

One-page summary: Preschoolers (3-5 years)

What's normal at this age

- Nearly all preschoolers have tantrums sometimes. Daily tantrums are much less common.
- Unpredictable, very long or destructive tantrums are worth raising with a professional.
- Hitting usually starts to decline after the third birthday.
- First lies are common and go with growing thinking skills.
- Recommended sleep at 3-5 years: 10-13 hours in 24 hours, naps included.

What works, and why

- 3 to 5 clear rules. Instructions given once, clearly and up close.
- Frequent, sincere praise for what you want to see more of.
- Briefly ignoring minor misbehavior, with attention back as soon as it stops. In experiments, briefly ignoring a child who refused an instruction increased cooperation.
- Time-in when your child is overwhelmed. A short, calm time-out for hitting or a refused instruction.
- Logical consequences that fit: toy thrown, toy put away for a while.
- Warnings before transitions, and short, predictable goodbyes.

What backfires

- Repeating warnings, and threats you won't carry out.
- Attention mostly for misbehavior, little for good behavior.
- Yelling, shaming and hitting: minimally effective now and not effective later, says the American Academy of Pediatrics in its 2018 policy statement.
- Time-out given in anger, with a lecture, or as an empty threat.

Things you can say

"In our house, we use gentle hands."

"When the toys are back in the box, then we go to the park."

"You waited for your turn. That was patient!"

"You hit, so that's time-out. Sit on the step until the timer rings."

"The car got thrown, so it rests on the shelf until after lunch."

"I'll pick you up after nap. Hug, kiss, see you later!"