

Free

Toddler Tips

for parents by parents

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The NSPCC Parenting Pack



The NSPCC offers a wide range of leaflets and booklets for parents that are available FREE of charge.

Handle with Care explains how to hold and look after your baby, including advice on how to cope with persistent crying.

Putting Children First is designed for parents of 0-5 year olds.

Listening to Children offers practical advice on how to listen to and understand children.

Stress: A Guide for Parents helps you identify and manage stress and offers simple stress-busting solutions.

Behave Yourself offers a positive approach to managing your children's behaviour.

Encouraging Better Behaviour provides useful information on positive parenting and positive discipline.

Not Naughty, but Normal outlines some of the emotions and difficulties faced by parents.

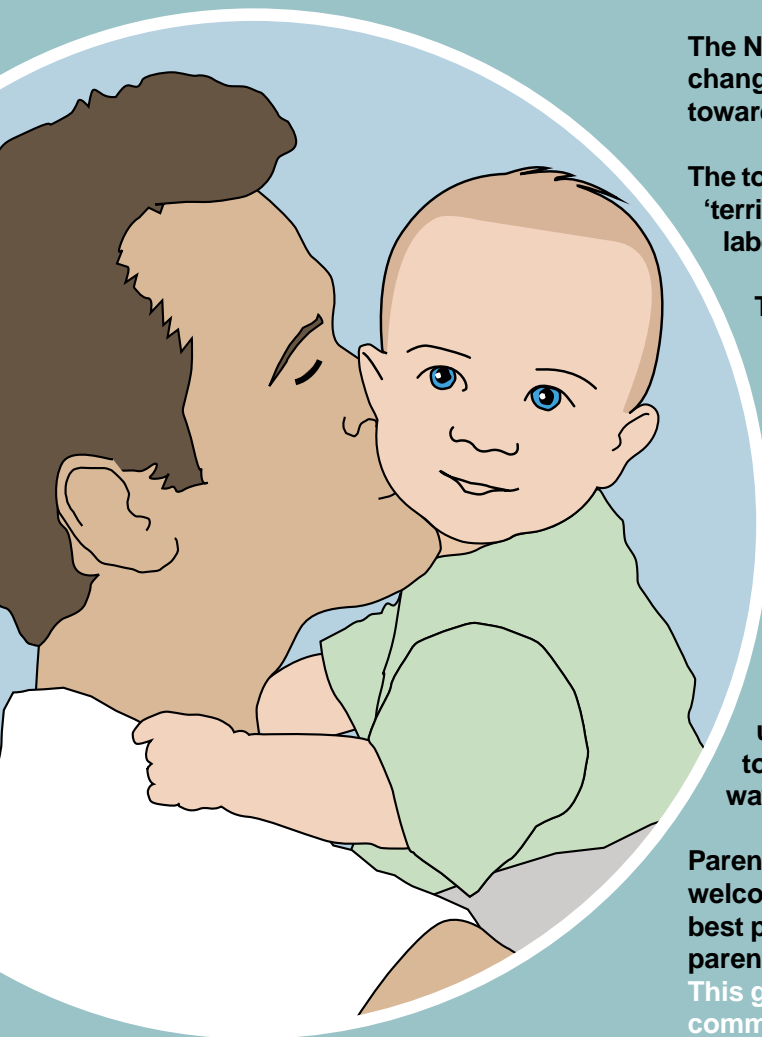
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Terrific Twos



The NSPCC FULL STOP Campaign aims to change our attitudes and behaviour towards children.

The toddler years are often described as the 'terrible twos' and normal toddler behaviour is labelled 'naughty' from day one.

The NSPCC wants to change the way we look at toddlerhood – it may be a challenge, but it's not terrible. Much toddler behaviour is normal not naughty.

And the NSPCC wants to change the way we treat children. With positive discipline, shouting and smacking are not necessary and often make things worse.

The key to better and safer parenting is understanding toddlers and learning how to cope with their emotions in a positive way for parent and child.

Parents preparing for toddlerhood often welcome greater help and support, and the best people to advise them are probably parents who have been through it themselves.

This guide is by parents for parents, with commentary by NSPCC Parenting Adviser Eileen Hayes, herself a mother of four. It does not cover every situation, but it should give anyone interested in toddler development some new insights and helpful hints.

In January 2003, the NSPCC asked ordinary mums and dads to submit their toddler tips, many of which are included in this guide.

This was made possible with generous support from the Early Learning Centre.



Toddler expert Eileen Hayes is the NSPCC's Parenting Adviser. Eileen's latest book *Tantrums* is published by Hamlyn.

Parents' five point plan

1 Listen and explain
"Whenever your child is naughty, don't just shout at them and expect them to respond," says Michael from Stevenage. "The best thing is to rationalise with them, bend down to their level, look into their eyes and explain to them what they are doing is wrong and why you don't like it."

