



Tips on Staying Cool During the Heat of a Temper Tantrum

By Hayley Jackson Perez, Extension Educator in Lancaster County

TEMPER TANTRUMS.

They're a rite of passage for many young children, and a test of patience for even the most seasoned parents and caregivers. Knowing what to do during a child's temper tantrum is tricky, but remember, you're not alone. Here are some helpful strategies to help you navigate these stormy seas while keeping your cool.



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First and foremost, understand that tantrums are often a child's way of expressing big emotions they haven't yet learned to manage. Young children, especially toddlers and preschoolers, are still developing their communication skills. Frustration, fatigue, hunger or simply feeling overwhelmed can trigger a cascade of emotions that erupt as a tantrum. Recognizing this helps shift your perspective from frustration to empathy.

It's crucial to understand that emotional regulation is a developmental process, and children of different ages require tailored support. See the table on this page for a breakdown of best practices, categorized by age range.

The Importance of Self-Regulation

Before addressing your child's tantrum, focus on your own self-regulation. Self-regulation is a person's ability to manage their own emotions, behavior and thoughts. In simpler terms, self-regulation is the ability to keep your cool, stay focused and act appropriately even when faced with challenges. Self-regulation is crucial for keeping your cool when your child is melting down. Children are incredibly perceptive and mirror our emotions. If you're anxious or angry, it will only escalate the situation. Taking a few deep breaths, counting to ten, or stepping away for a moment (if safe to do so) can help you regain composure.

Self-regulation in adults directly impacts a child's ability to learn how to regulate their own emotions. By modeling calm and collected behavior, you demonstrate to your child how to manage challenging feelings. This is a powerful teaching moment, even if it doesn't feel like it in the midst of the storm.

Practical Strategies for Staying Calm and Helping Your Child

Create a Safe Space: Ensure your child is in a safe environment. Remove any potential hazards and allow them to express their emotions without fear of injury.

Remain Calm and Empathetic: Speak in a calm, soothing voice. Avoid yelling or engaging in power struggles. Acknowledge and validate their feelings: "I know you're feeling really upset right now." Your child's feelings may not make sense to you, but avoiding judgment and instead validating how they are feeling is helpful when a child is in the midst of a melt down.

Offer Comfort, Not Rewards: During a tantrum, your child needs comfort and support in regulating their emotions, not material rewards. Offer a hug, a gentle touch or simply your presence.

Calm Down, Together: Young children will need your support in learning how to calm down. During a temper tantrum, your job is to help support the child in regulating

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their emotions. You can help children with this by taking deep belly breaths together. One way to teach this is to have a child lay on their back with a stuffed animal on their tummy. Ask the child to breathe in and out so that the stuffed animal moves. This can help children take multiple deep breaths and calm themselves.

Set Clear Boundaries: Consistency is key. Establish clear and consistent boundaries and stick to them. Children thrive on predictability and structure.

Teach Emotional Literacy: Once the tantrum has subsided, talk to your child about their feelings. Help them identify and label their emotions. “You were feeling angry because you didn’t get the toy you wanted.” This helps them develop emotional literacy, which is essential for self-regulation.

Practice Self-Care: Dealing with tantrums can be emotionally draining. Prioritize self-care. Take breaks when needed, seek support from your partner or family, and engage in activities that help you relax and recharge.

Remember, every child is different, and what works for



Belly breathing with a stuffed animal

one may not work for another. Be patient, persistent and compassionate. Tantrums are a normal part of development, and with consistent and calm guidance, your child will learn to manage their emotions effectively.

Ways to Support Children’s Self-Regulation by Age

INFANCY (0–12 months)	TODDLERHOOD (1–3 years)	PRESCHOOL (3–5 years)
<p>Co-regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infants rely entirely on caregivers to regulate their emotions. Respond promptly and consistently to their cries and needs. • Use soothing techniques like gentle rocking, singing and skin-to-skin contact. • Create a calm and predictable environment. <p>Building Secure Attachment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent and responsive caregiving fosters a sense of security, which is foundational for emotional regulation. • Pay attention to infant’s cues and respond appropriately. 	<p>Labeling Emotions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to name and describe emotions. “You seem sad,” or “You’re feeling angry.” • Use simple language and visual aids like facial expressions. <p>Providing Comfort and Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer physical comfort, such as hugs and cuddles, when they’re upset. • Acknowledge their feelings, even if they seem irrational. <p>Distraction and Redirection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redirect their attention to a different activity or object when they’re becoming overwhelmed. • Offer alternative ways to express their feelings, such as banging on a drum instead of hitting. <p>Establishing Routines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predictable routines provide a sense of security and help toddlers regulate their emotions. 	<p>Expanding Emotional Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a wider range of emotion words, such as frustrated, excited and disappointed. • Use stories and role-playing to explore different emotions. <p>Teaching Coping Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce simple calming techniques, such as deep breathing or counting. • Help them identify their triggers and develop strategies to manage them. <p>Promoting Problem-Solving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to think of solutions to their problems. • Help them understand that all feelings are valid, but not all behaviors are. <p>Modeling Emotional Regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children learn by observing adults. Demonstrate healthy ways to express and manage your own emotions.
KEY PRINCIPLES ACROSS ALL AGES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Safe and Supportive Environment: Children need to feel safe and secure to express their emotions. • Validate Their Feelings: Acknowledge and accept their emotions, even if you don’t understand them. • Be Patient and Consistent: Emotional regulation is a gradual process. • Teach by Example: Model healthy emotional expression and coping strategies. • Focus on Positive Reinforcement: Praise and encourage their efforts to regulate their emotions. • Co-regulation: Especially in the early stages, the caregiver is the regulator. This is where the caregiver helps the child to calm down, by staying calm themselves and using soothing techniques. 		