

## Surviving The Terrible Twos

By Dr David Lewis

Two year olds have boundless energy, an insatiable curiosity, a powerful self-will and poor judgement.

All too often the conflicts between your desire to protect them and their increasing need for independence results in misbehaviour or temper tantrums. Typically such outbursts occur whenever his, or her, independence is threatened. Perhaps because small fingers lack the dexterity to play with a favourite toy or after you've insisted he or she stops watching TV and goes to bed.

Yet this is a period of tremendous importance during which your child must learn essential lessons about life. Lessons that are only mastered in an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance and love. Feelings the two-year-olds' behaviour sometimes appears deliberately intended to undermine! Here are some practical ways to ensure you both emerge unscathed:

- Stop blaming yourself for bad behaviour. Tantrums and misconduct are a normal part of growing up not evidence of bad parenting.
- Identify situations likely to trigger a tantrum. If she's absorbed in a game when you want to go shopping, for example, try and wait until she grows bored and welcomes an outing.
- Never give in "just this once" to stop bad behaviour. If you do your child quickly learns to throw a tantrum misbehave in order to get his own way.
- Avoid saying "no" too often or the word will lose its meaning. The less correction a child receives the more impact discipline has when really needed.
- Teach the dangers of things like sharp knives, hot stoves and busy streets, by showing how to cope safely. For instance by letting him observe as you use a sharp knife. Demonstrating how easily it slices meat provides a more memorable lesson than warnings about a blade. Let him hold his hand close enough to a fire to feel the discomfort. Always follow the Highway Code when crossing a street, even if very quiet.
- Although such lessons provide a useful caution don't depend entirely on them. A two-year-old has an unreliable memory, especially when excited or angry.
- No matter how angry or upset you feel, never smack your child. It always makes matters worse. Regular angry outbursts are not evidence of an exceptionally bad temper. Much of the time, a two-year-old is incapable of self-control. Their brain is not yet sufficiently developed to resist powerful emotions. Instead of working one another into an even more furious outburst, stay composed and let him catch your calming mood.
- A scary tactic some two-year-olds adopt for getting their own way is "breath holding." This can continue long enough for the child to turn blue and even pass out. If this ever happens, don't

panic! Blow gently on his face, or try splashing it with a little cold water. This helps him catch his breath. If your child does try and hold a breath for too long, regular breathing will automatically resume before any harm is done. If this happens on more than one occasion, however, you'd be advised to consult your doctor.

- Once the tantrum or outburst of bad behaviour is over you either cuddle and comfort him, or carry on with normal routine as if nothing had happened. Both responses are equally satisfactory.
- This doesn't mean you should ignore bad behaviour. Once he has calmed down discuss what happened quietly and calmly. You might say: "You really were cross just now..." While chatting, hold your child close or sit beside her on the sofa. Talking over bad behaviour in an affectionate way helps your child come to terms with what are often frightening feelings.
- Distracting attention speeds upsets on their way. An even better antidote is making your child laugh.
- By transforming an angry outburst into mirth, you allow powerful emotions and a high level of physical arousal to dissipate naturally. So make a joke or do something silly to get a laugh.
- Never assume a reluctance to share toys betrays deep-rooted selfishness or insecurity. Learning to cooperate with others takes time to learn. The two-year-old, who meekly surrenders his favourite toy instead of tussling for it, may actually be lacking in self-confidence.
- Expect tantrums and bad conduct to get worse during major family changes, such as the birth of a new baby. Regard this as a sign he, or she, feels unloved and wants more affection.

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