

Getting Along: When I'm Angry



Anger is a feeling that all children experience. An infant's hungry cry, a toddler's temper tantrum, a preschooler's angry push, a school-ager's hurtful taunt, or a teenager's hostility are all vivid reminders that anger is no stranger to childhood.

Anger is part of life. Sometimes life hurts. Sometimes life is not fair. All children will experience anger in one way or another. And all children will learn how to cope with their anger—sometimes in a way that is “helpful” and sometimes in a way that is “hurtful.”

Why is it important to teach children about anger?

Anger is an inevitable part of life, but some ways are better than others for dealing with it.

We live in a violent world. Some children live in violent families or communities, others see violence graphically depicted on TV. It may be hard to believe, but the average child in the U.S. witnesses 45 acts of violence on TV each day.

Added to TV violence are talk shows and music videos that promote and glamorize drug and

alcohol abuse. Pictures and lyrics of many musical groups present suicide as an “alternative” or “solution.”

All of these influences can have a powerful effect on how children relate to their world and solve problems. In today's world, learning to cope with anger and frustration in a positive way may be one of the most important tools your child learns.

What we hope children learn:

- To express anger nonviolently: It is OK to feel angry, but it is not OK to hurt someone because we are angry.
- To recognize angry feelings in themselves and others.
- To learn how to control angry impulses.
- To learn self-calming techniques.
- To communicate angry feelings in a positive way.
- To learn how to problem solve.
- To learn how to remove themselves from a violent or angry situation.
- To learn how to avoid being a victim of someone else's angry actions.

Taking charge of angry feelings

Learning how to “take charge” of angry feelings is an important lifelong skill. Caring adults can help children learn how to handle anger in ways that are effective and helpful.

“Taking charge” of angry feelings means developing a “bag of tricks” or coping skills that can be used for different situations.

Different things work for different children. Parents can help children cope with anger by teaching them to

- relax,
- communicate,
- problem solve,
- change their environment, and
- look for humor.

Learn to relax

Anger causes a very physical response from most children. Muscles tense, hearts pound, and stomachs ache. Children can be taught to recognize these physical reactions and learn how to relax. One of the best ways to cope with a harmful physical response to anger is to do something else physical.

Help children calm their anger by using the five senses: touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, and seeing.

Squeezing play dough, splashing water, running outside, listening to music, painting a picture, tensing and relaxing muscles, taking slow deep breaths, or eating a healthy snack all make good responses to angry feelings.

Children who respond well to touch can be taught how to massage their own neck or arms as a self-calming technique. These same children also may find a great deal of comfort in stroking or caring for a pet.

You might say

- “Maybe it would help to draw a picture about how you feel.”
- “A warm bath sometimes helps to wash away angry feelings.”
- “When you feel hungry and irritable, tell me you need a snack.”
- “Sit down and take slow, deep breaths until you think you have calmed down.”

Learn to communicate

Children can be taught to communicate their feelings in a variety of ways. For some children this may mean talking things over with a friend or caring adult. A stuffed animal or family pet also can be a good listener.

Children can often explode in anger, yet not be able to tell you what their anger is all about. This may be because their abilities to reason and think logically are not yet well developed.

Teach children to identify their angry feelings by using the following statement:

I feel _____ when _____ because _____.

For example, “I feel angry when Martha calls me names because it embarrasses me.”

The idea here is to help children realize that there are always hidden feelings and actions beneath angry emotions. In the example above, being embarrassed and humiliated prompted angry feelings.

Learning to recognize the hidden emotions behind anger is an important first step in learning how to resolve anger.

Some children also may find it difficult to use words to get what they need. Learning to say please and thank you are big steps

for some children. Other children have even greater difficulty asking for help or asking other children to play. Still others must learn how to be assertive when another child “bullies” them.

Adults can help by teaching children the words they need to say and by coaching them as they learn to interact with others.

You might say

- “Ask if you need help.”
- “Say to Sara, ‘May I please play with you?’”
- “Tell Martha, ‘I won’t play with you if you call me names.’”
- “Say to Jon, ‘I am playing with the puzzle now; you may have it after lunch.’”
- “Tell someone how you feel before you lose control.”

Learn to solve problems

Older preschool and school-age children can be taught to problem solve as a “prevention” tool for getting angry. Adults can coach children through the problem solving steps: (1) stop the action, especially if someone is about to get hurt, (2) listen to each other, (3) think of different ways to solve the problem, and (4) choose an idea that everyone agrees on.

Children may need some adult assistance to carry out their problem-solving ideas. Also help children to evaluate why their plan did or did not work.

Most young children will need adult help to think through this process. Even though it does take time, doing this process over and over helps young children become fairly good at identifying a problem and coming up with ways to



solve the problem. A child who has lots of practice in thinking of different ways to solve a problem is much more likely to solve a conflict in a positive way.

Problem-solving steps

1. Stop the action.
2. Listen to each other.
3. Think of ways to solve the problem.
4. Choose an idea everyone agrees on.

You might say

1. "Stop. I see two kids getting very angry. Let's see if we can solve this problem."
2. "Let's listen to each other. What seems to be happening here? So Jason and Carey both want to play with the puzzle."
3. "Hmm. What could you do so that you both can play with the puzzle?"
Solution 1: You could set a time and take turns.
Solution 2: Jason could play with it until dinner. Carey could play with it after dinner.
Solution 3: You could play with it together.
Solution 4: We could toss a coin to see who gets to play first.
Solution 5: We could put the puzzle in the closet and no one could play.
Solution 6: We could get out another puzzle.
4. "What sounds like a good solution? OK, let's get out another puzzle. I'll check back in a few minutes to see how you are getting along."

Learn to change your environment

Children can be taught to change their environment. Sometimes in an angry situation it is best to

walk away until everyone can cool off. Encourage children to remove themselves from the situation if their strong feelings are getting out of control. Help them identify special "cooling off" places where they can safely regain control.

Adults also can help to structure the overall environment so that it promotes good behaviors. Clean, orderly rooms and regular routines go a long way in creating a peaceful atmosphere. Chaotic schedules and cluttered environments often leave children feeling confused and frustrated.

You might say

- "When things don't feel right, it is OK to walk away."
- "Take a break. Cool down Jake!"
- "Walk away when you're angry; come back with a smile."
- "When things seem wild and crazy it helps to slow down and do something quiet."
- "It is very upsetting to find broken toys all over the floor. Let's prevent angry feelings by picking things up and putting them where they belong."

