Free guide for parents

Yochai Leshem

What to do in the moment of a tantrum

Four simple steps: before, during, after, and you

Why explaining doesn't work during the storm

The brain is a two-story house. During a tantrum, the alarm system downstairs closes the staircase to the upper floor, the thinking brain. Explanations, threats and "calm down" all speak to the upper floor, but your child isn't there right now. So the first rule is: calm first, teach later.

1 Before: spot the storm coming

Most tantrums follow a pattern. The four usual suspects:

- Hunger, especially after daycare or school.
- Tiredness, including the crash after a long day out.
- Transitions: leaving a game, turning off a screen, leaving the house.
- Frustration: a task that is too hard or a game they are losing.

Once you see the pattern, act early: a small snack beforehand, a five-minute warning before a transition, a less crowded evening.

2 During: just three things

- Safety: move dangerous objects and gently stop a raised hand. "I won't let you hit."
- Few words: one fixed sentence, in a low voice. Every extra word is more noise.
- Calm presence: get down to your child's level, breathe slowly, stay close or at the distance they need.

Don't explain, don't threaten, don't compare, and don't take back what you said. Soft in tone, steady on the limit.

When to get advice

Intense tantrums after age eight, several times a day, repeatedly hurting themselves or others, or tantrums at school and daycare too. Start with your pediatrician.

3 After: a three-sentence repair talk

Wait until your child is back to themselves, then have a short, warm talk:

- Name the feeling: "You were really angry when he took the car."
- Feelings and actions are different: "It's okay to be angry. It's not okay to hit."
- Next time: "What can you do when the anger starts to rise?"

Instead of punishment, repair: help tidy up, draw something for the sibling who got hurt, rebuild the tower together.

4 And you: three seconds

You can't calm a child while you are downstairs yourself. Before you react:

- Stop.
- Take one long breath, with the out-breath longer than the in-breath.
- Quietly tell yourself: "He's not against me. He's downstairs."

Did you yell? It happens. Repair it: "I yelled at you, and that wasn't okay. I'm sorry." That teaches too.

✂ Cut out and stick on the fridge

Your fixed sentence for the storm

You're angry. I'm here.

Or my own sentence:

_____

Want the full picture?

The "Tantrums" course includes six short video lessons, a summary sheet for each lesson and a task for each week. The first lesson is free to watch.

parenting.yochai-leshem.com/en/hitparzuyot.html

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