

What to say when big feelings hit

The Tantrum Scripts

Word-for-word phrases for 48 everyday meltdowns, plus a five-step calm plan for moments when your own words disappear.

For toddlers and preschoolers

48 scripts | cheat sheet | calm tools

A note before you begin

For every parent who needs the words right now.

If you've ever stood in a grocery store while your toddler screamed on the floor, with strangers watching, and had no idea what to say, this book is for you.

Tantrums are a common part of early development. A young child can feel a huge emotion before they have the language and self-control to manage it.

This book gives you short, usable phrases for the moments you will actually face. The scripts are starting points, not magic words and not a test of your parenting.

The aim is not instant quiet or a perfect response. It is safety, connection, and a clear limit, one calm-enough moment at a time.

Fewer words. Lower voice. Same limit. Stay close when it is safe to do so.



What the research says

Tantrums are one of the most studied behaviors in early childhood. Here's what the research shows.

What the research says

87 to 91%

of toddlers aged 18 to 36 months have tantrums. By 42 to 48 months, it drops to 59%. Tantrums are normal, and they fade with age.

Potegal and Davidson, Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 2003

What the research says

Under 5 minutes

for 75% of tantrums, in a study of 335 children. The most common length was just 30 seconds to a minute. It always feels longer.

Potegal, Kosorok, and Davidson, 2003

What the research says

Feelings words

Emotion labels can support emotional learning. One often-cited brain-imaging study found a calming pattern in adults, not toddlers.

Lieberman and colleagues, Psychological Science, 2007

What the research says

13 of 17 outcomes

were linked with poorer outcomes in a meta-analysis of 160,927 children. Spanking was not linked with better behavior in the short or long term.

Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor, Journal of Family Psychology, 2016

What this means for you

Tantrums are usually brief and become less common with age. Calm, consistent responses and positive attention are useful tools; harsh physical punishment is not. No single phrase works for every child.

What's inside

1 **Why tantrums happen** 6
The pattern, what helps, and when to ask for support.

2 **The calm sequence** 13
Five steps for any tantrum, and staying calm yourself.

3 **Preventing tantrums** 18
Connection, transitions, choices, and routines.

4 **The scripts** 23
48 word-for-word scripts by situation.

\+ **Printables** 48
Cheat sheet, calm-down choices, feelings chart, and tracker.

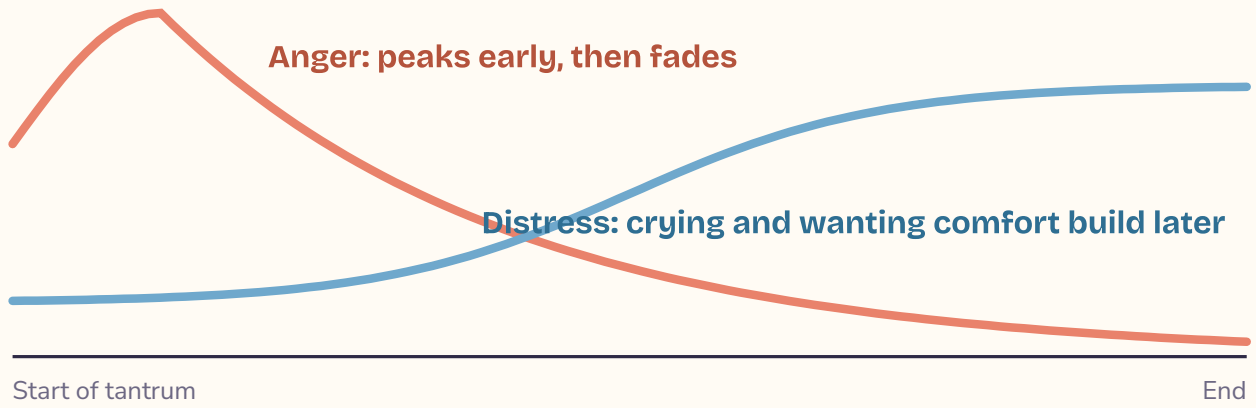
Find your moment

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Part 1 5-min read

The shape of a tantrum

Understanding this one pattern will change how you respond.



Simplified illustration of the pattern described by Potegal and colleagues, 2003

Researchers analyzing parents' detailed accounts of tantrums found two overlapping processes. Anger rises fast, peaks at or near the start, and then declines. Distress, with crying and comfort-seeking, builds more slowly across the tantrum.

During the anger peak

Say very little and keep everyone safe. Reasoning is unlikely to help at the loudest point, and extra words may add stimulation.

As distress takes over

This is when to offer comfort: a hug, a calm voice, naming the feeling. Now your child can take it in.

What the research says

Timing matters

In tantrums from 335 children, the most common length was 30 seconds to a minute, and 75% lasted 5 minutes or less.

Potegal, Kosorok, and Davidson, 2003

Scripts

Out and about, continued

Restaurant meltdown

Waiting, noise, and a long stretch of sitting still.

Say

It's hard to wait for food. Your body wants to move.

Say

Let's go for a little walk and come back.

Do

Step outside together for a few minutes. Bring a small busy bag next time.

Avoid

Staying put while the tantrum escalates to prove a point.

Running away in the store

Freedom is thrilling, and danger isn't understood yet.

Say

I won't let you run. Stores are busy and I need to keep you safe.

Say

You can push the cart with me, or ride in it. You choose.

Do

Hold hands or use the cart. Safety limits are firm.

Avoid

Chasing them as a game. They'll think it's fun.