Look for humor

Humor is a great antidote for anger. Whenever possible, help children to see the humor in a tense situation. Responding to an angry outburst in a calm way with a gentle smile will often help diffuse the anger. Learning to laugh or joke about your own anger helps children put things in perspective.

You might say

- "I'll bet we will laugh about this later."
- "Yesterday, I was as angry as a wet cat! But today I feel just

pur-r-fect!"

- "Can you see anything funny about this? Maybe we could make up a funny story about this situation."

Teach children what to do

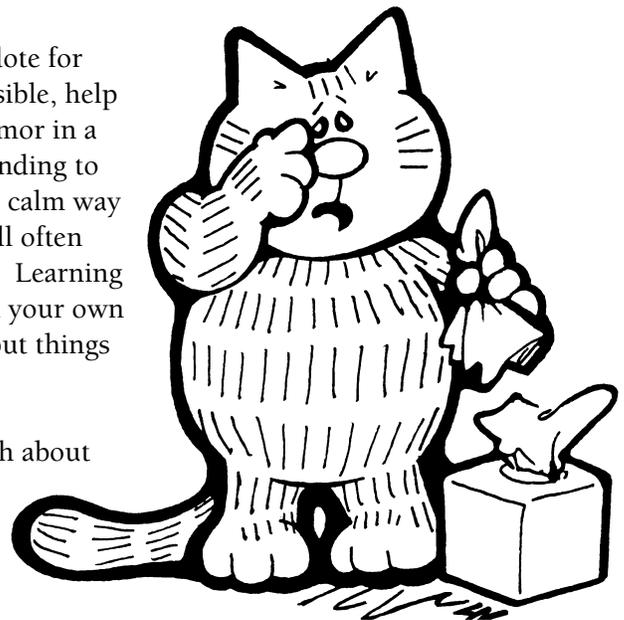
Telling a child not to do something works best when it is followed by something they can do.

YOU MAY NOT:

- Break something
- Scream at someone
- Bite someone
- Be mean to a pet
- Hurt yourself
- Throw a temper tantrum
- Hit somebody

BUT YOU MAY:

- Hug a stuffed animal
- Have a good cry
- Draw a picture
- Talk things over
- Rip up old newspapers
- Walk away from the situation
- Play with clay or water
- Bounce a ball
- Take deep, slow breaths
- Ask for help
- Listen to music



- Go someplace quiet to cool down

Parents get angry too!

Of course, parents get angry. And remember it's OK to get angry; just be sure that your anger doesn't take over. Use the opportunity to show your children positive ways to deal with anger. Teaching by example is an important parenting tool.

- Identify your own angry feelings. Children quickly sense when you are angry. Saying, "I'm mad, I'm upset, I'm feeling really angry," teaches children how to talk about their own anger.
- Explain why you are angry. Remember that young children often think that they are somehow the cause of your anger. A statement like "I am really angry that the car won't start," helps children understand what is really behind your anger.
- Deal with anger in a positive way. Saying to children, "I am really angry about that broken vase. I am going to take a few minutes to calm down on the front porch and then we will talk about what happened" sets a good example.

Is it OK to fight in front of the kids?

No family is an oasis of peace and harmony. All families have disagreements and arguments from time to time. Watching parents

argue can sometimes be a little scary for children, but seeing them resolve their differences in positive ways can offer tremendous stability and security.

Children should not be an audience for physical violence or extremely hostile arguments between parents. The impact of witnessing this kind of anger can have far-reaching effects on children.

Chronic anger

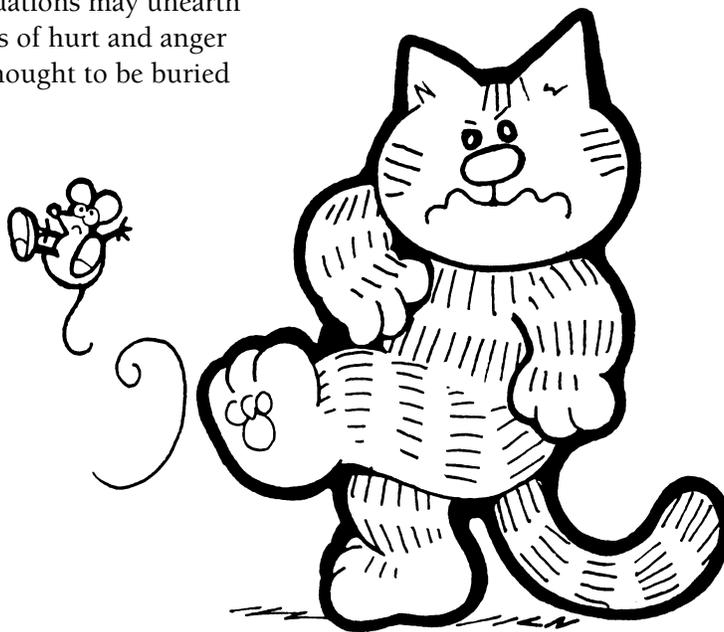
Sometimes anger gets in the way of normal everyday living. When anger is extremely intense or is happening too frequently, it may be time to get help.

A divorce, an abusive experience, a job loss, or a death all can trigger extreme anger. To make matters worse, sometimes these same difficult situations may unearth past feelings of hurt and anger that were thought to be buried long ago.

Ongoing anger feeds on itself and can be extremely destructive for families. If things get too out-of-hand, you may want to consider seeking the guidance and support of a counselor or family therapist.

Family Life 8

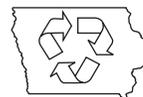
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Understanding Children

Biting



You've just discovered that you have a pint-sized biter on your hands.

Isn't it amazing how those tiny teeth that once caused so much excitement and celebration can now cause so much fear and frustration?

Biting, however, is quite common among young children. It happens for different reasons with different children and under different circumstances. Understanding the reason for your child's biting is the first step to changing his or her behavior.

■ Why children bite

Exploration

Infants and toddlers learn by touching, smelling, hearing, and tasting. If an infant is given a toy, one of the first places the infant puts it is in the mouth. Tasting or "mouthing" things is something that all children do. Children this

age do not always understand the difference between gnawing on a toy and biting someone.

