

**Cherubs Preschool**  
**Information Sheet – Tantrums**

## **Tantrums: Why they happen and what to do about them**



### **Why 2-year-olds throw tantrums**

A temper tantrum is the emotional equivalent of a summer storm – sudden and sometimes fierce, but often over as quickly as it starts. One minute you and your child are enjoying your dinner in a restaurant, the next they whimpering, whining, and then screaming to go home. Two-year-olds are especially prone to such episodes.

Though you may worry that you're raising a tyrant, take heart – at this age, it's unlikely that your child is throwing a fit to be manipulative. More likely, they are having a meltdown in response to frustration. Often, your 2-year-old's language skills – or lack thereof – are to blame.

Two-year-olds are beginning to understand more and more of the words they hear, yet their ability to articulate their feelings and needs is limited. As a result, frustration builds when your child can't express how they feel.

Some experts say shifting chemicals in your toddler's brain may cause tantrums. Whatever the reason, temper tantrums are normal at this age, and your child will probably grow out of them sometime around the age of 3. As embarrassing as these tantrums might be, try to keep in mind that all parents have to deal with them at some time.

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### What to do

**Try to stay calm.** A tantrum isn't generally a pretty sight. In addition to kicking, screaming, or pounding the floor, your child may throw things, hit, and even hold their breath until they turn blue. (Don't worry; they will eventually come up for air.) If your child holds their breath so often that you're worried about it, talk to your health visitor.

When your child is swept up in a tantrum, they are unable to listen to reason, though they will respond – negatively – to your yelling or threatening.

"The more I shouted at Brandon to stop, the more upset he would get," said one Mum. What worked instead, she discovered, was to just sit down and be with him while he raged.

Stomping out of the room – tempting as that may be – can make your child feel abandoned. The storm of emotion they are feeling can be frightening to them and they need to know you're nearby.

Rather than leave them thrashing on the floor, go to them and talk to them calmly to let them know you are there. If they are not thrashing around too much, pick them up and hold them. Chances are they will find your embrace comforting and will calm down more quickly.

**Remember that you're the adult.** No matter how long the tantrum goes on, don't give in to unreasonable demands or negotiate with your screaming child. It's especially tempting in public to cave in as a way of ending the episode.

Try not to worry about what others think — anyone who's a parent has been there before. Conceding only teaches your child that pitching a fit is the way to get what they want and sets the stage for future behaviour problems. What's more, a tantrum is frightening enough for your child without them feeling that you're not in control, either.

If your 2-year-old's outburst escalates to the point where they are hitting people or pets, throwing things, or screaming nonstop, pick them up and carry them to a safe place, such as their bedroom, where they can't harm themselves. Tell them why they are there ("because you hit your sister"), and let them know that you'll stay with them until they calm down.

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**Talk it over afterwards.** When the upset subsides, hold your child close and talk about what happened. Use simple language. Acknowledge their frustration, and help them to put their feelings into words, saying something like, "You were very angry because your food wasn't the way you wanted it".

Let them see that once they express themselves in words, they will get better results. Say with a smile, "I'm sorry I didn't understand you. Now that you're not screaming, I can find out what you want." Then give them a big hug.

**Try to head off tantrum-triggering situations.** Pay attention to what pushes your child's buttons and plan accordingly.

If they fall apart when they are hungry, carry snacks with you. If they have trouble making a transition from one activity to the next, give them a gentle warning before a change. Alerting them to the fact that you're about to leave the playground or sit down to dinner ("We're going to eat when you and Daddy have finished your story") gives them a chance to adjust instead of react.

Your child is grappling with independence, so offer them choices when you can. No one likes being told what to do all the time. Saying, "Would you like corn or carrots?" rather than "Eat your corn!" gives them a sense of control.

Monitor how often you say no, too. If you find you're rattling it off routinely, you could be putting unnecessary stress on both of you. Ease up and choose your battles – after all, would it really wreck your schedule to spend an extra five minutes at the playground?

**Watch for signs of overstress.** Though daily tantrums are a perfectly normal part of the terrible twos keep an eye out for larger problems developing.

Has there been upheaval in the family? Have you been extremely busy lately? Is there tension between you and your partner? All of these can provoke tantrums.