

## **Your Village: Parenting Beyond Discipline**

### **#3: Tantrum Prevention & Tips Transcript**

**Erin:** Hello and welcome to this week's episode of Parenting Beyond Discipline, the place to learn about ALL things parenting and get your questions answered. I'm your host, Erin Royer-Asrilant.

Today's episode will cover, the 2 types of tantrums, what causes each, as well as some tantrum prevention tips and answer some questions from our parent community.

So tantrums! They're crazy, aren't they?! Tantrums is one of the most common concerns facing parents of young children. When our child has a tantrum it can leave us feeling helpless, bewildered, frustrated, and if it's in public, so embarrassed!

So what IS a tantrum exactly? The definition of a tantrum is: an outward expression of a difficult emotion. What does a tantrum look like? We've all seen it but the child literally falls to pieces, and sometimes will even drop to the floor. Many times the child is completely inconsolable.

Actually, there are 2 types of tantrums. The first is what we call a "pure" or "true" tantrum. This is an honest expression of a difficult emotion, such as anger, hurt, or frustration. Pure tantrums are very common starting around 18 months, and can go up through the 4th year. But do not be surprised if you see them earlier. But by your child's 5th birthday, they should be a thing of the past.

The other type of tantrum is the manipulative tantrum which is just what it sounds like. It is a tantrum a child throws to try to get attention or get her own way. these tantrums, on the other hand, are more common in older children. They can start anytime in childhood, as early as 2 or 3 and can be seen late into childhood, depending on how they have been handled. If the child has gotten his or her way from throwing this type of tantrum, it will reinforce this type of behavior.

I will be focusing on true tantrums in this episode as these are the most common and the tantrums for which most adults are seeking some understanding and guidance!

Pure tantrums, are most common in these earlier ages because children's brains are growing and developing rapidly. They are learning so much, so quickly, in addition to developing their physical skills walking, talking, self-feeding, potty training, their

emotional brain is also undergoing a lot of development. With so much going on, it all takes time.

Now I'm going to get just a little technical here but I've really brought the material into layman's terms so you can better understand all of these amazing changes happening in the toddler brain. Honestly, I find all of this stuff fascinating so I hope you do too! Neuroscientists have divided the brain into 2 parts. My favorite description comes from Dr. Dan Siegel who uses the terms upstairs and downstairs.

Upstairs means the logical more advanced human brain, called the neocortex. and the downstairs brain, meaning the older, "reptilian" or limbic brain, which is the part in charge of things like the fight or flight and other survival related instincts. In a pure tantrum, the child is purely in his downstairs, or reptilian brain, the amygdala to be exact, which is a small organ the shape and size of an almond, when your toddler is in this state, he is unable to engage and use the more advanced, logical parts of his brain, the "upstairs". Due to the flood of hormones, he is incapable of controlling his emotions or engaging in logic or reason in that moment.

In a toddler, the logical brain is far from developed so when an emotion like anger, hurt or frustration hits, she has very little in the way of a logical brain to counteract the emotion in order to be able react in a more calm manner. Basically, the emotion becomes overwhelming. I share all of this so that when you see your toddler acting completely out of control, that you can understand what is happening and why she acts the way she does, which gives much bigger opportunity for empathy rather than frustration.

In addition to the lack of brain development, there are several other factors that come into play. Children in this age range are seeking autonomy. They want to do more than their bodies are able so it can provide A LOT of opportunity for frustration.

Lastly, our children naturally regulate off of our emotions so the level of stress a parent is experiencing in general or as a reaction to the child's tantrum can create more stress for the child, making tantrums worse.

The good news is there are many things we adults can do to help our children's brains to develop, to help these neurons connect the upstairs, the neocortex, with the downstairs, the limbic brain so that they can start accessing their logical brains earlier and better.

It's also helpful to understand some basics of social-emotional development.

From 0-3 months, our babies seek regulation for basic needs, feeding, sleep, warmth and calm, as well as a balance between under and over stimulation. Around 9 months babies sense of self begins to emerge. This means that your baby begins to realize she is a separate person from others. I know it sounds strange but before this point babies see themselves as an extension or part of their caregivers!! So between 9-18 months they begin to develop a sense of their own needs, wanting a toy, trying to crawl and then walk to get to something. Their sense of autonomy also begins to emerge. At this same time more emotions are developing such as anger, sadness, elation and frustration.

Between 18 and 36 months children are now seeking a balance between their need for dependence and their budding autonomy. They want to do more than they are physically and cognitively able. During this time we also see the beginnings of emotions such as empathy, shame, pride and guilt. Their growing sense of self can lead to an increase in emotional reactions to others; so they tend to react more personally to frustration and hurt. Every parent can relate to the toddler who falls apart because their sandwich (or apple or cracker or whatever) was cut in half and they didn't want it that way! This happens because they have very little control and when they have a specific idea about something and it doesn't happen, something that seems so small to us. It IS big, It's a big, big deal to your toddler.