2 Set a good example
"Toddlers watch every move you make," says Gerry from London. "So if you don't want your child to act aggressively, it's important that you don't either."

Eileen's advice: "Toddlers mainly learn by copying what you do. The more you yell, or say no, or lose your cool, the more likely it is that they will do the same. Hard as it is, it really pays off in the end if you can try to be calm and positive."

3 Ignore mild misbehaviour
"Don't be always nagging and whining at your child," says Mrs Garside from Halifax. "Ignore mild bad behaviour. If you nag all the time, it's water off a duck's back and they will switch off. Save your loud voice for when you really need it."

Eileen's advice: "Try to turn a blind eye to minor annoying behaviour, and save the word 'no' and other battles for the times when you have no choice or when the child's safety is involved."

4 Encourage them
You can do this not only with material rewards like a new toy or video but with lots of praise and tender loving care.

"When my toddlers have had tantrums," says Kate from Kidderminster, "I try to ignore them when it is safe to do so. I then really congratulate them and give them lots of cuddles to reward good behaviour."

"Nourish your child with positive attention and quality time," suggests Mrs Garside from Halifax, "and they will turn into a confident, secure happy child."

Eileen's advice: "Be lavish with praise for positive behaviour you want to encourage: 'Good girl, you came for dinner as soon as I called.' This makes your toddler want to repeat the behaviour that pleases you."

5 Give them a say
Parents agree that, instead of just saying, "Because I said so", toddlers should be given choices.

As Cath says, "Try to create a win-win situation in order to avoid an argument. For example, you want your toddler who hates wearing socks to wear some because it's cold outside. Instead of saying, 'I want you to wear socks now', say, 'Do you want to wear the black ones or the blue ones today?' That way your toddler feels in control about deciding which socks to wear, while not allowing them the option of saying, 'No socks!'"

Kay used the same ploy at bedtime: "Instead of asking him if he was ready to go to bed, I gave him a different option. I would say 'Do you want to read a book when you get into bed, or shall we listen to some nursery rhymes?' That way, the option was not bed or staying up, it was giving him an option once he was there."

Eileen's advice: "It is very hard for small children to feel they never have a say. They see that adults have all the power and make all the decisions – where to go, what to do and what to buy. Let them have choices whenever you can, over what to wear or eat, or what to play with."



"The golden rule with toddlers is co-operation not conflict."

Gerry, London

Tantrums

tantrum/'tntnm/ noun (esp. child's) outburst of bad temper or petulance.

The facts:

- Studies show that tantrums occur at least once a week in 50-80 per cent of pre-school children.
- The major cause of toddler tantrums is conflict with parents – most commonly over food and eating (16.7 per cent), closely followed by being put in a pushchair, high chair or car seat (11.6 per cent), then by dressing (10.8 per cent).
- There are peak times for tantrums – more tantrums occur in the late morning and early evening, when the child is probably hungry or tired.

At this stage in a child's life, what may seem weird, irrational or just plain naughty is perfectly normal. And it won't help – you or the child – to get stressed about it.

Eileen's advice: "Out of all the challenging types of toddler behaviour – for example, getting into everything, asking endless questions or refusing point blank to get into the buggy/car seat – it's the tantrum that gives toddlers a bad name and provides parents with the most headaches."

Damage limitation

There are times when nothing less than a miracle will stop your child kicking off – like the moment you realise you've left their favourite teddy at the supermarket and it shut two hours ago. BUT parents do employ some tactics to ward off trouble.

At home

'Toddler-proof' your home so you don't have to keep taking things away from your child. As Melanie says, "Look at your home and put away things they may break or can hurt themselves on. Your house may not look pretty but it's better than shouting at them all day."

Out shopping

When you have time, let your toddler help. "Let them choose some of the items you want to buy, ie, if you want biscuits, let them pick which ones or decide which colour of soap/bubble bath/toilet roll to get," suggests Diana from Leicester.

A friend's house

Take a goody bag of toys. "Always make sure you have a supply of toys, books, colouring pencils and food to chew on, especially when you are visiting friends without children, or elderly relatives," says Mrs Garside from Halifax.

Discipline vs Punishment

Discipline is not the same as punishment.

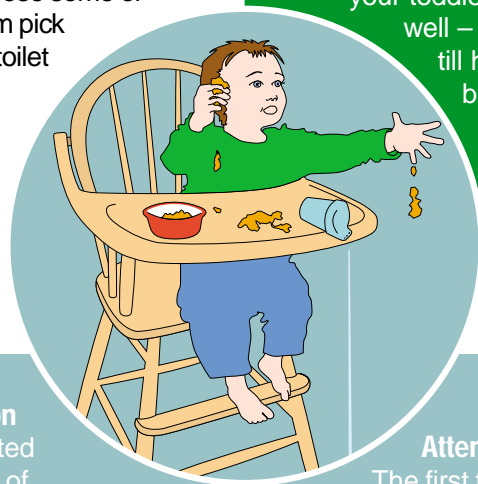
- 1 Positive discipline involves teaching your child to behave in ways that fit in with your family's rules and are generally socially acceptable.

