

Challenging Behaviors

Challenging behaviors such as tantrums, hitting, biting, kicking, throwing objects, or frequently saying “no” are very common during the toddler years.

Toddlers experience big emotions—like frustration, tiredness, hunger, or overstimulation—but they don’t yet have the words or skills to manage them. These behaviors are a normal part of development as children learn self-control, independence, and how to interact with others.



WHEW! NOW HOW DO I KEEP THIS FROM HAPPENING?

Many challenging moments can be prevented by reducing common stressors:

- **Keep routines consistent** for meals, naps, and bedtime. Tired or hungry toddlers struggle more with emotions.
- **Offer limited choices to give a sense of control.**
Example: “Red cup or blue cup?” instead of “What do you want?”
- **Use positive language.** Say “Walk, please.” instead of “Don’t run.” Or, “Hands to yourself.” instead of “No hitting.”
- **Notice and praise positive behavior.**
Example: “Great sharing!” Or, “I like how you used your words.”
- **Prepare for transitions.** Give warnings like, “Five more minutes at the park.” Redirect early when you see frustration building.



WHAT DO I DO IN THE MOMENT?

- **STAY CALM.** Take a breath. Avoid yelling or giving in to stop the behavior.
- **SAFETY FIRST.** Gently stop hitting, biting, throwing, or other actions that could hurt hurt someone. Move your child if needed.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS.** “You’re upset because you want the toy. It’s okay to feel mad.”



WHEN TO SEEK EXTRA HELP

Most toddler behaviors improve with time, patience, and consistency. Consider talking with your pediatrician or a child development specialist if:

- ⚠ Behaviors are frequent, severe, or worsening
- ⚠ Your child regularly hurts themselves or others
- ⚠ You feel overwhelmed or family relationships are strained

OKAY, WHAT NEXT?

- **SET A CLEAR LIMIT.** Keep it short and simple: “Hitting hurts. We use gentle hands.”
- **REDIRECT.** Offer another activity or focus: “Let’s build a tower instead.”
- **RECONNECT AFTER CALMING.** Offer comfort and teach alternatives: “Next time you’re mad, you can say ‘I’m angry’ or stomp your feet.”



ABOVE ALL, STAY CONSISTENT!

Loving, predictable responses help children learn over time. Each time you calmly guide your child through big emotions, you help build their emotional skills, confidence, and trust. Progress takes time—but your support makes a lasting difference.

