

LEARNING TO MANAGE YOUR CHILD'S TANTRUMS

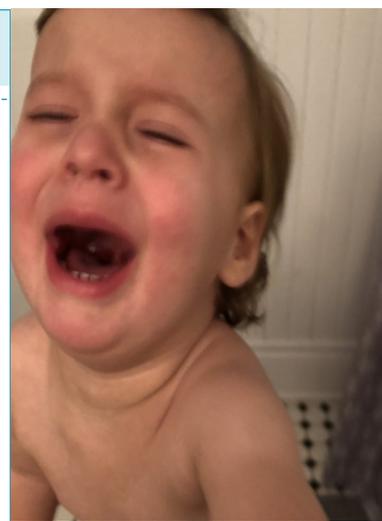
By Stephanie Paquette, Behaviour Management Specialist, EMSB

Tantrums come in all shapes and sizes. In my employment, I am often called upon to help when a student is in crisis and, as a mother, I am in the thick of parenting a very spirited and determined toddler. Tantrums are common in young children and are often caused by the frustration of boundaries set by caregivers and of not having alternative ways of expressing emotions. In older children, tantrums are frequently the result of not having learned more appropriate ways to manage their feelings. Tantrums offer caregivers an opportunity to help their child work through difficult emotions and learn self-regulation strategies.

Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage emotions and impulses. It is an important life skill and can be developed with practice. Teaching your child to self-regulate is best done by modeling the types of behaviours that you would like to see your child exhibit. For example, if your child is having a temper tantrum, responding with anger may in fact worsen your child's emotional meltdown. Although repeated emotional outbursts from children can be emotionally exhausting and exasperating, if you respond calmly and with empathy, you will not send your child into further alarm. When parents learn first to calm themselves, they will help their children avoid tantrums.

When we are calm, we are more available and in-tune with our children's needs. We can start to observe and take note of what is triggering our child's tantrums and respond accordingly. There is often a stressor that contributes to a child's tantrum. Stressors can be physical (sounds or smells), emotional (saying goodbye to a parent), cognitive (learning a new subject at school), social (friendships) and pro-social (being exposed to other people's stresses). When you have determined what your child's stressor(s) are, then you can start helping your child learn to manage the stressor. You can help them identify the physical sensations that they start to feel in their bodies when they experience stress. For example, sweaty hands, racing heartbeat or butterflies in their stomach. When children's emotions are validated by a caregiver and when they become connected to the physical sensations that are associated with an emotion, then we can give them the tools to more effectively manage the emotion.

For some children, connecting and remaining close to their caregiver can provide comfort whereas for others, they may require space and some time alone in order to feel calmer. Breathing techniques, reading books, engaging in physical exercises, drinking water and returning to the regular routine as quickly as possible are other tools that can help children manage their emotions. When caregivers validate their children's emotions and allow them a safe place to express their emotions, children will be more inclined to use self-regulation strategies to manage difficult feelings.



There is a Parents line that provides free professional support 24 hours a day for all issues including tantrums and meltdowns. Take a look at:

[https://
www.ligneparents.com/
LigneParents](https://www.ligneparents.com/LigneParents)