

# Understanding Tantrums & The Power of the Pause



# What Are Tantrums? Understanding the Basics



## Early Onset

Tantrums typically begin between 12–18 months as emerging autonomy develops.



## Peak Years

Tantrum frequency, duration, and intensity often peak around ages 2–3.



## Preschool & Beyond

Intensity lessens in ages 3–5 as language and cognitive skills develop. In ages 5–8, tantrums may signal emotional regulation or sensory difficulties.

## Why Do Tantrums Happen?



### Emotional Overwhelm

Tantrums are signals that a child is experiencing overwhelm beyond their current capacity to regulate.



### Fight-or-Flight Response

Their fight-or-flight response is activated and they lack skills to self-regulate the way adults have learned.



### Asserting Independence

Children assert autonomy but cannot yet effectively manage frustration or big emotions.



### Not Defiance

Tantrums are rarely about defiance — our children are not giving us a hard time; they are *having* a hard time.



### Skills in Development

Children are born with all their emotions but must learn to manage them — over time, through experience and guidance.

# The Power of the Pause



## Take a Breath

Even a single moment to breathe and ground yourself before responding can make all the difference.



## Your Calm Is Powerful

When we remain calm, we show children what self-regulation looks like. Our calm is more powerful than their chaos.



## Create Safety

Staying present and steady creates a sense of safety that allows children to move through their emotions.



## Avoid Escalation

Reacting emotionally often escalates the situation. A pause prevents us from adding fuel to the fire.



## Build Resilience

Each tantrum is an opportunity to reinforce lifelong emotional resilience through patience, empathy, and calm.

## What Self-Regulation Looks Like in Practice



### Model It

By modeling emotional regulation, we teach children how to manage big feelings over time – they're always watching.



### Practice Over Time

Developing the skill of pausing takes time and repetition – for us and for our children. It won't happen overnight.



### Lead with Empathy

Approaching moments with patience and empathy strengthens connection while helping children learn to self-regulate.



### Deepen Connection

Navigating tantrums well isn't just stopping a meltdown – it's an opportunity to build a deeper relationship.



### Every Moment Counts

Each challenging moment, handled with calm and consistency, is a building block for your child's emotional health.

# References

- References: American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry.