



Building “Piece” of Mind

The 18mo Visit: Tantrums, Time Out, and Time In

Toddlers are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others interact with your toddler influences the many new connections that are forming within the toddler's brain. These early brain connections are the basis for more complicated skills and behaviors, and they will affect the learning, behavior and health of your toddler for many years to come. Early, supportive relationships build your infant's brain and prepare it for the future.

By the time toddlers are 18 months old, they are often starting to have tantrums. Many times, these tantrums happen when your child can't explain their ideas and wishes (“I want you to read to me NOW!”). As they begin to communicate better with words, this type of tantrum may stop. You should always give your children attention whenever they try to communicate with words. You should do this especially when they make happy sounds instead of whining. You can do this by smiling, looking their way or responding promptly. When you do this, you are teaching your children that using happy sounds and words is the best way to get what you want. You want to catch your child being good.

Other tantrums happen when you set limits. An example is when you say, “No, you cannot play with an electrical outlet.” In this case, the best solution is often to distract them. If you show them another fun game, the tantrum might be prevented. An example is to say, “How about we

pound on these noisy pots and pans instead?” If your child persists, ignore the tantrum as much as possible. If your child learns that having tantrums changes rules or results in more attention, the tantrums will likely continue.

If your child becomes violent, it may be time to teach “time out.” Being violent includes hitting, kicking or spitting. More than anything else, time out needs to mean “quiet and still.” If your child isn't quiet and still, it isn't time out. Very few 18 month olds know how to be quiet and still. This is a skill that needs to be taught, learned, and practiced. The first step is gently restraining the child in your lap. Have the child looking away from you so the child doesn't confuse it with a hug. Sit there until they are quiet and still. Time out is over as soon as they are quiet and still. The skill of being quiet and still is strengthened and rewarded by ending the time out. With time, they will learn that time out is shorter if they are quiet and still. Once they are able to calm themselves quickly and consistently in your lap, it is time for step two. Step two is to have them sit by themselves in the chair. You can put your hand on their lap but look away from them. Have them sit there until they are quiet and still. Once they are, time out is over. Only when they are able to put themselves in the chair and quickly calm themselves is it advisable to increase the time spent in time out with a timer. Usually a minute per year of age is good rule of thumb. Only do this if they understand that time out is quiet and still.

Time out is most effective when two things happen. One is when only one or two troublesome behaviors are addressed at a time. These are usually issues with being violent or unsafe. The second is when there is a lot of time in. Time out works because, while your child is actually in time out, your child is being ignored. No child likes that! This is particularly true if your child knows what “time-in” feels like. Time in is when your child is the center of attention! If your child is looking for attention and knows that hitting results in time out, but picking up a book results in snuggles and reading (time in), your child will stop hitting and will learn to pick up a book instead. In essence, time out is teaching and strengthening your child's ability to calm down and to remain in control despite strong emotions.

Most importantly, time out is a healthier and safer alternative to spanking or other forms of corporal punishment. Corporal forms of punishment teach children that “adults hit when they are angry.” Instead, punishment should teach children “this is how I calm myself.” Corporal forms of punishment become less effective over time. They require more and more levels of pain and fear to work. This can be damaging to the relationship and eventually turn into child abuse.

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

~Frederick Douglass



An Introduction to Purposeful Parenting

Purposeful Parenting begins by thinking about the final result. What do parents want for their children? All parents want their adult children to be healthy, happy and successful. They want them to be all that they can be. Happily, most children want this too! Students of human development have noticed that children are born with a strong need to master new skills and to be challenged. Even children with disabilities! But before children act on these advanced needs (like the need to understand, to be creative, and to be productive), more basic needs must be met. Bodily needs, like breathing, water, food and sleep, are the most basic. Next is the need for safety. Children also need to feel loved and a sense of belonging with family and friends. Children then start to build self-esteem, as the need to grow confidence through contribution and accomplishment is natural. This confidence then leads to the need to be independent and to define for oneself what it means to be healthy, happy, and successful.

Recent research says that bodily needs, the need to feel safe, the need to be loved, the need to feel competent, and the need to be self-directed, are universal. Meeting these needs allows more children to be healthy and successful in school, no matter what their socio-economic or racial/ethnic background is. Unmet needs, though, can cause stress. If brief, stress can be positive and provide a source of motivation. However, too much stress can be toxic, messing up the basic growth and functioning of the brain. The six elements of Purposeful Parenting build on this research. By being Purposeful, Protective, Personal, Progressive, Positive and Playful, parents and caregivers will lessen toxic stress and encourage developing children to be all that they can be.

Purposeful

- Think about the long-term goals of parenting and try to nurture the basic skills that children need to be successful. These include language, social skills, and self-control (also known as emotional regulation).
- Remember that the word discipline means “to teach.” It does NOT mean to control or to stop bad behaviors.
- Determine the “purpose” of infant and child behaviors. Many repeated behaviors are used to meet one of the basic needs mentioned above. For example, repeated behaviors may be the child’s way of trying to say “I’m tired,” “I’m scared,” “I want some attention,” “I need to prove that I can do this,” or “I have an idea or plan.”
- Assist children in learning new, more desirable behaviors or skills to meet their needs and goals.

Protective

- Be sure that infants and children have their bodily needs met. These include food, water, shelter and sleep.
- Be sure that infants and children feel safe.
- Prevent toxic stress by always meeting these basic (bodily and safety) needs.
- But avoid being overly protective or “hovering,” so children will eventually feel capable and safe on their own.

Personal

- Be sure that infants and children feel loved and accepted. Strong relationships decrease toxic stress.
- Be kind and gentle. Being mean, harsh or violent may hurt the relationship and create toxic stress.
- Avoid calling your child names like bad or good, dumb or smart, mean or nice. Naming emotions and behaviors may help with the learning process (like “you look mad” or “hitting is not helpful”), but always love the child unconditionally.

- Help children in learning more helpful or adaptive behaviors instead of just saying “stop it” or “no!”
- Match your way of teaching to your child’s particular needs and strengths. It may take more planning and effort, but your teaching will work better if it is more personal.

Progressive

- Understand that infant and child development is always changing. Discipline and parenting skills need to change, too.
- Have reasonable expectations for your child’s development. Unreasonable expectations create frustration and stress.
- Notice and encourage basic behaviors and skills as they appear (“Thanks for using your words” or “Good job sharing”).
- Remember that it is easier to TEACH the behaviors we WANT, than to PREVENT unwanted behaviors!

Be Positive ...

- In regard. Love your child, not the behavior. Avoid corporal punishments like spanking. They are less effective with time, increase stress, and teach children that adults respond to conflict or strong emotions with violence.
- In outlook. Optimism decreases stress and anxiety. Use affirmations like “I know you can do better the next time.”
- In reward. “Catch your child being good” to strengthen positive, adaptive behaviors. Rewarding effort and steps in the right direction are more important than demanding complete success.

Playful

- Remain playful. Play time lets you teach everything mentioned above. Reading together is a good example. Ask your pediatrician about Reach Out and Read.
- Be engaging and interactive. Allow your child to be creative and to direct the play.