
Challenging behaviour

Temper tantrums are common

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. A good sleep routine and eating well can make a big difference to behaviour.

Serious behavioural difficulties

In a small minority of children behavioural problems become persistent and severe, such as when a child gets stuck in a pattern of challenging behaviour. They often feel unhappy, unsafe and out of control (and so do their parents). It is characterised by repeated and persistent bad behaviour much worse than would normally be expected in a child of that age. This can occur in children of all ages but more often starts in early life, with it being more common in boys than girls.

Signs of behavioural problems can present in many ways from aggression, refusing to speak and tics (rapid, repetitive, involuntary contractions of a group of muscles) to repeated head banging. You know your child best. If you are worried, discuss with your childminder, nursery, health visitor or GP. Some children may need to be referred to a specialist where they can get the help they need.

Toddler tantrums

Tantrums may start around 18 months and become less common at four. Tantrums often happen when a child is frustrated and is not able to express themselves clearly. Tantrums are especially likely to happen if a child is tired, hungry or uncomfortable and often occur in busy places.

Give your child attention and find a quiet place. Try to understand your child's feelings.

Don't feel you have to cope alone. Talk to your health visitor or GP, ask about support groups and local parenting programmes.

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.