"I don't use any form of bad discipline," says Elise from Leamington Spa, "just lots of good attention when they do something right."

- 2 Punishment, such as smacking, won't get you anywhere. Not only can it be harmful – it's also ineffective. Research has shown that it always makes tantrums worse.

"When your child is being naughty, DON'T SMACK," says Mrs Halliwell from Wigan. "Distract them with something like a toy or even finding a book and reading a story."

Eileen's advice: "Positive discipline works best using love, praise, encouragement and a good example to get your toddler to behave well – not waiting till he behaves badly before you notice, then rushing in to smack or shout."



Eileen's top triggers for tantrums



Frustration

The limited abilities of toddlers to explain what they want, or succeed at everything they try, can lead to tantrums.

Attention

The first tantrums don't start just to get attention but if you do give lots of attention, chances are they will have one again soon!

Tantrum control

But in those cases when you've tried everything with your child and he or she is still intent on throwing a wobbly, what then?

Four fury busters

- 1 **Count to ten**
If your child loses it, the worst thing you can do is lose it too. So try not to shout or, worse, lash out with a smack. It will only make the situation worse.

Eileen's advice: "Do everything you can to stay calm yourself. Breathe deeply, count to ten, tune out whining, pause before you act – try not to let your child 'press your buttons'."

"Remain calm," says Jane from Stoke-on-Trent, "and even if you are screaming inside, don't show it. It's hard but they are not toddlers for long!"

"Count to ten," says Nicola from St Leonards-on-Sea, "and reflect on the situation before reacting. You will often regret what you do if you act in haste."

"The first thing to do is take a deep breath," suggests Alan from Blackpool, "and then think to yourself that these people around me don't know me and will probably never see me again. That way, you are dealing with the child, not your embarrassment."

- 2 **Lighten up**
Remember that toddlers are learning to navigate a complicated world. Don't expect them to be rational or reasonable in the adult sense because they're not. According to parents, taking a step back and seeing the funny side can often help.

Eileen's advice: "Laughter can work especially well for toddler discipline, defusing tricky situations, and avoiding battles where everybody loses and feels bad. It often helps to laugh at yourself as an adult – when you are rigidly insisting on a particular behaviour from your toddler, you are probably taking yourself too seriously."



Rachel from Dyfed recommends that, "when you

Wanting something they can't have

Whether it's sweets you've said no to, or a toy from another child, accepting that they can't have everything takes a long time.

Proving independence

Feeling that their independence is being threatened when you refuse, for good reason, to let them wear shorts on a freezing day!



Emotional overload

Coping with masses of new experiences and emotions every day, which can easily become overwhelming.

Eileen's advice: "One mum said she carried a sign saying 'Tantrum in progress' to hold up at the appropriate moment – passers-by would smile or laugh, and her daughter would often forget the tantrum."

Try not to forget which of you is the child! As Louise from Madley explains: "As we are both very stubborn, some days I have to dig very deep to remember that I am the parent – reasonable, level-headed and in control – and she is a one stone wonder who should be given the benefit of the doubt!"

- 3 **Tender loving care**
Sometimes holding your child firmly in a tight hug and reassuring him in a quiet voice works well but only if you can remain calm.

"When my toddlers threw a temper tantrum I would just stand there and watch for a few seconds, then gently pick them up and give them a good cuddle, never raising my voice but also telling them that their behaviour is unacceptable," remembers Geraldine from Yateley.

Caroline from Cheshire swears by whispering: "When a small child is having a tantrum, crouch down to their level and whisper in their ear. It works far better than shouting because they have to stop crying to listen to you. Use key words that your child will pick up on. Bob the Builder works for me!"

- 4 **Repeat after me**
Whatever happens, keep reminding yourself that:

- It's perfectly normal for toddlers to test everything, including your patience.
- You are only human.

"That way," says Clare from Newport, "you limit the stress you feel when she insists on wearing blue shoes instead of trainers or when she goes completely berserk because you wouldn't let her press the start button on the microwave."

Simple pleasures

For many parents, the best thing about having toddlers is seeing the pleasure they get from simple things. A lesson we could all (re)learn.

"Use empty cardboard boxes as makeshift cars, pirate ships, wendy houses and so on – with a little bit of time and the minimum of artistic inspiration, the box can create hours of fun and at no cost," suggests Christine from St Georges RC Primary School.

"Spend as much time with your children as possible – when they're older, they won't remember if you ironed their pyjamas but they will remember if you took time to play with them," says Anita from Co. Durham.

