

Ages and stages: One to three years

Sometimes parents expect too much, not realising that their child is acting normally for their age. Here are some tips for being 'firm and fair' at each age and stage.

One to two years

Toddlers want things here and now. They might get upset by change and can be easily frustrated and bored. As their physical skills develop, they'll start to talk, run, climb and test your limits. Tantrums might start any time from now.



Parent tip

"Try to say what you do want them to do (and why). So instead of saying 'don't run in the house,' say 'please walk in the house, you might hurt yourself if you run!'"

You can:

- Try telling them about things in advance. "When I've finished hanging out the washing we will..."
- Balance independence with limits: "Sit on the floor and you can hold your drink."
- Praise behaviour you do like, and ignore behaviour you don't.
- Pick your battles – focus on the things that really matter.
- Give limited choices. Eg "apple or orange?", not "what do you want to eat?"
- Involve them in what you're doing. Ask them to hand you the pegs, or get the mail.
- Try to avoid tantrum triggers, like shopping when they're tired or hungry.

Two to three years

Between the ages of two and three, children are developing their own separate identities. They'll start to use words like 'mine' and insist on doing things for themselves.

They may be more interested in playing with other children. Learning to share and cooperate with others takes lots of practice. Crying, whining, hitting and even biting are common as they learn to deal with their feelings and frustrations.



You can:

- Help them learn to play with others.
- Ask them to do one thing at a time – not a list.
- Give them lots of praise, being specific about what you like.
- Give them little jobs to do, like handing you the pegs for the washing or collecting the mail.
- Explain why you don't like something they are doing.
- Respect their boundaries too – don't force them to hug or kiss friends or relatives if they don't want to.
- Stay calm and loving when you follow through with consequences.

Parent tip

"Making it into a game or singing a silly song can lighten the mood and avoid a power struggle."

Brain Box

Did you know? The emotional brain is driving how they behave at this age. Practice new skills like taking turns when they're happy and relaxed.