

Tip for Tots – Temper tantrums

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Temper tantrums are storms that happen when verbalization has not taken place. Your child's feelings build, but he has found no way to discharge them. His pent-up feelings have nowhere to go, and he loses control of himself in fighting, flailing and flinging himself around.

The first thing to do with the under-five child who is besieged in this fashion is to remove him to a quiet place. It will take time for him to decelerate, and you want to make sure he can't hurt himself. Stay with him if he's headed in that direction. Say "I won't let you hurt yourself," as you toss pillows under him. He feels safer when you take over the controls for a short time and let him know that he can call on some of your strength to whether the storm.

If the tantrum is of a milder sort, such as stamping his foot or shouting furiously, put him in isolation and then encourage him to talk. If he is still screaming, tell him you will talk it over when he calms down. You cannot respond peaceably in the midst of a hurricane.

Getting the child to acknowledge angry feelings, important in all discipline problems, is particularly helpful with the tantrum. The best way to prevent tantrums is to allow the child to express his rage in words at the time it is felt. When anger is emitted piecemeal through words, it need not erupt into something overwhelming which frightens him as much as it does you.

Remember too that during the course of their development children will have angry feelings which are quite unrelated to your handling - as in the case of the two-year-old's negativism or the four-year-old's attempts to play one parent against the other. These are normal phases that really do pass. Often the child himself doesn't know what is eating him. If he is unable to verbalize a feeling and you cannot locate a reasonable source, tell him that he is having a bad day or that he got up on the wrong side of the bed. After all, we have our bad time too. You can sympathize with him, but also make it plain that he cannot take his bad mood out on others, and cannot hurt you, himself or the house.



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