



Building “Piece” of Mind

Your toddler: Tantrums, time out, and time in

Toddlers are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others relate to your child affects the many new connections that are forming in the toddler's brain. These early brain connections are the basis for learning, behavior and health. Early, caring relationships prepare your child's brain for the future.

Tantrums

By the time children are 18 months old, they may start to have tantrums. Many times, these tantrums happen because they can't tell you what they want in words (“I want you to read to me NOW!”). As they begin to talk more, this type of tantrum may happen less.

Encourage children to use words:

- Smile when they use happy sounds or words to get your attention.
- Look at them when they use words (even if they are interrupting).
- Answer them when they use words and they are not interrupting.

When you do this, you are teaching your child that using words is the best way to get what he wants.

Tantrums may also happen when you set limits by saying no. When you say no, distract your child with something else to do. “How about we pound on these noisy pots and pans instead?”

If the tantrum continues, ignore it as much as possible. If tantrums result in more attention, the tantrums will likely continue.

Time-out

Consider teaching “time-out” if your child starts to:

- hit
- kick
- spit

Time-out must mean “quiet and still.” If your child isn't being quiet and still, it isn't time-out. Very few 18-month-olds know how to be quiet and still. You will teach him this by ending time-out the moment he is quiet and still.

Step one

- When your child is hitting, kicking, spitting or losing control, pick him up but look away so he knows this is not a hug.
- Gently hold him in your lap.
- Sit until he becomes quiet and still. At first, it may just be a brief moment.
- As soon as he is quiet and still, time-out is over. He is allowed off your lap.

Over time, your child will learn that time-out is shorter if he is simply quiet and still. Once your child is able to calm himself quickly and consistently in your lap, it is time for step two.

Step two

- Have your child sit by himself in a chair.
- You can put your hand on his lap or shoulder, but look away.
- Have your child sit there until he is quiet and still.
- As soon as he is quiet and still, time-out is over.

Once your child is able to put himself in the chair and quickly calm himself, then you can begin to use a timer. Time-out should last about one minute per year of age. Only try this when your child understands that time-out means being quiet and still.

Time-out works best when:

- You use it for one or two behaviors at a time
- There is a lot of “time in”

As your child ages, time-out may work because, when in time-out, your child is being ignored. No child likes that! This is especially true if he knows what time-in feels like.

Time-in

Time-in occurs when your child is the center of your attention! Teach him that picking up a book or a toy results in reading and snuggles or play time together (time-in). If hitting results in time-out, but picking up a book results in time-in, he will learn to stop hitting and to start picking up a book instead.

Calm down

Time out teaches your child to calm down. It helps him remain in control despite strong emotions.

Time out is healthier and safer than spanking or other forms of punishment. Physical punishment teaches children that “adults hit when they are angry”.

Time out teaches children “this is how I calm myself.”