Teething

Children generally begin teething about age 4 to 7 months. Swelling gums can be tender and can cause a great deal of discomfort. Infants sometimes find relief from this discomfort by chewing on something. Sometimes the object they chomp on is a real person! Children this age may not understand the difference between chewing on a person or a toy.

Cause and effect

About age 12 months infants become interested in finding out what happens when they do something. When they bang a spoon on the table, they discover that it makes a loud sound. When they drop a toy from their crib, they discover



that it falls. They also may discover that when they bite someone, they get a loud scream of protest!

Attention

Older toddlers may bite to get attention. When children are in situations in which they do not receive enough positive attention and daily interaction, they often find a way to make others sit up and take notice. Being ignored is not fun. Biting

is a quick way to become the center of attention, even if it is negative attention.

Imitation

Older toddlers love to imitate others and find it a great way to learn new things. Sometimes children see others bite and decide to try it themselves. When an adult bites a child back in punishment, it generally does not stop the biting, but rather teaches the child that biting is OK.

Independence

Toddlers are trying hard to be independent. "Mine" and "Me do it" are favorite words. Learning to do things without help, making choices, and needing control over a situation are part of growing up. Biting is a powerful way to control others. If you want a toy or want a playmate to leave you alone or move out of your way, biting helps you get what you want.



Biting—What's really happening?

	1st Incident	2nd Incident	3rd Incident
Where did the biting incident happen?			
Who was involved?			
When did the biting happen?			
What happened before the biting incident?			
What happened after? How was the situation handled?			
Why do you think the biting might be happening? (You may want to review ideas in this publication.)			

What will be your plan of action?

Prevention ideas: _____

Teaching new behavior: _____

Try your action plan for at least a few weeks. Good luck!

Frustration

Young children often experience frustration. Growing up is a real struggle. Drinking from a cup is great, yet nursing or sucking from a bottle is also wonderful. Sometimes it would be nice to remain a baby. Toddlers don't have good control over their bodies yet. A loving pat sometimes turns into a push or a whack. Toddlers also don't talk well yet. They have trouble asking for things or requesting help. They haven't learned how to play with others. When you don't have words to express your feelings, sometimes you show others by hitting, pushing, or biting.

Stress

A child's world can be stressful at times. A lack of daily routine, interesting things to do, or adult interaction are stressful situations for children. Events like death, divorce, or a move to a new home also cause stress for children. Biting is one way to express feelings and relieve tension.

■ What parents can do What is really happening?

Use the who, what, when, where, and how method to discover what is really happening. When does the biting occur? Who is involved? Where does it happen? What happens before or afterward? How was the situation handled?

Try prevention

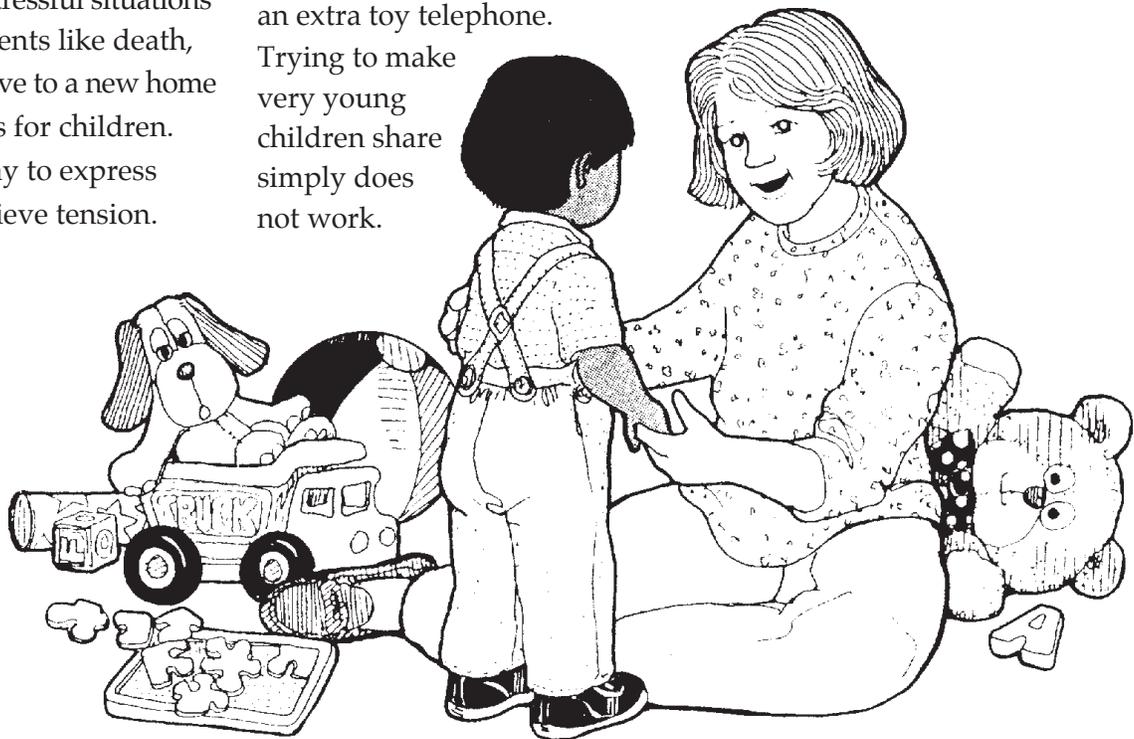
If you determine that the biting occurs as the result of exploration or teething, you may want to provide the child with a cloth or teething ring to gnaw on. If your child seems to bite when tired or hungry, you may want to look at your daily routine to be sure that he or she is getting enough sleep and nourishment.

If biting happens when two children fight over a toy telephone, you may want to purchase an extra toy telephone. Trying to make very young children share simply does not work.

Toddlers don't have the skills or understanding to negotiate or understand another child's point of view.

If attention seems to be the main cause for biting, try to spend time with your child when he or she is doing more positive things. Snuggle up and read a book together or roll a ball back and forth. This is much more fun than giving or receiving a scolding.

If the child is experiencing a stressful situation, make life as supportive and normal as possible. Predictable meals and bedtimes, and extra time with a loving adult can help. Some activities can actually relieve tension. Examples are rolling, squishing, and pounding play



dough, or relaxing and splashing in the bathtub. It takes time and patience, however, for healing to occur in painful situations like divorce or death.

