



The Happiest Toddler on the Block: How to Eliminate Tantrums and Raise a Patient, Respectful, and Cooperative One- to Four-Year-Old

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Key Takeaways

- **Toddlers are not civilized! They operate more like neanderthals, or as Karp calls them, “Cave-Kids”!**

Toddlers aren't small adults or even small big kids. Their brains struggle with language and logic to begin with, and this deficiency is only amplified when they are upset. You'll experience more successful outcomes if you keep this key fact in mind when dealing with toddlers. Karp lists four big toddler struggles:

1. Our modern world is weird to them.
2. Their brains are out of balance.
3. Their normal development can make them misbehave.
4. Their temperaments can make them overreact.



- **Approaching toddlers with an ambassador mindset is key to effective parenting/caregiving.**

“The key to effective parenting: Be an ‘ambassador’! The best parents diplomatically mix sincere respect and clear limits,” Karp says. The two key diplomatic skills are: “communicating with respect and speaking the language a toddler’s immature brain can understand.”

- **Following the “Fast-Food-Rule” (FFR) can help diffuse an upset toddler.**

Karp calls this the “Golden Rule of Communication” encompassing these two parts. 1. The person who is most upset gets to talk first. 2. What is said to an upset person is not as important as the way it is said (facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice). Karp calls this “finding the sweet spot”! The person who is least upset listens patiently and repeats the most upset person’s feelings back with care and concern.

- **Using “Toddler-ese” can help diffuse an upset toddler.**

Using short phrases (1-2 words), repeating, and mirroring a bit of your toddler’s frustration can help you connect with respect.

One of Karp’s examples: “Instead of: ‘I know you feel mad about it. Did that doggie scare you?’ say ‘You’re mad! Mad! *Mad!* Scared! Scared! Big doggie!”

Though we may not realize it, we probably use “Toddler-ese” all the time when our toddlers are happy.

For example, “Imagine you’re in the park and your three-year-old bravely climbs to the top of the slide . . . for the very first time. Beaming a huge grin, she shouts, ‘Look, Mommy! *Look!*’ Which of these two responses would feel more natural for you to make to her? To flatly say, ‘Very good, mother is proud.’ To applaud and chirp in your best cheerleader voice, ‘Yea! You *did* it! *Good* climbing. *Wow!*’ For most parents the first is too stiff, but the second feels pretty normal. Well, that’s Toddler-ese!”

- **Encouraging “Green-Light Behaviors” helps reduce toddler tantrums.**

“The best way to help your toddler behave better is to flash a green light of encouragement every time you see him being *good*,” Karp says. Karp says this “feeds the meter”! He lists five specific categories of ways to do that:

- Time-*ins*: Boost cooperation with bits of fun.
 - Includes: Attention, Praise, Gossip, Rewards, Hand Checks, Star Charts and Play
- Build confidence: Respect—plus some silliness—makes kids feel like winners.
 - Includes: Giving Options and Playing the Boob

- Teach patience: Give your child two surefire ways to build self-control.
 - Includes: Patience-Stretching and Magic Breathing
- Create daily routines: Simple routines help kids feel smart and secure.
 - Includes: Bedtime Sweet Talk, Special Time, Loveys and Pacifiers
- Plant seeds of kindness: Teach manners and character through the “side door” of your child’s mind.
 - Includes: Fairy Tales and Role-Play

- **Curbing “Yellow-Light Behaviors” helps reduce toddler tantrums.**

Yellow-light behaviors are those little annoying things kids do like taking their time/dawdling, whining and pestering. Karp lists four “smart parenting” skills to curb those annoyances.

- Connect with Respect: Use the Fast-Food-Rule and Toddler-ese to help detour around potential conflicts.
- Make Your Limits Clear and Consistent: This helps your child know when you *mean business*.
- Forge Win-Win Compromises: Use your toddler’s sense of fairness (plus a little smart bargaining) to turn a *won’t-won’t* into a *win-win* . . . so both you and your little one can feel triumphant.
- Enforce Mild Consequences
 - Includes: Clap-Growl Warnings and Kind Ignoring

- **Stopping “Red-Light Behaviors” helps reduce toddler tantrums.**

Red-light behaviors are acts of aggression, dangerous acts and acts that break important family rules like not eating in the living room. These behaviors require prompt and clear limit setting. Karp says you can put the brakes on these toddler red-light deeds with a “take-charge” consequence like a time-out or giving a fine (losing a valued privilege or possession). Karp is very clear, however, that “effective discipline does not require resorting to spanking, intimidation or humiliation.”

Additional Notes: Karp includes two chapters at the end of the book that apply all of the above principles to five specific toddler behavior challenges: temper tantrums; worries and fears; annoying attitudes and actions; defiance; and aggressive and/or dangerous behavior. There are also two appendices: The Ten Basics for Raising a Happy Toddler and Dr. Karp’s Key Terms and All-Star Tricks! I’ve used them both over the years as quick refreshers! Overall the book is laid out well for an easy read with lots of bulleted lists as well as some helpful illustrations and charts to break things up within the chapters. And with the included index it’s easy to find the page(s) that address a specific issue you might be facing with your toddler.