"The best thing about being the parent of a toddler," claims Clare from Langstone Newport, "is their total joy in things which grown-ups have forgotten about – a balloon, drawing, singing a song, learning to jump."

"Feeding the ducks is such a de-stresser – there's something about throwing bread that's really fun even for adults," says the mother of Florence.

The plus points

Despite the stress toddlers can bring, most parents agree that the positives of toddlerhood far outweigh the negatives.

Of all the positives, unconditional love scores highly with parents and is guaranteed to get them all misty-eyed.

As one parent from Twyford Tots Nursery puts it, "The great thing about being a parent is when you're tired and a kiss or a hug makes you feel a whole lot better."

Or, as Audrey from Antrim says, "When they run up to you, put their arms around your leg as though they are giving you a hug and say, 'luv you' for no apparent reason."

"Watching them grow into little people rather than 'just babies'," says Rachel from Dyfed.

"The pleasure you get from making them giggle and doing something that gets a real belly laugh," says John.

Eileen's advice: "Make the most of the fun times with toddlers and find time to laugh together. This stage is over in a flash and many parents look back with real regret when their child is setting off for school."

TOP TEN TODDLER TIPS

- 1 "Spend time with them," says Steven from London.
- 2 "Never shout," says Chris. "Sitting down and talking to them one-to-one helps much more."
- 3 "Give them your attention and when the going gets tough, distract them," says Tweedie.
- 4 "Always pace out your toddler's day," says Mrs Garside from Halifax. "If you're doing something busy in the morning, do something quiet in the afternoon."
- 5 "Try to look at the world through the toddler's eyes," says Gerry from London.
- 6 "When your child refuses to do something, offer him a choice, so he feels he's in control," says Julia from Newport.
- 7 "Always kiss and make up if you do shout at them," says Lulu.
- 8 "Don't worry about mess – clear toys away at bedtime," says the mother of Florence.
- 9 "When you feel at the end of your tether and you're losing control, imagine they're your neighbour's children and treat them as such. It helps," says Colette.
- 10 "Minimise your stress levels by looking after yourself as well as your toddler," says Keith from Kent.

"The joy of children is something that will stay with you for life. I have four and although at times you pull your hair out, I have so many funny memories, I wouldn't change them for the world."

Kathleen, London

YOU time

Many parents say exhaustion is the most challenging aspect of having a toddler. So don't forget to look after Number One. "Always make time for yourself," says Alison from Sittingbourne. "The happier and more relaxed you are, the happier your children will be."

"Have 'You time' every day even if it's just ten minutes reading," suggests Lulu.

"Try and get as much help as you can – or take a break if you can afford childcare or have relatives who can help," says Mrs Garside from Halifax.

"And if it all seems a bit much," explains Annie from Horsham, "remember the reason why it's so stressful is because you want the best for them. If you need to talk to someone, you can usually find a friend going through the same thing. There is also plenty of good advice to be found – like this!"

"Don't focus on the tantrums. The toddler years go by so fast, so make the most of them while they still want your kisses and cuddles."

Karen

TOP TEN TESTERS

- 1 "Coping with tantrums," says Stephen from Co. Tyrone.
- 2 "Being consistent when you're both tired," says John from Hartlepool.
- 3 "Being a slave to a two-footer," says Rachel from Dyfed.
- 4 "The clinging," says Linda from White Waltham. "Sometimes I can't leave my sofa for a whole day without being clung to and asked for a 'huggle'."
- 5 "The frustration," says Clare from Langstone Newport. "Trying to reason with my daughter about why she shouldn't scribble on walls and why she has to sit in her car seat."
- 6 "The endless questions . . . although it is still the greatest compliment when they look at you and only you, as the source of all knowledge," says Karen.
- 7 "Trying to beat the guilt," says Andy, "which comes when you realise no matter how much time you spend with your children, it is NEVER enough."
- 8 "Other people's opinions of how you should bring up your child," says Elise from Leamington Spa.
- 9 "Coping with sleepless nights," says Paul from Newton Hall, "and trying not to let them affect your everyday life."
- 10 "Not understanding the concept of sharing so when her older sister has something she wants – the biting and hitting starts until she gets it," says Audrey from Antrim.

The best thing

- "The best thing," says Sharon, "is watching them becoming their own little person, which at the same time can be the most challenging of things too!"
- Sue from Leek believes that "the best thing is the way in which just looking at them can make your heart soften, even on a not-so-good day, if you just stop what you're doing in order to enjoy them."
- For Chris, "The best thing is watching them change every day. My child is picking up on all kinds of things and I just love seeing them trying to mimic you."
- Stephen from Co. Tyrone reckons "the best thing is watching the changes and learning every day. Each day is an adventure."
- And one parent from Twyford Tots Nursery thinks that "the best thing is waking up in the morning to see a smiling face looking at you out of his cot."

