

Tantrums getting the better of you?

Tantrums in the two to three-year-old are fairly common. It is their way of protesting and signaling to us they really want to get their own way. At this age children are just coming into their own and do not like to be thwarted. They are driven by inquisitiveness and strutting new skills. They have mastered walking and are ever increasing their motor skills. They are ready for exploration, but haven't yet internalized rules, so they think everything is fair game. And while we may think these young children can totally understand us, in truth, this is still a year and more away. So it is not enough that we tell them what to do, we must also show them and physically direct their play and areas for exploration. When young children get involved in things they shouldn't, it is important to simply re-direct them to approved activities and areas of play. You may find yourself doing this dozens upon dozens of times per day! Once will never be enough at this age and this is why parenting two-year-old can be such a demanding time.

While redirection is the key for managing behaviour at age two, if tantrums persist at age three, ignoring such behaviour is the next strategy parents should try. Ignoring tantrums teaches the child that this behaviour doesn't work and so they often stop. Ignoring really means withholding attention for misbehaviour, but, and very importantly, it is also a must that parents do provide attention for appropriate behaviour. This is usually in the form of verbal feedback, praise, hugs and kisses.

If ignoring the tantrums isn't working at age three, you can start to use "time-out" as a consequence. Time-out means time away from anything reinforcing or otherwise pleasurable - like sitting on the stairs or in the corner, or quietly on a chair. While the general rule is one minute of time-out per age of child, time-outs that are much briefer and a matter of seconds, say 5 to 15 seconds are often MORE effective than longer time-outs. In the life of a three-year-old, 5 to 15 seconds is a long time, but it is not so long that they forget why they were sent to time-out in the first place. The key to effectively using this strategy is to apply a brief time-out each time the behaviour occurs. It is better a brief time-out follows at each instance of a tantrum, than only long time-out.

If tantrums persist even with the use of time-out, ask yourself if there are other stresses in the home. Issues of illness, marital violence or discord, alcohol or drug abuse in caregivers all can affect parenting and child behaviour. You may also want to check your child's hearing. Many children at this age have had a number of recurring ear infections (otitis media). With each re-occurrence of an ear infection, fluid remains in the ear and diminishes

hearing capacity. They will grow out of it, but in the meantime, your child may actually be hard of hearing and as a result, language delayed. Therefore even though a little older, they may not hear you or understand your verbal commands. This is something you should check out with your pediatrician.

If all the above fails, fear not, but do ask for help. Call a local parenting center, a counselor or social worker or even your family doctor. Odds are something is going on that probably because you are so close to the problem, you do not see. If ever you feel like spanking your child, then give yourself a break to stop yourself. Have a cup of herbal tea, warm milk, a hot bath, or go for a walk. Do anything that works to give you a little distance and a chance to collect your thoughts. Just be sure your child is appropriately supervised while you grab a moment alone. Sometimes this "parental pause" is just the ticket to regain composure and reenter more effectively.

Tantrums? Follow these steps:

1. Redirection
2. Ignore
3. Time-out
4. Check for other stresses
5. Check hearing
6. Ask for help
7. Take a break

Lastly, you can't offer too much praise, love and affection to a child. Give generously throughout the day!

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW
www.yoursocialworker.com
gary@yoursocialworker.com
(905) 628-4847

Gary Direnfeld is a child-behaviour expert, a social worker, and the author of *Raising Kids Without Raising Cane*. Gary not only helps people get along or feel better about themselves, but also enjoys an extensive career in public speaking. He provides insight on issues ranging from child behaviour management and development; to family life; to socially responsible business development. Courts in Ontario, Canada consider Gary an expert on matters pertaining to child development, custody and access, family/marital therapy and social work.

Buy the book:

To order Direnfeld's book, *Raising Kids Without Raising Cane*, send a cheque or money order in the amount of \$12.00 to: Interaction Consultants, 20 Suter Crescent, Dundas, Ontario, L9H 6R5

Are you the parent of new teen driver? Check out this teen safe driving program: www.ipromiseprogram.com