



Tender Hearts Child Therapy Center

Parent Newsletter

July 2012

Handling Tantrums in Public Places

With summer in full swing and children out of school, parents often find themselves out and about trying to keep their kids busy. And the more children are in public, the greater the chance of them having a tantrum with an audience of onlookers. While tantrums at home are surely no fun, a tantrum in a public place is often far worse. What can a parent do to deal with the dreaded tantrum at the grocery store or after sitting down for a meal at their favorite restaurant?

Children use tantrums for several reasons. They are a way of communicating and a way to release emotions such as frustration and anger. Perhaps the most understood reason for a child to have a tantrum is to gain control in a certain situation. While in public, a child may have a tantrum in order to get something they want. It could be a toy or candy that they have already asked for and mom or dad has told them "no."

There are several steps parents can take to prevent and deal with a tantrum in public. These are Prevention, Distraction, Isolation, and Persistence.

Prevention is related to making sure the child is not tired, hungry, or over-stimulated when going to a public place. Tired, hungry, or over excited children are far more likely to have a tantrum than children who are rested and who have a full belly. Being sure basic needs are met before going out to a busy grocery store or to the mall is the first step.

Distraction is the first step once the tantrum begins. Often a parent can avoid an all-out tantrum by immediately changing the subject or moving to another area of the store.

If distraction did not work, isolation is the next step. Take the child to a more private place with a much smaller audience. A bathroom or to your car in the parking lot are possible choices. This will reduce embarrassment on the part of the parent and help mom or dad stay in control and not get angry, which will only make matters worse. Give the child a few minutes to completely calm down before returning to whatever it was that you were doing before the tantrum began.

Persistence is also important. No matter what, do not give in during the tantrum and give the child what he or she wants. This will only encourage more tantrums in the future and make things harder on you the next time. In a worst case scenario, it is better to take the child home and end the outing than to give the child what he or she wants to end the tantrum.