

## Tantrums Age 6 Summary

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### Why Tantrums?

Whether your five-year-old is frustrated over trying to put on shoes by themselves or your ten-year-old stays up late angry that a friend refused to play with them, learning how to deal with anger, upset, and their many accompanying feelings can become a regular challenge if you don't create plans and strategies for managing them.

#### STEP

# 1



### Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Be curious about your child's feelings. You might start by asking:
  - *"When do you feel angry or intensely upset?"*
  - *"What time of day?"*
  - *"What people, places, and activities are usually involved?"*
- Use your best listening skills. Remember, what makes a parent angry can differ significantly from what angers a child. Listen closely to what concerns your child most without projecting your thoughts, concerns, and feelings.
- Explore the mind-body connection. In calmer moments with your child, ask, *"How does your body feel now?"* See how descriptively they can list their physical signs of well-being. Now ask, *"How does your body feel when angry?"* Every person's physical experience will be different. Find out how your child feels and make the connection between those symptoms and the usual feelings they are having.
- Resist the urge to provide solutions. Your curiosity and questions will go much farther in helping your child feel heard and helped.

**Tip:** If your child has recently thrown a tantrum, use that example to reflect on what caused it at a time when you are both calm. You might ask, *"What upset you after school yesterday?"* Finding out what contributed to a tantrum can give you insight into your child's triggers and also help raise your child's self-awareness.

#### STEP

# 2



### Teach New Skills

- Learn together! Anger and hurt are essential messages to pay attention to. They mean emotional, social, or physical needs are not met, or necessary boundaries (rules, values) are violated. It's important to ask: "Why am I feeling this way? What needs to change to feel better?"

- Respond with emotional intelligence. When your child has a tantrum, focus on calming yourself down and then your child. Stop what you are doing and walk them to a safe, non-public spot where they can calm down. Don't leave them. Be with them and use a calm, soft voice, encouraging them to breathe by breathing with them slowly. Don't try to talk about the situation until they are calm (they won't be able to hear you anyway). Stand aside and focus on your deep breathing while you allow your child time to calm down.
- The saying, "Name it to tame it," really works! Look for ways to identify feelings and name them. Post this feelings chart on your refrigerator as a helpful reminder. The more you can name a range of feelings in family life, the more comfortable your child will get with saying what they are feeling. This strategy alone can reduce the time a child is engaged in a tantrum since they become skilled at saying what they are feeling and feel more capable of securing their understanding faster.
- Create a calm-down space. During playtime or time without pressures, design a "safe base" or place where your child decides they would like to go when they are upset to feel better. Maybe their calm-down space is a beanbag chair in their room, a blanket, or a special carpet in the family room. Then, think together about what items you might place there to help with the calm down.
- Reflect on your child's anger so you can be prepared to help. When reflecting on your child's feelings, you can think about unpacking a suitcase. Frequently, layers of feelings need to be examined and understood, not just one. Anger might just be the top layer. So, after discovering why your child was angry, you might ask about other layers. Was there hurt or a sense of rejection involved? Perhaps your child feels embarrassed? Fully unpacking the suitcase of feelings will help your child feel better understood by you as they become more self-aware.
- Help your child repair harm when needed. A critical step in teaching your child about managing anger is learning how to repair harm when they've caused it. Mistakes are an essential aspect of their social learning. Everyone has moments when they hurt another. But, it's that next step that they take that matters in repairing the relationship.
- Tantrums occur at any age. Though you may not call it a tantrum beyond toddler or preschool age, children, teens, and adults can emotionally lose control.
- Avoiding or pretending you are not angry will not make it disappear in time. Because anger—like any other feeling—emerges to send a vital message to its owner, it cannot be avoided or denied. When turned inward, anger can become destructive in the body. Also, when buried anger can be stuffed down for a time, it may contribute to a larger explosion (that may not have occurred otherwise) because of the buildup of heated feelings over time.

**Tip:** Raising your voice and your level of upset in response to your child's tantrum will only increase the intensity and duration of your child's upset. Yelling only communicates that you are raising the emotional intensity, not diminishing it. Leaving your child alone in their room will also escalate the tantrum at this age. They need you, and they may be fearful of themselves because their feelings have overpowered them.

**Tip:** The only way a calm-down space serves as a tool for parents to promote their children's self-management skills is if they allow a child to self-select the calm-down space. Practice using it and gently remind them of it when they are upset. "*Would your calm down space help you feel better?*" you might ask. But if that space is ever used as a punishment or a directive - "*Go to your calm down space!*" - the control lies with the parent and no longer with the child, and the opportunity for skill building is lost.

**STEP**  
**3**



## Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use "Show me..." statements with a positive tone and body language to express excitement and curiosity. When a child learns a new ability, they are eager to show it off! Give them that chance. Say, "*Show me how you use your safe base to calm down.*" This can be used when you observe their upset mounting.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like, "*I noticed how you took some deep breaths when you got frustrated. That's excellent!*"
- Accept feelings. If you will help your child become emotionally intelligent in managing their biggest feelings, it is important to acknowledge and accept their feelings -- even ones you don't like! When your child is upset, consider your response. You could say, "*I hear you're upset. What feels most supportive when you're upset?*"
- Practice deep breathing. Because deep breathing is such a simple practice that can assist your child anytime, anywhere, it's important to get plenty of practice to make it easy to use when needed.
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine. You might ask, "*What happened today that made you happy?*" or "*What were the best moments in your day?*" You should answer the questions as well. Children may not have the chance to reflect on what's good and abundant in their lives throughout the day. Grateful thoughts are a central contributor to happiness and well-being.
- Reflect and reframe. When you are reflecting with your child about their upset, it can be helpful to consider the issue from another perspective. Though you never want to excuse another child's hurtful behaviors, you can better understand their thoughts and feelings. For example, Julie was cruel to your child today when, on most days, they are joyful friends. You might ask, "*It seems like Julie had some big, painful feelings. It is not okay that she took that out on you. I do wonder what may be going on for her. Do you have any ideas? ?*" Find out. What if Julie's parents have recently announced they are getting a divorce? There are always reasons for children's behavior. See if you can dig further to find compassion and understanding and share that with your child.

**Trap:** Refrain from judging your child's friends. You want your child to trust you with their friendship worries and problems. If you harshly judge their friends, they may lose some of that trust and not confide in you.

**STEP  
4****Support Your Child's Development and Success**

- Ask key questions to support their skills. For example, *"You are going to see Julie today. Do you remember what you can do to assert your feelings?"*
- Learn about your child's development. Each new age presents different challenges. Being informed about what developmental milestones your child is working toward will help you be more compassionate and patient.
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for trying out new and different coping strategies can help offer additional support and motivation for your child when tough issues arise.

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5****Recognize Efforts**

- Recognize and call out when things are going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when everything moves smoothly. Noticing and naming the behavior provides the necessary reinforcement that you see and value your child's choice.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for significant accomplishments—like the full bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.

**Trap:** It can be easy to resort to bribes when recognition and occasional rewards are underutilized. If parents or those in a parenting role frequently resort to bribes, it is likely time to revisit the five-step process.

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