Teach new behavior

When a child bites, use your voice and facial expressions to show that biting is unacceptable. Speak firmly and look directly into the child's eyes. For example, you might say "Sara, it's not OK to bite. It hurts Jon when you bite him. He's crying. If you need to bite, you can bite this (cloth, toy, food, etc.), but I won't let you bite Jon or another child." If the child is able to talk, you also might say, "You can tell Jon with your words that you need him to move instead of biting him. Say 'Move, Jon.'"

You also may want the biter to help wash, bandage, and comfort the victim. Making the biter a part of the comforting process is a good way to teach nurturing behavior.

Whenever the biter is out of control, you will need to restrain or isolate the child until he or she calms down. Insist on a "time out" or "cooling-off period." Wait a few minutes until the child is under control and then talk to the toddler about his or her behavior.

■ A final note

Biting is a difficult and uncomfortable issue to deal with for parents. If your child is the victim, you may feel angry and outraged. If your child is the biter, you may feel embarrassed and frustrated.

Take heart! Most toddlers who bite do so only a short while. Paying close attention to the reasons will help you come up with some useful solutions. Soon your toddler will have learned important new skills for communicating and getting along with others.

■ Read more about it!

For more information about children and families ask for the following publications from your county extension office.

1-2-3 Grow (newsletter series for toddler years), PM 1071a-h (cost)

Ages and Stages, PM 1530a-i

Child's Play - Art, PM 1770a (cost)

Child's Play - Fingerplays Plus, PM 1770b (cost)

Child's Play - Pretend Play, PM 1770c (cost)

Understanding Children: Disciplining your toddler, PM 1529c

Understanding Children: Language development, PM 1529f

Also visit the ISU Extension Web sites at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/> and <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/families/>





Understanding Children

Disciplining your preschooler



Preschoolers are delightful to have around, but at times can be quite a challenge! Learning how to get along with others and follow rules takes lots of practice for preschoolers; learning how to guide and discipline preschoolers takes lots of patience for parents.

■ Understanding preschool children

Preschool children are busy learning about the world around them. They ask lots of questions and they love to imitate adults. They are learning to share and take turns (but don't always want to). Sometimes they want to play with others and sometimes they want to be alone.

Preschoolers also are quite independent. They like to try new things and often take risks. They may try to shock you at times by using "forbidden words." Getting attention is fun, being ignored is not.

Preschoolers like to make decisions for themselves because it makes them feel important. They also are likely to get carried away and become rather bossy.

Preschoolers have lots of energy—sometimes more energy than adults! They play hard, fast, and furious; then they tire suddenly and get cranky and irritable.

Preschoolers spend a lot of time learning how to get along with others. "Best friends" are very important, but such friendships are brief and may last only a few minutes. Hurt feelings (and sometimes swift kicks) are part of the learning process too.

■ Ideas for parents

There is no one right way to discipline. An approach that is successful in one situation may not work in another. Also, different children respond in different ways to disciplining methods. Successful parents often use a

variety of approaches to deal with behavioral problems.

Set up a safe environment

One of the most important things a parent can do is to establish a safe environment.



Preschoolers move quickly and love to climb and explore. Take a close look at your home including the exterior, garage, and yard. You may be able to avoid some accidents. Fix, repair, toss, or lock up anything that might be a danger to your child.

It also is important to be on the look out for dangerous situations while running errands or visiting others with your children. Having a safe place to play and appropriate toys to play with can save you from saying “NO,” making your job as a parent much easier.

Establish a routine

Preschoolers need a consistent routine and reasonable bedtimes. Their small stomachs and high energy levels frequently need nutritious snacks and meals. Establishing consistent times for eating, napping, and playing helps children learn how to pace themselves. Balance the day with active times, quiet times, times to be alone, and times to be with others. Take care of basic needs to help prevent frustrating situations with a cranky and whiny child.

Set a good example

Preschoolers love to imitate adults. Watch your bad habits because your youngster will be sure to copy them! If you want your child to use good manners or pick up his or her room, be sure to demonstrate how to do it. Preschoolers are very interested in “why” we do things; it helps to explain what you are doing in very simple terms.

Time out

Many parents like to use a technique called “time out.” A time out is just that—a time out or cooling off period. When a child is misbehaving or out of control, he or she needs to be removed or isolated for a few minutes. Time out can be used with children ages 3 to 12 and with as many children as you have private places. For young children, however, the time out period needs to be no longer than 5 minutes or they tend to forget the reason for the time out.

A time out gives a child a few minutes to settle down and think about what has happened. Parents need to follow-up by talking with the child about the misbehavior.

Young children do not always understand their misdoings. It helps to explain what happened, what they should not be doing, and what they can do instead. They also need the opportunity to practice the correct behavior. Keep such discussions simple. You might say, “It’s not OK to hit your sister. Instead, tell her with words that you want to play with the blocks, too.”

Active listening

Child: John won’t let me ride in the wagon.

Father: Sounds like you are upset about that.

Child: Yeah, he’s mean!

Father: Hmm. You sound really angry!

Child: Yeah! I had the wagon first.

Father: You were playing with the wagon before John was?

Child: Yeah, then he took it away.

Father: Hmm. Wonder why?

Child: I dunno. Maybe because I wouldn’t let him play.

Father: Wonder how both of you could play with the wagon?

Child: Maybe he could ride and I could pull!

This is an example of active listening in which the father is trying to understand the problem as well as the child’s feelings. The father does not try to end the conversation; instead, he encourages it. With the father’s time and support, the child is able to explore the situation, understand the problem, and even offer a solution.

Sometimes preschoolers do not need an adult to intervene.

Rather, they need someone who will listen and help them work through a problem.

Young children still have very limited problem-solving skills. The child in the above example was 5 years old. With a 3-year-old in the same situation, the father may have needed to be more direct or offer a suggestion. For example:

Father: Maybe you could both sit in the wagon, or maybe one of you can pull and the other one can sit. Which idea do you like best?

Natural or logical consequences

Natural or logical consequences help children understand the connection between their actions and the results of their misbehavior.

Natural consequences are results that would naturally happen after a child’s behavior if the parent did not do anything.

The following examples show how natural consequences work.

- Four-year-old Cara was tossing a quarter around in the car. Her mother asked her to put the quarter in her pocket. Cara continued to toss her money and the quarter flew out the window. She lost her quarter.
- Five-year-old Juan kept forgetting to put the ball in his toy box when he came inside from playing. One afternoon the ball disappeared. Juan lost his ball.

