

Loving Discipline: It's Not Too Early to Start!

The Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Years

It's been a long day. You are tired and you just want to sit down. But your three year old colored your sofa with markers. The baby is crying--again! You just want to scream.

Being a parent can be tough at times. When you feel upset, you can still control how you react when your baby cries or child acts up. Remember these three steps to help you stay calm:

- Take a deep breath
- Count to ten, and
- Put your hands in your pockets so you don't use them on your kid.

Hitting doesn't work. Your child will only feel pain and confusion. Your child might not even understand why you are doing it. Yelling will only make a child feel scared and hurt.

Never, ever shake a child. Their little brains can get badly hurt and they can die.

If you need to talk to someone or need help managing your anger, please call the Family Support hotline at 1-800-829-3777. They are there to listen and help you. Don't be afraid to call!

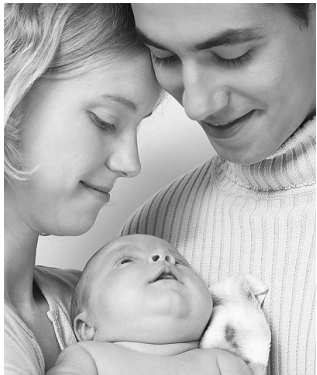
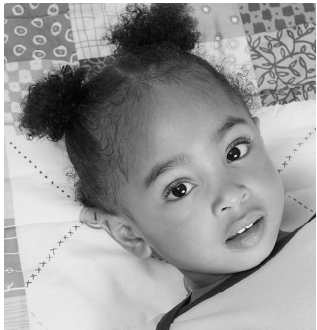
Why DO babies cry?

Babies can't talk. Crying is your baby's way to tell you that something is needed. Your baby might be hungry, sleepy, gassy, sick, wet, too cold, too hot, or just lonely! Keep trying different things until you figure out what your baby wants.

Sometimes you won't be able to stop the crying. If you feel like you can't take it any more, leave your baby with a trusted adult. Leave the room. Take a walk. Get a cup of tea. If you are alone, put the baby down in the crib or another safe place. Go to the next room for a few minutes and take a deep breath. Calm down before going back.

Controlling your little explorer

Once your infant turns into an active toddler (ages 1-2), your baby will be curious to explore the world. If your baby does something dangerous, say a firm "no" and move the baby away. Keep unsafe items out of reach so you don't have to keep saying "no."



Tantrums 101

Toddlers want to do everything for themselves, even if they don't know how. If they are upset, they may not have the words to tell you why. At the same time, they have not learned how to control their feelings. All this leads to the dreaded kicking, yelling, screaming tantrum!

Your child needs your help to calm down. This is not the time to scold or teach a lesson. Your baby will be too upset to listen to anything you have to say!

Move or direct your baby to something else. "Let's go for a walk!"

Find something funny in the situation. Or make it a game. "I bet I can put away more toys than you can. Let's have a race!"

Some children have tantrums to get your attention. If that is the case, try to ignore your baby until he/she calms down. If your baby is in a safe place, go to the other side of the room.

Try different things until you find something that works for your child. Sometimes nothing works. If your baby will let you, hold and comfort your baby during the tantrum. Once your child is calm, you can talk about the upset.

To help avoid tantrums:

- Make sure your child isn't hungry or tired.
- Don't expect too much. You can't expect a toddler to sit still through a movie!
- Let your child decide small things, like what to wear. This helps children feel in control.
- Stick to a schedule. For instance, put your baby to bed at the same time every day.
- Warn your baby before it's time to do something new or leave the park — no surprises!
- Spend some time playing with your baby. Sometimes all they want is YOU!

Don't feel bad if tantrums still happen. They are a very normal part of life for toddlers and preschoolers!

Lay down the law

As your child becomes a preschooler (ages 3-4), your child can understand more and talk more clearly. This is a good time to teach your rules.

- **Say exactly what you expect.** "You must try at least one bite of a new food."
- **Use "when-then."** "When you brush your teeth, then you can choose a bedtime story."
- **Listen when your child asks nicely.** Show that whining doesn't work.
- **Praise when your child does something right.** "Great job putting away your toys!"
- **Show understanding when your child is upset.** "I know it's hard to share your dolls."
- **Remind your child when he/she "forgets."** "We only use markers on paper."
- **Make a picture chart of things your child must do (change clothes, go to bed, play, etc...).** When your child does something, check it off. After every 50 checks, give a small prize.
- **Timeouts can be helpful when your child isn't listening.** Tell your child that he/she must obey by the time you count to three slowly. If your child doesn't obey by three, calmly give a timeout. Find a corner or other space for time out. Never use the bed. Tell your child to stand still for a few minutes (one minute per year, so a three year old would be timed out for three minutes). This is not to punish your child, but will give your child some time to think and calm down. After the time out, both the parent and the child should try to leave the incident behind.

Even the best parents can use some help. Don't feel bad about asking for help from friends, family, or other parents. You might want to take a parenting class, too. Alameda Alliance for Health can help you find one. For more information, please call Health Programs at 510-747-4577.