



Normal vs. Abnormal Temper Tantrum

Temper tantrum behavior is common among children ages 3 to 5 years old and is a normal part of development. There is little research to indicate that abnormal temper tantrum behavior could be a red flag for an underlying clinical symptom. However, if your child exhibits persistent temper tantrums that last more than 25 minutes in duration and include aggressive behavior, self-injury, and the inability to self calm himself or herself after, you may want to speak to a clinical provider.



Normal Temper Tantrum



Age

12 months up to age 4.



Behavior During Tantrum

Crying, flailing arms or legs, falling to the floor, pushing, pulling, or biting.



Duration

Up to 15 minutes.



Frequency

Less than 5 times a day.



Mood

Should return to normal between tantrums.



Abnormal Temper Tantrum



Age

Continuing past age 4.



Behavior During Tantrum

Injury to himself, herself, or others during the tantrum.



Duration

Lasts longer than 15 minutes.



Frequency

More than 5 times a day.



Mood

Persistent negative mood between tantrums.

Sources:

Daniels, E., Mandleco, B., & Luthy, Karlen E. (2012). Assessment, management, and prevention of childhood temper tantrums. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 24, 569-573.

Belden, A.C., Thomson, N., & Luby, J.L. (2008). Temper Tantrums in healthy versus depressed and disruptive preschoolers: Defining tantrum behaviors associated with clinical problems. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 152(1), 117.

Additional resources, skills, and strategies for parents are available at no cost through the online Thrive Initiative programming. Visit the Thrive website <https://thrive.psu.edu>, and sign up today!