

NEGATIVISM AND TEMPER TANTRUMS

Negativism is commonly seen in toddlers. Negativism is doing the opposite of what others want and is closely related to autonomy: the toddler wants to do things by herself/himself. Because a toddler is going through a time of wanting independence, he/she becomes negative toward anyone who attempts to take away his/her independence. "NO" is the most common word said. This is why many people say that toddlers are going through the terrible-twos.

When you realize that "no" really means "let me decide for myself," you can work with toddlers much more easily.

Parents and caregivers of toddlers should limit restrictions to those that are most important to you as the parent. For example, if the child jumping on the bed is not a big deal to you, but the child going to bed at a certain time is, then be firm about going to bed and don't make a big deal about the child jumping on the bed. The parents must decide on a few (two or three) rules or limits that they want to enforce, then relax about the other things the child does. The key is being consistent about enforcing the limits and not allowing others, like neighbors, in-laws, or your own parents, to decide what YOU think is important. Your own mother and father may think it is horrible that you allow the child to jump on the bed, but if it is not a big deal to you, then don't let their opinions bother you.

If parents enforce too many limits or restrictions, the child is more likely to have many temper tantrums.

Temper tantrums at this age are normal and are usually displayed between ages two and three. They are a sign of a struggle for control and independence. When children do not get what they want, they may respond by yelling, screaming, kicking, biting, hitting, or holding their breath. They are frustrated with their inability to verbalize their feelings.

When the child has a temper tantrum, the parent should remember two goals:

1. Prevent the child from harming himself/herself.
2. Enforce limits you have set. (By giving in, the child learns to condition you. By having a temper tantrum, children can get anything they want.)

Parents/caregivers can reduce the chance of a toddler having a temper tantrum by recognizing some of the factors that influence temper tantrums and then doing their best to eliminate these factors. The following are factors that influence temper tantrums:

1. The toddler being overtired.
2. A disruption in the normal routine of life.
3. Too much excitement or activities (temper tantrums are often seen at the zoo).
4. Frustration of too many choices.
5. Frustration of too many restrictions.
6. Frustration at the lack of language ability.
7. Lack of firm, realistic limits.

There are many ways to help a toddler gain self-control. Let's quickly review them: (Use transparency "Helping Toddlers with Self-Control."):

1. Allow the toddler to make his/her own decisions, when possible.
2. Tell the toddler what is going to happen before it happens.
3. Give the toddler transition time from one activity to another.
For example: You will need to put away your blocks in two minutes so that we can have lunch. Using the timer can also help to elevate the parent or caregiver from being the bad guy--the timer is!
4. Verbalize feelings of the child such as "I know you don't want to go to bed, but if you want to be strong and healthy, you must have sleep."
5. Play pretend games of obedience such as "Who can wash their hands first?"
6. Make requests in a pleasant tone of voice.
7. Remove difficult toys or play equipment that seem to frustrate the child.
8. Reduce or avoid demands when the toddler is tired, hungry, or ill.
9. Have enough toys or ideas to prevent boredom.
10. Offer to help when the toddler seems to need it.
11. Honor their small demands.
12. Praise the toddler for signs of self-control.
13. Leave the child alone during temper tantrums.
14. Comfort the child after a tantrum to assure him/her of your love but displeasure with his/her actions.
15. Talk to the child about how much happier his/she will feel if he/she avoids a temper tantrum.
16. Remember--toddlers do not reason, they just react.

Review the following situations with the class. How could an adult help prevent the child from having a temper tantrum?

SITUATION #1: You have just picked James up from his caregiver's home. It's been a long day for both of you. James is tired and hungry. So are you. As you approach the grocery store, you decide to stop and grab some bread and milk.

SITUATION #2: Stacey just had a birthday party. She received several nice, new toys from her grandparents. Now her cousin, Matthew has come over for cake and ice cream. He sees the toys and immediately wants to play with them. Stacey throws a temper tantrum and grabs all the toys in her arms and yells, "No! Mine!"

SITUATION #3: You have an important meeting at 3 p.m. It is now 2 p.m. and you are getting ready to go. You look downstairs and see that your toddler has strewn toys all over the basement. You yell at him to hurry up and get the toys put away. He just sits down on the floor and begins to scream, "No go!"

SITUATION #4: When you came home from the grocery store yesterday, you went to put the new cereal in the cupboard. There you found several partially full boxes of cereal. You placed them on the cupboard for breakfast the next morning. However, Greg, your toddler, does not want any of them. He is having a tantrum and yelling, "No, no! Cookie!"