

# BEHAVIORS OF 18–36-MONTH-OLD CHILDREN



## Situation #2: A toddler in a grocery store

A father was in a grocery store when his 2-year-old son grabbed a box of candy off the shelf. The father told him that he couldn't have the candy and that if he wants something, he has to ask. Instead of obeying him, the boy started to cry, scream, and hit the father and then fell on the floor in a full-blown tantrum.

## Why is this happening?

### Because children at this age

- Think they are the center of the universe and want things immediately.
- Have difficulty waiting for what they want and are easily frustrated.
- Don't know how to control emotions like anger and frustration.
- Still don't know how to use words to express feelings and desires and use tantrums instead.
- Are beginning to develop a sense of being separate individuals with their own power, and they regularly test the limits of this power. They frequently say "NO!" or grab what they want.
- Are learning how to behave in public.

## What can adults do in the situation described here?

1. Stay calm and remember that tantrums are normal at this age.
2. Use a few gentle but firm words to calm the child.
3. Do not use physical punishment because it will teach the child to use violence.
4. Ignore the behavior and wait for the storm to pass.
5. Distract the child with something else, like a toy or a book.
6. Ask the child to help you choose something else in the store.
7. If the child can't calm down, take him/her to a quiet place.

## What can adults do to prevent this problem in the future?

- (a) When you have to go to a public space:
  - Be patient: Children at this age are learning to behave in public.
  - Make the trip short, and never go when the child is tired or hungry.
  - Always have toys and treats to entertain the child.
- (b) Avoid bringing a toddler to
  - Adult places, like restaurants, movie theaters, hospitals.
  - Tempting places such as grocery stores.
- (c) Teach your child
  - To ask things in a polite way.
  - To choose between objects and activities that are permissible.

