dress or pink pants?"</i>
At dinner time, child complains about or is resistant to eating vegetables.	<i>EXAMPLE: "It's dinner time, and tonight it's your choice. With your noodles and chicken, would you like honey carrots or broccoli?"</i>
When going outside to play, child is particular about their footwear.	
Going grocery shopping with your toddler can be challenging when their demand for treats or toys are not met.	
When playing a game with peers or siblings, child doesn't like share – often snatching toys saying "mine".	
When story time comes to an end, child demands you read another (and then another), and gets upset if parent says, "no".	



**Instead of  
breaking your  
toddler's will,  
harness their  
energy.**

**GUIDE THEM IN THEIR  
QUEST FOR INDEPENDENCE,  
WHILE MAINTAINING  
HEALTHY BOUNDARIES.**

# Managing the Meltdown

It's better to prevent a meltdown before it happens than try to de-escalate your child's volcano mid-eruption. Unfortunately, toddlers are unpredictable. As such, it's impossible to predict and prevent all emotional outbursts. However, you can learn to identify high-risk scenarios, and disarm ticking timebombs in developmentally appropriate ways (thereby reducing the likelihood of a meltdown).

**Q.** Think of a recent situation in which your toddler had a meltdown (was difficult, defiant or demanding). Briefly describe the scenario:



**What high-risk situations (beneath the surface) may have helped trigger the meltdown? ✓**

Uncomfortable		Anxious		Overtired	
Frustrated		Hungry		Jealous	
Feeling unwell		Angry		Change in routine	
Uncertain		Overwhelmed		Sad	
Overly excited		Confused		Overstimulated	



**NOTE:**

There are endless possibilities of potential high-risk scenarios and triggers. (every child is different). If you can figure out even just one or two scenarios in which your toddler is more susceptible to a meltdown, you may be able to pre-empt and solve the problem before it arises.

**Which of the strategies learned in this session may help circumvent future meltdowns? ✓**

Fresh Perspective		Consistency Keys		Positive Reinforcement		Power of Choice	
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**Q.** Given the same situation, what could you do differently next time?