

## The Importance of Effective Listening

Careful listening is one of the best ways for parents and other caregivers to have a positive influence on a child. Paying attention and responding to a child's needs shows love and encourages a sense of trust. Establishing this type of close relationship should begin as soon as a child starts to talk. As the child grows, additional listening strategies can be added.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS

By age three, most children should be able to carry on a conversation. Children need to develop conversational skills for their emotional, social, and intellectual development.

Children learn to communicate to get their needs fulfilled and to make emotional connections. Children need to be able to trust others in order to develop emotionally. Adults can help foster this sense of trust by being effective listeners. Responding to children with an actual answer and not just an “uh-huh” helps them feel valued and encourages them to share more information. When children feel that they have been heard, they are more likely to engage in conversation.

Children learn social skills and social expectations through conversation. These are keys to getting along with both adults and other children.

Talking with children and really listening to what they have to say is also one of the best ways to stimulate brain development and encourage intellectual development.

Here are some tips for effective listening:

- **Check out body language.** To fully understand what a child is trying to say, pay attention to the child's body language and tone of voice, as well as the words that are being spoken. A child may not always be able to put feelings into words.
- **Show your interest.** Make eye contact with the child. With a small child, you may need to crouch down to the child's level. Use nonverbal responses while the child is talking.
- **Keep the conversation private if necessary.** Children may not be willing to talk about some topics while others are around. If privacy is not an issue, at least make sure that other children do not interfere with your conversation with the child. Also be careful about how much you share what is talked about with others. Children need to know they can trust you.
- **Be especially attentive if you are tired.** It can be very difficult to listen to a child if you are tired. Make a special effort to concentrate on the child's conversation.
- **Be responsive.** Smiling, nodding, or showing concern all indicate you are really listening. When the child stops, verbally respond to what was said.
- **Do not interrupt.** Do not be in such a rush to respond that you do not allow the child to finish talking. Make sure that you are really listening and not already planning what you are going to say to the child.
- **Respect the child's feelings.** Keep in mind that the child may have feelings about a situation that are different from your own. After acknowledging the child's feelings, help the child talk about a solution to the problem.
- **Encourage the child to keep talking.** Sometimes a simple “Tell me more about that” when

- **Give the child your attention.** The first rule of good communication is to pay attention. Turn off the television or put down whatever you are reading. If the phone rings while you are discussing something very important to the child, do not take the call.

(Continued on next page)

a child is talking can be an invitation for more discussion. Encourage children to talk more about situations that are bothering them.

- **Paraphrase to show that you understand.** Repeat what the child has said using different words. This will let the child know that you were listening and that you heard what was said.
- **Avoid responding in negative ways.** It can be very discouraging to a child—or to anyone—to receive negative responses. Having conversations is important. Do not use those times to correct the child’s word choice, grammar, or pronunciation. Focus on the message. Avoid using harsh words or using “wipe-out” language—words that dismiss or poke holes in anything the child says.
- **Avoid “adult talk.”** Children become frustrated when they hear messages like “I know what’s best for you.” With older children, give reasons for your responses so that the child can understand and learn.
- **Answer questions as much as possible.** Children can ask a lot of questions. Try to remember that answering these questions helps children learn. Children are usually satisfied with simple answers, but avoid answers like “Because I said so.”
- **Make conversation part of your everyday routine.** Let toddlers know that you care what they have to say by talking with them while you are preparing meals, or doing household chores, and other activities. Ask questions about what happened during the day. Children who are already used to talking with adults are more likely to talk about things that are bothering them.

### Taking Action

Observe yourself in listening to others—preferably children—on at least five occasions. What good listening skills do you practice? In what ways could you improve your listening skills?

## Emotional Development from One to Three

## Section 11–1

# Understanding and Dealing with Temper Tantrums

Where does the phrase “throw a temper tantrum” come from? Once you witness a tantrum, you will understand. You might see a two-year-old girl so angry that she will scream, cry, throw herself on the floor, and flail her arms and legs. She may even hit and kick anyone who dares to come near. Unfortunately, temper tantrums are a normal part of growing up, and most boys and girls have them at one time or another. Although there are no magic cures, understanding some of the reasons for tantrums can help parents and other caregivers cope with them. There are also some useful techniques to try when a child is in the midst of a temper tantrum.

