



# MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

[www.midjerseypeds.com](http://www.midjerseypeds.com)

**33 Brunswick Woods Drive  
East Brunswick, NJ 08816  
(732) 257-4330**

**25 Kilmer Drive,  
Building #3, Suite 107  
Morganville, NJ 07751  
(732) 972-6888**

## TEMPER TANTRUMS

### Definition

A temper tantrum is an immature way of expressing anger or frustration. By 3 years of age, you can begin to teach your child to verbalize his feelings. We need to teach children that anger is normal but that it must be channeled appropriately. By school age, temper tantrums should be rare.

**Examples** — Whining, hitting the wall or floor, head banging, breath holding.

### Responses To Temper Tantrums

As a general rule, ignore the tantrums and praise your child when he/she controls his/her temper. Remain calm. Yelling and spanking are not helpful. Be supportive of children having frustration or fatigue-related tantrums. Young children may be frustrated because their parents don't understand their speech. Older children may be frustrated with their inability to do their homework. At these times listen to your child and offer encouragement. Praise your child for not giving up. Some tantrums can be prevented by steering your child away from tasks that are frustrating. Children tend to have more temper tantrums when they are tired because they are less able to cope with frustrating situations. At these times put your child to bed. Hunger can contribute to temper tantrums. If you suspect this, give your child something to eat. Temper tantrums also increase during sickness. Ignore attention-seeking or demanding-type tantrums. As long as your child stays in one place, is not too disruptive, and is safe, you can leave them alone. If you recognize that a certain event is going to push your child over the edge, try to shift his/her attention to something else. Don't give in to your child's demands.

During the temper tantrum, ignore it completely. Once a tantrum has started, it rarely can be stopped. Move away, even to a different room; then your child will no longer have an audience. Reasoning with the child at this point is not usually effective. Give your child time to regain control. After the tantrum, be friendly and allow things to return to normal. Physically move children having refusal-type tantrums. If your child refuses something unimportant (such as taking a bath or going visiting), let it go before a tantrum begins. However, if your child must do something important, such as going to the doctor or to day care, he should not be able to avoid it by having a tantrum.

Some of these tantrums can be prevented by giving your child a 5-minute warning instead of asking him/her suddenly to stop what he/she is doing. Once a tantrum has begun, let your child have the tantrum for 2 or 3 minutes. Try to put his/her displeasure into words: "You want to play some more, but it's bedtime." Then take him/her to the intended destination (for example, the bed), helping him/her as much as is needed (including carrying). Use time-outs for disruptive-type tantrums. Some temper tantrums are too disruptive for parents to ignore. On such occasions send or take your child to his room for a few minutes. Clinging or following you around during the tantrum, hitting or throwing things are a few examples of disruptive behavior. When your child has a temper tantrum in a public place such as a restaurant or church, move him/her to another place for his/her time-out; the rights of other people need to be protected.

If your child is totally out of control and screaming wildly, consider holding them. their loss of control probably scares them. Take your child in your arms, tell them you know they are angry, and offer them your sense of control. This usually takes only a few minutes. Then let them go. Some children won't want you to comfort them. Hold your child only if it helps.