

The Terrible Twos - How to Stay Sane When Your Child Is Not

If you have a little one who is anywhere between the ages of two and four, some days can seem like they last forty eight hours instead of twenty four. If you are the proud mother of a little girl this age, the only word in her vocabulary may be "No." If you try and counter her "no's" with "yes's", she may emit sounds so shrill your ears will bleed. If you are the proud mom of a little boy, his new habits may include coloring the dog with your lipstick or banging your favorite, and delicate, table with his toy trucks until they crack. How do you deal with this? One way of course is to leave the country and never return. There are, however, more reasonable ways in which to deal with your children's testing periods.

While you may not be able to move to China, you can remove yourself from the situation and help calm your frayed nerves. If your child is being rebellious or misbehaving, sometimes just stepping out of the room for a few moments, counting to ten, and taking some deep, calming breaths can make all the difference when you re-enter the room to deal with your misbehaving child. He or she may then start to associate your leaving the room with "Uh oh, Mommy is mad" rather than associate your screaming and yelling with being angry, which can only be detrimental. This may help calm the child enough that upon your return, he or she will be more receptive to your teaching him what behavior you didn't like. Since you will be calmer as well, the discipline will likely be more effective.

For a more long-term approach, taking some time for yourself and "getting away from it all" is a good bet to restore your sanity. Take a good block of time on a Saturday or Sunday, 2 hours, maybe, and mark this time in your calendar in pen, not pencil, as a recurring activity. Keep a standing appointment with yourself, and honor it as you would any other. Think you are too busy on a weekend to do this, between your toddler's play dates, errands, and your other family obligations? You will feel much more productive the rest of the weekend allowing yourself this little 'refresher', rather than trying to cram some time in on a random Tuesday or other weeknight. Moreover, you will feel much more able to cope with your child's behavior. For this special "adult time-out" time, you can book a massage or a facial at your favorite spa. Take a couple of hours to go window shopping or visit a museum, by yourself or with a friend. Take in a movie with a couple of girlfriends. If your husband is willing to fly solo on a Saturday night, you can even steal away to your favorite local pub with the girls once in a while and let off some steam. If you don't have extra funds for these activities once a week, you can sneak yourself off to the tub with a good book, a bubble bath and a nice glass of wine and come out feeling ready to face the world and your terrible-two-year-old.

Getting involved with groups that highlight child behavior may also help you cope with issues that seem to rear their ugly heads again and again. Your child may be going through a developmental phase that has you frustrated to say the least. It can be comforting to have a support network or group of friends with similarly-aged children. Many of these groups are "Mommy and Me"-type groups that can be found in your community directory. If no such local groups exist in your area, you can always consult some educational reading material on child behavior and speak with your doctor if it is getting more and more difficult to control. Sometimes, just a different approach can give great results. For example, if you are used to taking away a privilege or a toy when your child acts up, perhaps you need another tactic. Calmly tell him or her why Mommy is upset with the actual behavior, and explain and speak as if he were older than his actual age. Your own child may surprise you!

On the flip side, sometimes just not reacting at all can be the best approach. Just like you are getting to know what makes your child tick, he is getting to know what makes you tick as well and will quickly learn how to push your buttons and command your attention. Rather than play into this, ignore his pushy requests and the negative behavior may just quietly go away.

The Terrible Twos are challenging, to say the least, but using some of these approaches can help you keep the loving bond between you and your child without you losing your mind in the process.

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