

Caring for... your toddler (1-3 years)

Caring for children is challenging and it's hard to know what is and isn't normal behaviour.

Below are some normal toddler behaviours, with tips on how to manage them.

1 Temper tantrums

Temper tantrums are very common in this age group, as a child's social and emotional skills are only starting to develop at this age. Tantrums happen when children have trouble with 'big' feelings and often do not have words to express their emotions. They need your help to calm down.

Try:

- Identify triggers for tantrums, then try to avoid them e.g. go shopping after your child has had a nap and a snack
- Plan in advance and tell your child what to expect. For example "we are going to the shops, but we are not having junk food today"
- Stay calm, speak slowly and acknowledge your child's strong feelings. Wait out the tantrum. e.g. "I can see you're really upset that your icecream fell off the cone," or "I know it's hard to leave the playground when you're having fun." This can give your child a chance to reset their emotions

2 Doesn't want to share

Children need to learn to share so they can make and keep friends, play co-operatively, learn to take turns and negotiate. Children need opportunities to learn and practice sharing. It's best to guide and encourage them when they need to share.

Try:

- Play games with your child that involve sharing and turn taking, e.g. "now it's my turn to build a tower, then it's your turn"
- Saying things like "when you share toys with your friend, everyone gets to have fun"
- When you see your child trying to share or take turns, give them plenty of praise and attention, e.g. "I like the way you let Ryan play with your train. Great sharing"
- Give your toddler some blocks and ask them to share with everyone in the room, e.g. "give one to your brother and give one to daddy"

3

Child won't sit still

Children have a lot of energy and like to be vocal and move around. They have a very short attention span, of around two to five minutes per year of age e.g. a two year old can only stay focussed on a task for between five and 10 minutes.

Try:

- Take your child to the park or playground to play outdoors
- Plan and mix indoor activities so your child stays engaged. For example:
 - » “Let’s play (I spy...freeze or any other game)”
 - » “Do you want to help me with (insert activity)?”
 - » “Let’s read this book”

4

Toilet training

Children learn to control the muscles responsible for bowel and bladder control at this age. While some children are quick to pick up the skill, some will take longer.

Try:

- When your child goes towards the toilet, say “good job for trying to (wee/poo)”, regardless of whether they’re successful or not
- If they wee or poo in their nappy, try saying “let’s try to use the toilet next time”
- Make them comfortable when they’re sitting on the toilet or potty, e.g reading a book
- Reward all success by letting them flush the toilet

5

Getting into things and danger

Children learn by exploring and touching. Teach your children what is and isn't safe and remove potential hazards. Always identify a safe location in your house, where your toddler can safely explore.

Try:

- Saying “stop, wait for me!” if you want them to stop running
- Praise your child when they listen e.g. “good job waiting for me to cross the street”
- Remove your child from danger and explain why e.g. “electricity is dangerous”
- Distract your child when you need to, e.g. “look how cool this toy is?”

6

Saying ‘NO’ when you ask them to do something

Sometimes children go through phases of refusing to cooperate at all. This will change with time. They need your guidance to understand rules. Be consistent, firm, loving and focus on getting your child to cooperate on the important things. When you give your child instructions to do something, make it clear, short and appropriate for their age.

Try:

- Saying things like:
 - » “Let’s put all the (toys) away so we can (watch movie)”
 - » “Please, go and (wash your hands) now, so you will be all set by the time (dinner is ready)”
 - » “Let’s see how fast you can put all the (toys) away!”
- Praise your child: “Great work, I couldn’t have done it without you”

7

Throwing things on the ground

Children learn about gravity, cause and effect. The impulse of throwing will pass over time, when they discover new ways to manipulate objects. Set some boundaries, follow with consequences and if your child is throwing out of anger, address the emotion.

Try:

- Point out to your child that some things (balls, paper, airplanes) are ok to throw, other things (plate, books) are not. For example: “Here is a (ball). You can throw it into the basket” or “let’s play catching a ball”
- When your child throws objects that are off limits, take it away and explain why. For example “that toy truck is hard. You could hurt someone or break something”
- If your child throws objects out of frustration or anger, teach them other ways to deal with anger, like giving them a physical space to run around and release their frustration and/or saying things like “can you tell mummy why you’re upset?”

8

Being aggressive – biting, hitting, grabbing things from others

Children often fight because they do not have the skills to resolve disagreements. They learn how to sort out differences by watching and copying behaviour they see in their environment. As they grow, children learn better ways of resolving conflict. They need praise for good behaviour.

Try:

- Saying:
 - » “When you (hit, bite) your (brother), it hurts him and he feels sad”
 - » “Let’s find something else to play with”
 - » “It’s your (sister)’s turn with the (train). I’ll help you wait until it’s your turn”
 - » “It’s okay to be angry, but I won’t let you hit. We need to keep everyone safe”

9

Having many fears (the dark, going to bed, monsters, animals)

It’s common for young children to be afraid of the dark or to be scared of monsters, especially when they’re transitioning to sleep in their own room.

Try:

- Reassuring your child and talking to them about their worries e.g. “it’s okay to have fears. Let’s figure this out together”
- Monitor your child’s feelings e.g. “you feel afraid. Maybe a nightlight would help you feel better?”
- Give your child a weighted blanket or comfort toy to help create a sense of safety

10

Won’t go to bed / won’t stay in bed

A consistent early bedtime routine and safe sleeping space are key to a happy bedtime. Children need help to feel safe and secure to stay in bed.

Try:

- Make going to bed an enjoyable experience. Learn what helps your child go to sleep. Consider their sensory needs. Do they like dark and quiet, or do they prefer light and sounds of the ocean? Do they need a heavy blanket?
- Saying:
 - » “Let’s see how fast you can get in bed”
 - » “It’s 8 o’clock and you are in bed already, well done!”
- When your toddler wanders out of their room, silently walk them back in, tuck them in and leave

For more information or advice, visit reputable parenting websites such as:

- **Kids Health**
kidshealth.schn.health.nsw.gov.au
- **Tresillian**
tresillian.org.au
- **Karitane**
karitane.com.au
- **Raising Children**
raisingchildren.net.au
- **Triple P**
triplep-parenting.net.au
- **Family Connect and Support**
familyconnectsupport.dcj.nsw.gov.au
- **Parent Line**
parentline.org.au (NSW) or
free call 1300 1300 52

Don't let frustrations escalate – reach out for help when you need it.