



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you manage your child's tantrums?

Ages & Stages

PRECHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

Have you ever felt so overwhelmed that you just wanted to sit down and cry or scream at the top of your lungs? Everyone has days like that, children and adults alike. The difference is that most adults are able to cope reasonably well with stress, have more self-control, and can find ways to solve problems without having a tantrum.

Children often have a harder time dealing with problems and do not have the skills to express themselves or to work out problems by themselves. They may understand that there is a problem, or that they are tired, sad, or frustrated. They may need your help in learning how to express those feelings.

To prevent a tantrum before it starts, try the following:

- Be willing to talk with your child about their feelings and listen to what they have to say.
- Redirect. For example, if you notice them getting upset after you tell them that they can't have another cookie, try redirecting their attention to another activity. Suggest that the two of you read together or take a walk around the block.
- Discipline consistently by reminding your child of your rules and the consequences for breaking the rules. If they break a rule, follow through with the consequences.
- Give your child a few choices to encourage their ability to make decisions. (“Do you want to put your coat on by yourself or do you want me to help you?” “Would you like carrots or crackers for your snack?”) The more choices you give them to make every day, the more confident they will become in problem-solving and being independent.
- Find age-appropriate things that your preschooler can do without your help.

When your child does have a tantrum, try the following:

- Ignore the tantrum, if possible. If you show that you will not react to this behavior the tantrum should get shorter.
- Try to stay calm through the tantrum. The more upset you become, the more upset your child is likely to become!
- Do not argue with a screaming child. Explain that you will talk with them after they calm down.
- Talk about the tantrum after the child has calmed down. Talk about what upset them and ask what you both could do differently next time.

- Comfort your child if you think they need it. This is not giving into the tantrum, but rather reassuring your child that you are there for them. Strong emotions can be scary for young children.
- Always remind your child that you love them even when you don't like the way they are acting.
- Remember that there is no one thing that works to prevent or short-circuit every tantrum. Try to encourage behavior that limits tantrums before they happen and do your best to avoid giving tantrums attention when they occur.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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