

# Dealing With Common Challenging Behaviours

Challenging behaviours can be stressful to deal with. As a parent, you may feel that you've done something wrong. Or you may be reminded of a difficult situation you faced as a child.

But as your toddler grows and seeks more independence, it's normal for her to act out. She's learning about the world and what she can and can't do. Her behaviour is also her way of telling you that she needs something, like rest, food, comfort or connection to her parent or caregiver.

When your toddler's behaviour is challenging, your job is to help her understand what she's feeling and how to handle her emotions in a healthy way. It's also your chance to respond to her needs in a way that builds a strong and respectful bond with her.

## Biting

- ✓ State the limit clearly and simply: "No, please don't bite. It hurts." Then move on.
- ✓ If she bites while breastfeeding, firmly tell her no and remove her from the breast. Then try again. (See [Breastfeeding Your Toddler](#))
- ✗ Don't bite her back. It may frighten and confuse her, and will tell her that biting is okay.
- ✗ Don't laugh.



### TRY THIS

You don't need to do something every time your child "acts out." If she's doing something minor that isn't putting her in danger or hurting anyone, you may want to overlook it. Don't overlook her good behaviour, though. Praising her regularly helps her learn how to express her feelings in a healthy way.



### KEY TAKEAWAY

Your toddler learns how to behave by watching you. If you deal respectfully with her and with others, she'll learn to do the same.

## Tantrums

### Before a tantrum happens:

- ✓ Keep to routines around rest, activity and meal and snack times. Take healthy snacks and water with you when you go out.
- ✓ Let her know ahead of time what's going to happen and what you want her to do: "We're going to the store for milk and fruit. You can help me choose the bananas."
- ✓ Find ways to help her deal with her feelings, like running fast or using words.
- ✓ Try not to say no to every request. Give her control over little things.

### If you see a tantrum coming on:

- ✓ Redirect her, distract her, or try to change what's bothering her: "I see you're getting frustrated. Can I help you?"
- ✓ Give her quiet time if she's tired.
- ✓ Give her food if she's hungry.

### If she's having a tantrum:

- ✓ Take some deep breaths and stay calm. Don't scream or spank her.
- ✓ Try to comfort her: "I'm here and I love you." But don't try to talk about her feelings until later, when everyone is calm.
- ✓ Try holding her firmly but lovingly, but stop if it seems to make the tantrum worse.
- ✓ If you're in public, remember that most people will understand.
- ✓ Make sure that she won't get hurt, hurt others or damage anything.

### When the tantrum is over:

- ✓ Cuddle and comfort her.
- ✓ Praise her for regaining control.
- ✓ Help her name the feelings she had before, during and after the tantrum.
- ✓ Talk about what she could do next time – like telling you she's upset or hungry before the feelings get too big to handle.



### DID YOU KNOW

Like many parents, you may be uncomfortable when your child shows big emotions like anger or sadness. It might remind you of hard times in your life, or you may just be less comfortable sharing feelings. Understanding why you feel uncomfortable with your toddler's emotions can help you respond to your child in a healthy and helpful way, instead of reacting out of your own sadness, anger or frustration.



### BRAIN BUILDER

By staying calm when your child is having a tantrum, you're showing her how to respond to stressful situations.

## Fighting With Other Children

- ✓ If you're worried about safety, step in right away.
- ✓ If safety's not an issue, stay back for a minute to see if they can solve the problem themselves.
- ✓ Suggest fair solutions, like sharing: "Amy really likes the truck you're playing with. When you're done with it, can you give her a turn?"

## Whining

- ✓ Check if she's hungry, tired or uncomfortable.
- ✓ Help her find the words to express what's bothering her.
- ✓ Praise her when she's not whining.

## Dawdling (Moving Slowly)

- ✓ Give her plenty of notice before changing activities.
- ✓ Build in extra time to do things, especially when you know that switching activities will be hard, like putting toys away to get ready for bed.
- ✓ Tell her what you need her to do clearly and simply: "Put on your coat now, please."
- ✓ Put away toys, turn off the TV and get rid of other distractions when you're in a hurry. And give her some control over the situation by giving her a job to do.