Logical consequences should be used whenever natural consequences are dangerous or unpractical. For example, it would be dangerous for a child to experience the natural consequence of running into the street and getting hit by a car!

Logical consequences happen when a parent helps the child correct the behavior. A logical consequence of a child running into the street could be losing the privilege of playing outside. Dad might comment, "Looks like you will need to play inside. When you can stay out of the street, then you can play outdoors."

The following examples also illustrate the use of logical consequences.

- Four-year-old Alex said "Yuck!" and hurled his muffin across the kitchen. Dad calmly picked up the muffin and put it in the trash. Dad commented, "When you keep your food on your plate, then you can eat." Alex went without a snack.

Watch your language

Use your words carefully to teach children. Focus on what to do rather than what not to do.

Try saying:

- Slow down and walk.
- Come hold my hand.
- Keep your feet on the floor.
- Use your quiet voice inside.

Instead of:

- Stop running.
- Don't touch anything.
- Don't climb on the couch.
- Stop screaming and shouting.

- Five-year-old Dena and four-year-old Peter are fighting. Mom says, "Looks like you two are having trouble getting along. Find something that you can play with together or you'll have to play alone in separate rooms."

Redirection

Often, the problem is not what the child is doing, but the way he or she is doing it. In that case, redirecting or teaching the child a different way to do the same thing can be effective. If the child is drawing on books, remove the books and say, "Books are not for drawing on." Offer a substitute at the same time and say, "If you want to draw on something, draw on this paper." If your child is throwing blocks, you can remove the blocks and offer a ball to throw. If the child wants to dance on the coffee table, help him or her down and ask your child to perform for you on the front porch.

Ignoring the behavior

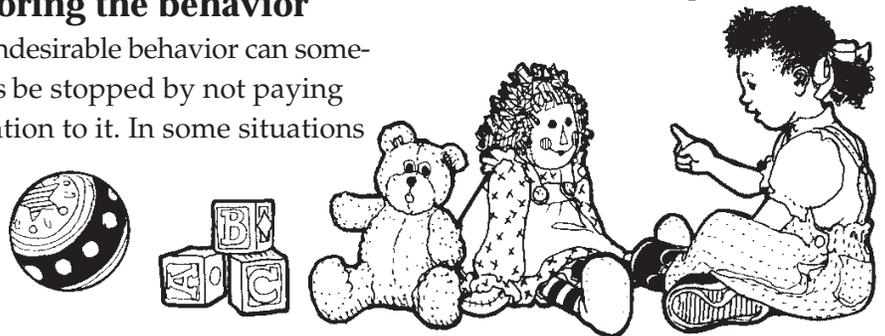
Undesirable behavior can sometimes be stopped by not paying attention to it. In some situations

this can work effectively. Withhold all attention, praise, and support. Eventually, the child quits the unacceptable behavior because it does not bring the desired attention. This works particularly well when a child uses forbidden or swear words to get attention.

When all else fails

Sometimes children have a behavioral problem that seems to happen over and over. When nothing seems to be working, try the who, what, when, where, and how method. Ask yourself, "When does the troublesome behavior seem to happen? What happens just before and after? Where does it happen and with whom? How do I usually respond? How could I prevent the behavior? What other approaches could I use?"

The best method to find a more successful way to cope with behavioral problems is to take the time to think about options.



■ Does spanking work?

Preschoolers often respond well to physical action when you need to discipline them. Touching them on the arm, taking them by the hand, picking them up, holding, or restraining them are all good ways to get their attention.

Spanking also will get their attention, but doesn't do a very good job of teaching children how to behave. In fact, it generally distresses a child so much that he or she can't pay attention to your explanations and directions. It's hard to reason with a screaming, crying child.

Spanking and slapping can quickly get out-of-hand for both parents and children. Most reported cases of abuse involve loving, well-meaning parents who lost control. Studies show that children who experience or witness a great deal of spanking, slapping, or hitting are much more likely to become aggressive themselves. Children who are bullied by older brothers, sisters, or other children often react by bullying others. Children who are spanked frequently often hit younger children.

File: Family life 8

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Preschoolers love to imitate. Most parents find it more successful to focus on teaching a child *what to do* rather than *what not to do*. It may help to think of behavior problems as opportunities to teach your child new skills. After all, the word discipline comes from the word disciple, which means to teach.

■ Taking care of yourself

Parenting preschoolers is challenging and works better when you remember to take care of yourself. Remember to rest, eat well, and relax. Above all else, try to maintain a sense of humor. When you discover your child dumping flour on the floor or finger painting with the sour cream, remember that someday this will be a great story to tell your grandchildren. Grab a camera and take a picture! You will want to remember this. Honest.

■ Read more about it!

For more information about children and families contact your county extension office and ask for the following.

Is Your Baby Safe at Home, PM 954a-d

Understanding Children: Temper tantrums, PM 1529j

Understanding Children: Toilet training, PM 1529k

Understanding Children: Biting, PM 1529a

Ages & Stages, 1530e-g

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Understanding Children

Disciplining your toddler



No doubt about it, toddlers are a handful! At times, it will seem like they can be in two places at the same time, and be headed for trouble in a third one yet. Many a parent can recite nerve-racking stories of toddlers perched on top of the bookcase, or of a fall that resulted in an emergency room visit.

Setting limits and maintaining some kind of control are difficult tasks with toddlers because they are so independent, yet have so few skills to communicate and solve problems. The key to disciplining your toddler includes love, understanding, and quick thinking!

■ Understanding toddlers

Toddlers are limited in their ability to communicate

Toddlers are interesting little people. Like babies, they still like to be held, talked to, and comforted. And they still often express themselves by crying, shrieking, jabber-

ing, grunting, and pointing. Unlike babies, however, toddlers can say a few words, which can mean many things. "Cup!" may mean "Hand me my cup," "I want more milk," "The cup just fell off the table," or "The dog just stole my cup!" A toddler, with this limited capacity to communicate, is therefore very hard to understand.

