

DEALING WITH TANTRUMS

Do's and Don'ts

Tantrums aren't bad behavior; they signal that your child is emotionally upset, or dysregulated. Understanding what's going on inside your child during a tantrum is key. When tantrums happen, stress hormones flood their brains and bodies, making it hard for them to calm down on their own. They need your help.

When Your Child Begins to Tantrum

Do:

- **Hold them close:** Take your child into your arms, face-to-face, so you can make eye contact.
- **Express your feelings:** Tell them how their behavior makes you feel. You can say things like, "When you're this upset, I feel so [frustrated/angry/upset/sad/helpless/scared]. We can make it better together."
- **Share your emotions:** Let them know how you feel when they push you away. It's important to communicate your hurt, frustration, and sense of rejection. Keeping your feelings to yourself shuts your child out.
- **Apologize for their distress:** Say, "I'm so sorry that happened or I'm sorry it made you so upset." This doesn't mean you're responsible; it means you empathize with their feelings and want to help make it better.
- **Guess what's wrong:** Often, there's a hidden trigger for the tantrum. By guessing what's wrong, you show there may be a way to understand their upset, and your child learns to be curious about the cause of their meltdown.

Don't:

- **Don't ignore or isolate them:** Putting a child in time-out during an emotional upset can create distance between you. Instead, have a time-in. Bring them in close, communicate and work to bring down that wall and repair the disconnect.
- **Don't avoid apologizing:** If your child doesn't feel understood, frustration can grow. They may think you don't care enough about their feelings.

Remember:

- **Safe expression is good:** If your child has tantrums with you but not at school or with others, it means they feel safe expressing their feelings with you and that they can trust that together you can resolve it.
- **Stay connected:** If your child is still angry after you've expressed your feelings, say, "Let's stay hugging until we feel better." The conflict may not be immediately resolved, but in 10-20 minutes, the tantrum will end, you will both feel calm and emotionally connected and your relationship will be stronger. Over time, you'll find that tantrums decrease and can be resolved in just a few minutes.