By 24 months a strong sense of self AND ownership has developed. Every parent has heard their child around this age say things like "MY truck" or "mine" This is that sense of ownership. This comes from the strong sense of self and it IS a good thing at this age and for a little while. Kids this age do not understand sharing.

At around 30 months up through 48 months, toddlers seek to balance meeting caregiver expectations AND getting their own desires and goals met. This is an exciting shift because it's the first time we start to see kids shift a little bit of focus from themselves and their needs to those of another. They are becoming aware of the "other" and the wants, needs or desires of another.

Now with a basic understanding of just how much rapid brain development is going on, hopefully it is easier to understand that teaching better skills will take some time. It can also help to think of tantrums as an opportunity to teach your child skills he or she does not yet have.

The easiest way to deal with tantrums is to prevent them, whenever possible, in the first place. When it comes to prevention, have a schedule for your child and stick to it as

much as possible. Some kids really need a rigid schedule and others do not. I cover this topic more in-depth in my temperament class. So if you're interested in learning more about that topic, I highly recommend checking out that class on the website.

Overall though, a schedule is a very good idea for tantrum prevention, among many other reasons. In general, meals, naps and bedtime should be scheduled and adhered to within reason. Keeping your child from getting over tired and over hungry will greatly help with emotional regulation.

As you probably already know, outings can create lots of special opportunities for tantrums! So for any known problem areas, for example, leaving the park or play date, staying close in parking lots or asking or grabbing for toys or food during shopping trips, you will want to set your expectations give choices and consequences all ahead of time. So before you get out of the car you would have this talk. "When I say it's time to leave the park, I need you to come with me right away." Setting the expectation, "you can run along side me, waddle like a penguin on our way back to the car." Giving choices. "If you do not come with me right away, I will have to pick you up and carry you." The consequence. For most toddlers, like I mentioned, autonomy is huge. So being carried is far from optimal! For the toddler who likes to run off in the parking lot, "I need you to stay close in the parking lot" Setting the expectation. "You can hold my hand or ride in the stroller." Choices. "If you try to run away then we will have to go back to the car and try again later." or "we won't have time to go to the store today."

Another way to prevent tantrums during outings is give your child a job. This keeps her mind busy, leaving less opportunity for a struggle over autonomy or finding and asking for junk food. "I need apples. Can you look for the apples and tell me when you see them?" "We need 3 apples. I need you to help me count!"

Diet also plays an important role in tantrum prevention. Healthy foods such as fruits, whole grains, vegetables, and lean proteins will keep blood sugars more even. Sugary and processed foods will cause jumps and dips in insulin levels and therefore can exacerbate mood swings. For this reason it is also important to always bring snacks. With snacks especially, it is so easy to get into that habit of buying processed foods. I know life gets crazy, and some days you are lucky to just get the kids fed or have clean clothes. Believe me, I get it! I don't think I showered more than twice week for 4 years straight. But setting up positive eating habits is so important. So do what you can. Try to bring fruit, cut up vegetables, whole grains or unprocessed yogurt for snacks. If this is a struggle try shooting for doing it for 1 or 2 days a week. Make a real conscious effort to switch over one small step at a time. For lots of great healthy snack ideas, We

have a post up on our blog with a printout with lots of different healthy snack ideas, called 15 Easy Healthy Snack Ideas.

Another way to prevent tantrums is to use positive discipline techniques such as choices. Giving lots of choices, whenever you can will prevent struggles (and therefore tantrums) over autonomy. "do you want the green plate or the pink plate? Do you want to take this toy or that one? Do you want to wear these shoes or those shoes? Choices get your child interested in putting on his shoes, or eating his lunch or whatever task is at hand because he was involved in part of the process.

Give warnings for transitions. "In 3 minutes, we will need to get ready to leave the park." Make sure they acknowledge they heard you!

Know your child's triggers. With our 3 kids. 2 of our kids cared VERY much about the color of their plates. The other one could have cared less. So I ALWAYS remembered to let the first 2 choose which plate they wanted first. We literally went to IKEA and bought 3 sets of their plastic plates to make sure we always had enough of each color. If you are not sure what your child's triggers are, you can use a tantrum chart to figure out what the triggers might be. You can chart the time of day, what was happening when it started, how long the tantrum lasted, where you were and who was there. This will help you see any patterns. We have a tantrum chart you can use on our blog post about tantrum prevention.

Another prevention tool is to watch for cues in your child's behavior. I know we can't be on top of our kids 24-7 but when you are close by try to pay attention to signs that she is about to lose control such as: getting fidgety, voice changes, like a higher pitch, or shakiness or a particular look, like eyes growing wider. When you see your child's signs, try using empathy to pull her back before she reaches the tipping point, "you're mad I put the snack away. are you still hungry?" or "You are frustrated because your tower just fell over! You worked so hard!"