It can be helpful to know that a child’s need for autonomy—independence—is often the root cause of a tantrum. Children want a sense of independence and control over their environment. When children realize that they cannot do something on their own, a tantrum may result from their frustration. While tantrums are often associated with toddlers, they occur at different ages for different reasons.

### INFANTS

Infants may cry a lot, but they do not really have tantrums. Crying is their way of communicating that they need something. Some infants seem to cry endlessly for no reason. They may have colic, a painful condition. Studies show that infants who have their needs met quickly, and who are held and comforted when they cry, develop a strong sense of security.

### TODDLERS

Toddlers are most likely to have temper tantrums. These occur for various reasons, even relatively minor ones. Toddlers become frustrated very easily, and they are not able to fully communicate their feelings. They also have not yet developed

problem-solving skills to help ease their frustrations. Temper tantrums are most likely to happen when toddlers are hungry, tired, or overly excited.

### PRESCHOOLERS

Preschoolers have fewer temper tantrums because they have better problem-solving skills. A larger vocabulary allows them to communicate better. When things are not going their way, however, preschoolers may behave like two-year-olds. Four-year-old Grant had a temper tantrum at a store over an art set that he wanted. When he started to scream and kick, his embarrassed mother put the toy in the cart just to get him to stop. If people give in to their demands, children learn quickly that tantrums can be used to get what they want.

### AVOIDING TANTRUMS

Although it may be impossible to avoid all tantrums, here are some strategies that may help:

- **Make sure the child is not seeking attention.** For some children, negative attention, such as a caregiver’s response to a tantrum, is better than no attention at all. Try to catch children doing good things and reward them with positive attention.
- **Offer choices when possible.** Being able to choose gives a child a sense of some control. You might give choices for a snack, which toy to play with, or whether to wear the orange shirt or the blue one.
- **Help children stick to a regular routine.** Predictable schedules help children understand what is going on and what will be happening next.

(Continued on next page)

- **Give a few minutes' notice before ending an activity.** Children often have trouble dealing with sudden changes in activities.
- **Examine the situation.** Is it possible that there are too many rules and “don'ts” in the child's life? Are there other ways that adults are unintentionally increasing the likelihood of a temper tantrum? For example, Tommy's father realized that Tommy's tantrum was partially caused by being hungry and tired from being taken on too many errands.

## HANDLING A TANTRUM

- **Stay calm.** This is essential when dealing with a child who is having a tantrum.
- **Set a positive example.** Spanking or screaming at the child sends the message that these behaviors are acceptable. Stay in control of yourself and your emotions. Speak quietly to the child.
- **Pause before you act.** Take at least 30 seconds to consider how you will handle the tantrum.
- **Consider the cause.** Tantrums may need to be handled differently depending on the cause. Try to understand the reason for the tantrum. For example, if the child has just experienced a great disappointment, you may need to provide comfort and support.
- **Ignore.** If the tantrum poses no threat to you, the child, or others, try ignoring it. Stay nearby and continue your activities. If you begin an activity that the child likes, such as playing with blocks, he might become interested enough to stop the tantrum.
- **Distract or remove.** Try offering a replacement for an object that is off-limits to a child. If necessary, move the child to another area of the room. Leave a store or other public place, leaving behind planned purchases, if necessary.
- **Wait it out.** Wait until the child calms down before talking about the situation. Do not expect to be able to reason with a screaming child.
- **Teach coping skills.** It is important to discuss the behavior in a calm manner to teach the child how to handle anger and to deal with difficult situations.
- **Do not give in.** Do not reward children by giving in. They will learn that tantrums are effective for getting their own way. Instead, verbally praise the child for regaining control.