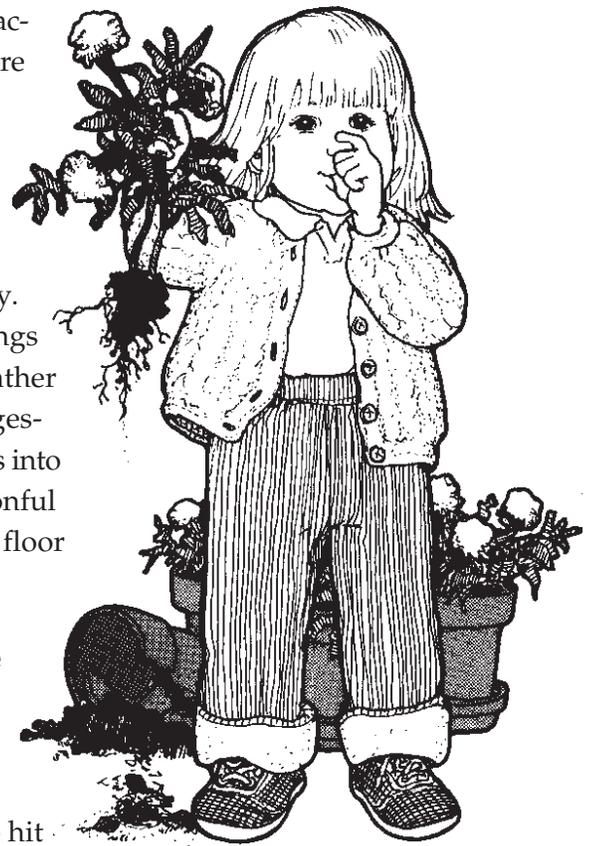
Toddlers can try your patience

Sometimes, toddlers do things that drive parents crazy. They reach out and grab things (like eyeglasses). They are rather clumsy and awkward with gestures; a loving pat often turns into an accidental whack. A spoonful of peas may wind up on the floor rather than in the mouth.

Toddlers cannot share

Toddlers are also very possessive. "No," and "Mine," are favorite words and they are quite willing to hit

or bite to get (or keep) a favorite toy. In fact, toddlers may spend as much time carrying around and protecting toys as they do playing with them.



Toddlers cannot plan their own day

Toddlers are always “on the go” and often play until they “run out of gas.” They have very little skill at pacing themselves and can be happy one minute and cranky the next. Much of this behavior depends on the new skills they are developing. The same toddler who screams for an unreachable cookie may lead or drag you to the jar and point at another time. Learning to do things in a socially acceptable way is a big step for a toddler.

■ How parents can help

Set up a safe environment

One of the most important things a parent can do is to establish a safe environment. “Toddler-proof” your home by locking up dangerous chemicals and medicines, covering electrical outlets, and storing breakable objects up high, especially if your toddler is a climber!

You also may want to take a close look at toys and how your toddler uses them. Getting hit accidentally on the head with a foam block is no big deal, but a “bonk” on the head with a hard wooden block is more serious. A safe place to play and appropriate toys to play with will save you from saying “No” and make your job as parent much easier.

Establish a routine

Toddlers need naps and reasonable bedtimes. Small stomachs need nutritious snacks and meals frequently. Growing bodies need time to run, jump, and play every day. Riding around all day in a car seat, sleeping in a stroller, and eating fast food is OK once in a while, but if it’s happening often you may want to rethink your schedule. Taking care of basic needs can go a long way in preventing a cranky, whiny child.

Remove or isolate

When a child is running out into the street or about to get into the household bleach, there is no time for negotiation. Parents MUST remove a child from a dangerous situation. Picking up, holding, or putting a child in the crib for a few minutes until things can be made safe is perfectly OK. Your child may protest loudly, but your primary responsibility is to keep him or her safe.

Distract

This works especially well with very young children. When a child is doing something unacceptable, try to call attention to another activity—perhaps playing with another toy or reading a book together. The goal is to temporarily distract the child from the current problem. For example, if a child wants to play with break-



able knickknacks at a friend’s home, perhaps you can distract him or her with a stuffed toy. Since young children’s attention spans are so short, distraction is often effective.

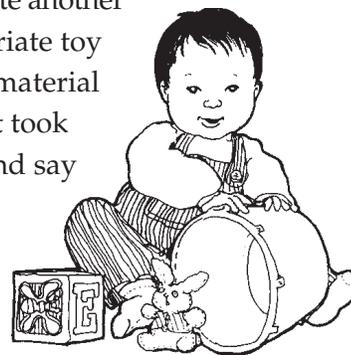
Redirect

If your toddler is throwing blocks, hammering on tables, or drawing on books, remove the materials while saying something like “Blocks are for building, not throwing.” At the same time substitute another

appropriate toy for the material you just took away and say

“If you want to throw something,

throw the bean bag into the basket.” By redirecting the activity into a more acceptable situation, you let children know you accept them and their play, and you channel a problem activity into a more acceptable activity.

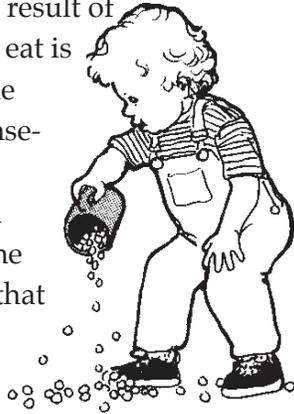


Ignore

The goal in this strategy is to have the child stop the undesirable behavior by not paying attention to it. This can be effective in some situations with older toddlers. Withhold all attention, praise, and support. Without the desired attention, children eventually quit whatever they’re doing. This takes patience.

Use natural or logical consequences

Natural consequences are results that naturally happen after a child's behavior. For example, the natural result of refusing to eat is hunger. The natural consequence of dropping a cookie in the bathtub is that it becomes soggy.



Natural consequences can be very effective for teaching children what happens when they do certain things.

Logical consequences should be used whenever natural consequences are dangerous or impractical. For example, it would be dangerous for a child to experience the natural consequence of running into the street and being hit by a car! Logical consequences should be logically connected to a child's behavior and should teach responsible behavior.

For example, if a child persistently flings peas across the kitchen or spills milk over the edge of the table, you may want to use logical consequences. First remove the peas or milk until they can be used in an appropriate manner. Second, provide an opportunity for your toddler to "clean-up." Peas that are dropped must be picked up; milk that is spilled must be wiped up. Using

logical consequences teaches toddlers to help with the cleaning and to understand that cleaning up our mess is a part of growing up.

Set a good example

Toddlers love to imitate their parents. If you want your toddler to treat the dog kindly or have good eating habits, be sure to demonstrate how to do it. Remember also to talk about what you do. Even though toddlers may not fully understand everything you say, they will begin to understand that there are reasons for doing things a certain way.