Kids can feel our stress so another important way to help prevent tantrums is to minimize our own stress. I know the life of a parent can be really crazy but the point is to do the best you can to take care of yourself. Don't sacrifice yourself to the point where you are so burnt out you have nothing left to give. When we feel well rested and have less stress our children react better. If you are feeling too stretched and stressed, there is a great class on our site called peaceful parenting part 1 where I cover all the ways we need to take care of ourselves and many options and solutions for making you more of a priority.

Now for our questions from our parent community. The first one is from Jennifer in Oregon who asks, "My 10 month-old boy is showing a lot of bratty behavior all of the sudden, screaming at us and yelling no. I thought tantrums came later? Could my 10 month old already be having tantrums? I don't know what to do! Help!"

Hi Jennifer, yes it come as quite a surprise when tantrum like behavior shows up so early, while it may not be a full blown tantrum, as early as 9 months is not unheard of.

First I'd like to caution you about using negative labels for his behavior. This behavior is very normal for this age so it's important to see it for what is, which is age and developmentally appropriate. Now that I've covered the information in this episode you probably already have a much better understanding. So in addition to using the all the other examples for tantrums prevention that I mentioned, there is another important thing to also keep in mind that could be very useful in your situation. It is very common for toddlers to begin to assert their independence and with little language on board, the easiest way is with the use of the word "no". So it becomes increasingly important for parents and caregivers to remove the word No from their own vocabulary. I know it sounds impossible at first, but hear me out! Because the best way to see a behavior from our children is to model it ourselves. This goes for both positive and negative behaviors. So you are probably wondering, "OK how in the world do I parent a toddler without saying No!" You will want use a discipline technique called Positive Directions, this is one of the tools covered in our Focus on the Positive class. Positive directions means stating everything in the positive. There are 2 reasons for this, #1, it is much easier for young children to understand. I watched a young mom one time tell her probably 16-18 month old girl "don't step in the mud." I could see this little girl thinking very hard and soon she stepped right in the mud. Ugh! Chances are she actually wasn't trying to oppositional. She probably was trying to follow directions. But all she the got was step and mud and the rest of the message kind of got lost. For really little kids state the directions in the positive because it's really hard for them to take the language and then turn it around with the don't, stop, or no part. So saying things like, "stay on the sidewalk." or "walk with me" would be 2 good ways of saying "Don't step in the mud." Also telling a toddler to "stop that!" or "No!" invites him get exert his will. Whereas the using the positive invites him to try something new, "please jump on the floor." or " please sit on the couch" rather than "No jumping on the couch!" or "stop jumping on the couch!"

Our 2nd question of the day comes from Lisa in Florida. Lisa says "my 2 1/2 year-old can throw a tantrum for days! Ok it's only about 15-20 minutes but it seems so long. Is this normal?"

Hi Lisa, I'm so glad you asked this question. 20 minutes is definitely on the long side but not completely out of the range of normal! I am curious to know if you've timed them. Because a 7 minute tantrum can feel like an eternity so what may like like 20 may really only be 12. But regardless, here are a couple things I can recommend. If you aren't doing it already, be sure to stick with a schedule, especially with nap and bedtimes since I'm sure you've noticed that over tired kids can make tantrums way more frequent and way more intense. Here are some steps for dealing with an intense tantrum in the moment, remembering that your son is stuck in the emotional part of his brain so you will be trying to help him find his way out and therefore can help make them shorter. The first thing is to label his emotion for him. You seem very angry right now. "I can see you are feeling very frustrated." Labeling the emotion helps him to make those neural connections from his emotional brain to his logical brain. You are connecting the feeling, the emotional piece, with the word, the logical piece. The second step is to offer to hold him. This is not spoiling or reinforcing bad behavior because with true tantrums our job is help our child calm down and grow those neural connections so he can begin to access his logical brain. Some children will want to held and others won't want to have anything to do with it, while others will take you up on the offer some days and then not on others. My daughter always wanted to be held, but her twin brother never did. But still every single time I would ask him. The point is to let your child know you are there for him if he needs you. So I would always tell Chandler, "If you change your mind, I'm right here. I'm happy to hold you if you would like." Over time you will start to hear your child use words in place of feelings, For Chandler he would yell very loudly, "I'm SO Angryyyyy!" It was actually very cute and when I heard this, I knew the work on teaching him feeling words and on using words rather than reacting were taking hold.

For more on teaching your emotion skills and building these neural connections over the long run for reducing tantrum frequency as well as duration, you can see our class on tantrums. To see our classes or read the blog, you can visit our website at [YourVillageOnline.com](http://YourVillageOnline.com).

Thanks everyone for tuning in today. If you would like to submit a question for next week's episode or other future episodes, you can send an email to [Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com](mailto:Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com). You can also see what other topics we have coming up by visiting the page on our site, [YourVillageOnline.com/Podcast](http://YourVillageOnline.com/Podcast). If you're loving what you're hearing on our podcast, please let us know by giving us a great review, and also, subscribing to our channel. If there is something you think we can do better or if there is a topic you would like to hear about, please send an email to [Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com](mailto:Podcast@YourVillageOnline.com). Thanks so much everyone and I look forward to seeing you next time.