### Taking Action

Describe how you would handle a three-year-old's temper tantrum in the following places: at home, in the ticket line at a movie theater, and at a neighbor's home.

## Guiding Children Effectively

Every day, parents and other caregivers face situations that require them to guide children’s behavior. The best responses take into consideration the age and temperament of the individual child, and the circumstances, as well as the misbehavior. Even those who live or work with children on a daily basis benefit from evaluating their methods from time to time. Here are some effective techniques:

- **Distract.** By monitoring children’s activities, it is often possible to distract or redirect them when misbehavior seems likely to occur. This is an especially important technique to use with toddlers. Simply saying “Look at this” or asking “Could you help me?” can lead a child away from dangers or actions.
- **Ignore it.** Every instance of breaking a rule is not the same, nor are all rules equally important. Sometimes it is best to simply look away when misbehavior is minor. Children can never do everything they should. If a problem such as being tired prompts a tantrum for example, putting the child to bed may be an appropriate response.
- **Help the child.** Telling a child again and again to do something is frustrating and often produces no results. Frustration can be avoided—and time can be saved—by helping the child get started on the desired activity or behavior.
- **Use an appropriate tone of voice.** Children will respond to the way your voice sounds. When guiding inappropriate behavior, speak in a clear, low tone that indicates you are serious about what you are saying. When giving praise or encouragement, speak in a higher tone of voice that indicates you are pleased.
- **Give children choices.** When appropriate, give children choices about what they can do. “Josh, you can’t take the bulldozer because Tyler is playing with it. Would you rather ride the tricycle or read a story?” Only give choices that you are willing to permit. If you ask questions like “Do you want to take a nap?” the answer will almost always be “No!”
- **Make rules clear and specific.** Children need to understand what is expected of them. Use specific words that the child can understand. Saying “Don’t make a mess” may not be specific enough for a toddler.
- **Be consistent.** Rules should not change from one day to the next. However, rules may change as a child gets older and has more self-control.
- **Consider the child’s age.** Sometimes inappropriate behavior is related to the age of the child. For example, it is unrealistic to expect a child under the age of two to understand how to share.
- **Use positive language.** Include more “do” statements than “don’t” statements. For example, instead of “Don’t run in the classroom,” say “Please walk in the classroom.”
- **Warn the child.** Think of the child like a baseball batter—it’s three strikes before you’re out. At the first strike, remind the child why the behavior is unacceptable and what the proper behavior is. At the second strike, remind the child again about the behavior and warn of the consequences of further misbehavior. On the third strike, put those consequences in action.
- **Follow through.** After you give a child a warning about his or her behavior and what the consequence will be, follow through with that consequence. If a child starts to see that you do not follow through with consequences, he or she will not take your warnings seriously.

(Continued on next page)

- **Do not exaggerate.** Respond in a way that is suited to the misbehavior. Some actions simply deserve a brief scolding; others punishment.
- **Take away privileges.** When a child has misbehaved in a way that calls for consequences, there are other options besides giving time-out. One alternative is to take away a treat—something the child likes. However, the child needs to know beforehand what the consequences will be. Very young children may not understand the connection to the misbehavior.
- **Require repayment.** When a child does something that hurts another person’s feelings or possessions, have the child do something to try to make amends for the action. An apology to the other person is the least the child can do. This experience will help the child learn empathy and respect for others.
- **Allow natural consequences to happen.** Sometimes the best form of discipline is to allow the child to experience the natural consequences of his or her actions. For example, a child who does not share with others will soon learn that people may not want to play.
- **Set a good example.** Children learn from the actions of adults. If you would like the child to remain calm, it is important to remain calm yourself. Use phrases like “Please,” “Thank you,” and “Can I help you?” when guiding children’s behavior.
- **Give praise and encouragement.** Acknowledge a child when he or she is exhibiting acceptable behaviors. This is especially true when you notice the behavior has improved. Be specific about the praise and encouragement you give. This helps the child understand which behavior, actions, or words you liked.

### Taking Action

Write an example in which each technique could be applied. Identify at which ages each technique might work best.