Help your toddler understand "sharing"

As was mentioned earlier, sharing is not something that toddlers do very well. They aren't able to understand the process yet. Toddlers do enjoy playing next to other children, but are not very good at playing with other children.

If you have several young children, it is better (and easier) to provide several similar toys than to require sharing. Two toy telephones can prevent many squabbles and may even encourage children to cooperate and communicate better.

Toddlers usually find it difficult to share because they don't really understand what ownership means. They may think sharing a toy is the same as giving it away.

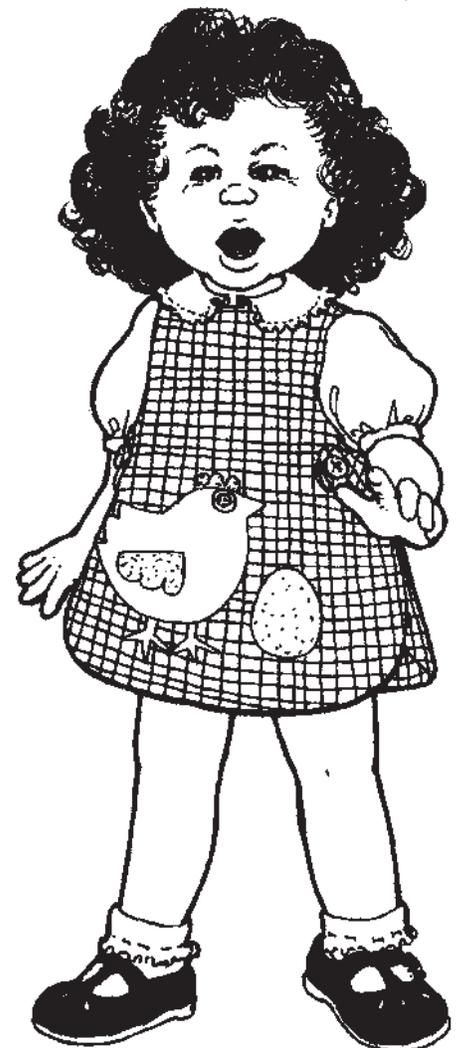
It is very common for a toddler to give someone a toy, but expect it to be given right back. Older

brothers and sisters sometimes have trouble understanding this. Sometimes it helps to explain that your toddler is just "showing" her brother the toy. If your toddler does share, give praise, but respect the need to protect treasures.

Is it ever OK to spank?

Toddlers often respond well to physical action when you need to discipline them. Touching them on the arm, taking them by the hand, picking them up, holding, or restraining them are all good ways to get their attention.

Spanking will also get their attention, but doesn't do a very



good job of teaching them how to behave. In fact, it generally distresses children so much that they can't pay attention to your explanations or directions. It's hard to reason with a screaming, crying child.

Some parents who frequently slap a toddler's hand are dismayed to find their toddler slapping back. Or worse yet, slapping and hitting others.

Spanking and slapping can quickly get out-of-hand for both parents and children. Most reported cases of abuse involve loving, well-meaning parents who just lost control. Studies show that children who experience or witness a great deal of spanking, slapping, or hitting are much more likely to become physically aggressive themselves.

Toddlers love to imitate. Most parents find it more successful to teach a child *what to do* rather than *what not to do*. It may help to think of behavior problems as opportunities to teach your child new skills. After all, the word discipline comes from the word disciple, which means "to teach."

■ A final note

Disciplining toddlers is not easy. And you won't always feel good about how you handled a situation. It's important to recognize that you are human. After all, it's hard to be calm when your toddler tries to drown the cat with orange juice or smack you in the face with a banana. You can respond quickly when your

toddler needs guidance if you understand the reasons for his or her behavior and know your options. Good luck!

■ Read more about it!

For more information about children and families contact your county extension office and ask for the following.

Is Your Baby Safe At Home,

PM 954A-D

Understanding Children: Temper tantrums, PM 1529J

Understanding Children: Toilet training, PM 1529K

Understanding Children: Biting, PM 1529A

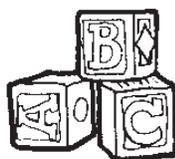
Understanding Children: Fears, PM 1529D

Also visit the ISU Extension Web site at

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/>

Written by Lesia Oesterreich, extension family life specialist. Illustrations by Lonna Nachtigal. Graphic design by Valerie Dittmer King.

File: Family life 8



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Understanding Children

Temper tantrums



Temper tantrums—just the thought of one is enough to make you cringe. Most parents agree that there is nothing quite like dealing with a kicking, screaming child. It can bring out the worst in all of us and it is always difficult to handle.

Temper tantrums are a normal part of growing up. All children have them. Often they happen for different reasons at different ages. Sometimes they take you by surprise and sometimes they are predictable. There are no magic cures, but there are some successful techniques that can help.

■ Ages and stages Infants

Infants may cry a lot, but they don't really have tantrums. They cry because they are wet, hungry, cold, or lonely. Crying is their only way of letting adults know that they need something. Sometimes infants have colic. They seem to cry endlessly for no

apparent reason. Studies show that infants who have their needs met quickly and who are held and comforted when they cry, develop a strong sense of security and well-being and may actually cry much less later on.

Toddlers

Toddlers throw tantrums for many reasons—some big, some small. A square block won't fit in a round hole. Shoes feel funny and socks don't seem to come off right. To make matters worse, you won't let them climb on top of the kitchen table. Toddlers have tantrums because they get frustrated very easily. Most toddlers still do not talk much. They have trouble asking for things and expressing their feelings. Toddlers also have very few problem-solving skills. Tantrums are most likely to happen when toddlers are hungry, exhausted, or overexcited.

Preschoolers

Preschoolers are less likely to throw tantrums. They have developed more coping skills and are able to communicate better. Still, when dinner is late or when



things get frustrating, your preschooler may begin to behave more like a 2-year-old! Some children learn at this age that tantrums can be used to get something they want. If parents give in to demands, tantrums may begin to occur with greater frequency.

School-agers

Older children are typically more tolerant of frustrating situations, but they too get overly tired, hungry, and irritable. Although school-age children have developed stronger problem-solving skills, they are faced with increasingly complex social situations, and need to refine their problem-solving skills. Learning to get along with friends, work as part of a team, or compete in a sport requires skills that many older kids haven't fully developed yet. Kids who have limited problem-solving skills or difficulty expressing themselves with words are more likely to have temper tantrums or fits of anger. Older

children *can* learn to recognize when they are feeling upset or frustrated. Also, they can learn acceptable ways to deal with their anger.

