

# Challenging behaviour

## Often a simple answer

All children test the limits you set and try to cross boundaries some of the time. This is all part of growing up, learning and becoming an independent person. It is important to remember that babies behave as they do in order to get their needs met. Crying or not sleeping is not them being naughty or done to upset you. Older babies may spit out food they don't like or wriggle away from a nappy change. All they are doing is trying to communicate their likes and dislikes in the only way they can.

Many reasons for challenging behaviour can be put down to simple things like tiredness or hunger, needing physical contact or emotional support, a change in a child's life (maybe a new nursery or a new baby in the house) or they may feel powerless and frustrated because they cannot put into words what they want to tell you.

You can use positive feedback when they are misbehaving too. Tell them you are upset about their behaviour, not them. That way they will not see themselves as a naughty person and know they have the power to change the way they act. It is up to you to set boundaries and rules in their life, which will change as they grow. Discuss your parenting styles early on with your partner so you both keep to consistent rules.

Sometimes, it's just some one to one time they need. Give them your full attention, with no distractions. Talk to them about how they feel, play with them, read to them or just enjoy a cuddle.

## Toddler tantrums

Tantrums may start around 18 months and become less common at four. Toddler tantrums often happen when a child is not able to express themselves as clearly as they want to. Their frustration may come on as a tantrum. Tantrums are especially likely to happen if a child is tired, hungry or uncomfortable. They often happen in busy, public places, which can be highly embarrassing and add to the parents' stress.

Keep calm and consider whether your child needs food or rest. Give your child attention and if possible, find a quiet place or some way of distracting their attention. Do not give in, but do try to understand your child's feelings. Praise your child for calming down afterwards.

## Toddler behaviour tips:

- **Give your toddler time**, tell them you love them, hug them.
- Try to **allow them the independence** to make very simple choices, e.g. 'would you like the blue or red cup?'
- **Have clear, simple rules and routines** to cut down the need for battles.

- **Praise every little bit of good behaviour** you want to encourage and turn a blind eye to minor misbehaviour whenever possible.
- **Try to ignore behaviour you don't like**, as this means it is less likely to be repeated.
- If they start to have a tantrum, don't give in, but do **try to understand** and notice your child's feelings - 'I can see you're upset'.
- **Keep calm and reasonable** yourself by taking a deep breath and waiting before you respond.
- Remember that **smacking always makes toddler behaviour and tantrums worse** and can make your child afraid of you.
- **Check if your child needs food or rest** or to be in a quiet place.
- **Praise your child** for calming down afterwards.

## 1

My child has loud, violent tantrums and it's upsetting.

## 2

Sometimes it can be hard to work out whether a child's behaviour is normal or the signs of a behavioural disorder.

## 3

If you are worried, talk to your health visitor or nursery nurse.