■ How to handle a tantrum

1. Try to remain calm. Shaking, spanking, or screaming at your child tends to make the tantrum worse instead of better. Set a positive example for your child by remaining in control of yourself and your emotions.
2. Pause before you act. Take at least 30 seconds to decide how you will handle the tantrum. Four possible ways to deal with a tantrum include:

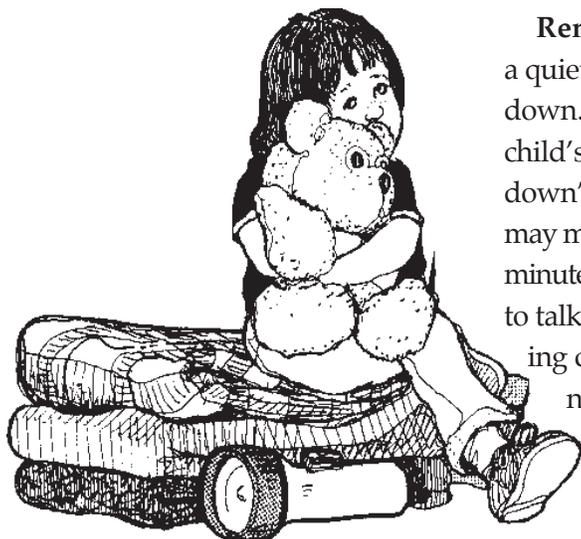
Distract—Try to get your child's attention focused on something else. If your child screams when you take away something unsafe (like mommy's purse) offer something else to play with. This technique works well with toddlers.

Remove—Take your child to a quiet, private place to calm down. At home this may be the child's room or a special "cooling down" place. Out in public it may mean sitting outside for a few minutes or in the car. Avoid trying to talk or reason with a screaming child. It doesn't work! Stay nearby until your child calms down. Then you can talk and return to whatever you were doing.

Ignore—Older children will sometimes throw tantrums to get attention. Try ignoring the tantrum and go about your business as usual. If staying in the same room with a screaming child makes you uncomfortable, leave the room. If necessary, turn on the radio and lock yourself in the bathroom for a few minutes.

Hold—Physically restrain children if they are "out of control" (may harm themselves and others). You also might say something like: "I can see you are angry right now and I am going to hold you until you calm down. I won't let you hurt me or anyone else." Often this approach can be comforting to a child. Children don't like to be out of control. It scares them. An adult who is able to take charge of the situation, remain calm and in control, can be very reassuring.

3. Wait until your child calms down before talking about the situation. It's difficult to reason with a screaming child. Insist on a cooling down period and follow-up with a discussion about behavior. Use this opportunity to teach your child acceptable ways to handle anger and difficult situations. With practice, preschoolers and school-agers can learn:
 - How to ask for help,
 - When to go somewhere to cool down,
 - How to try a more successful way of doing something, and



- How to express their feelings and emotions in words (rather than hitting, kicking, or screaming).
4. Comfort and reassure your child. Tantrums scare most kids. They often are not able to understand the reason for their anger and generally feel shaken when it is all over. They need to know that you do not approve of their behavior, but that you still love them.

■ An ounce of prevention

Tantrums are a normal part of growing up. All children will have them sometime. If tantrums seem to be happening often, you might consider the following suggestions.

- Study your child's tantrums. When and where do they occur? Who is generally involved? What happens before, after, and during a tantrum? Often, looking for patterns can give you clues about conditions or situations that bring out the tantrum in your child.
- Set realistic limits and help children stick to a regular routine. Predictable mealtimes and bedtimes are particularly important.

- Offer real choices. Don't say, "Would you like to take your nap?" unless you are prepared to honor your child's choice not to nap. Instead try, "It's nap time now."
- Choose your battles carefully. Say "No" to things that are *really* important. Avoid fighting over little things.
- Give your child a few minutes warning before you end an activity. Saying "We are going to leave the park and go home in a few minutes," or "I wonder what we can cook for supper when we get home," helps your child get ready for change.
- Help children not to "get in over their heads." Children need challenging activities, but not so challenging that they experience overwhelming frustration and failure.

■ Read more about it!

For more information on helping children deal with anger and learn self-control see extension publications:

Getting Along series, PM 1650 - 1653

Understanding Children: Disciplining your preschooler, PM 1529b

Understanding Children: Disciplining your toddler, PM 1529c

Growing into Middle Childhood: 5- to 8-year-olds, PM 1174a

Growing out of Middle Childhood: 9- to 12-year-olds, PM 1174b

Balancing Work and Family: Avoiding the morning rush, PM 1404a

Balancing Work and Family: Coming home and making the transition, PM 1404f

Ages and Stages: 2-year-olds, PM 1530d

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Tantrums—A Plan of Action

When do tantrums occur?

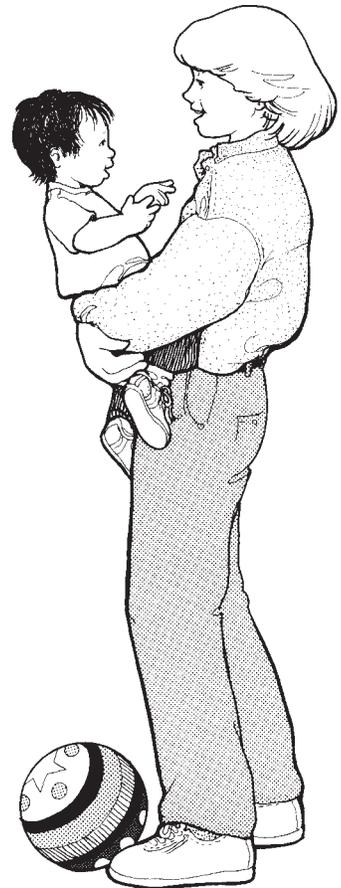
Where do tantrums happen?

Who is generally included?

What happens before, after, and during a tantrum?

Things I can do to prevent a tantrum from occurring.

Ways that I can handle the tantrum when it occurs.



Written by Lesia Oesterreich, extension family life specialist. Illustrations by Lonna Nachtigal. Graphic design by Valerie Dittmer King.

File: Family life 8

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