

# Testing toddler?

At the end of your tether with a badly behaved tot? Here's how to regain control of the situation – and your sanity

**W**e love them so much, but dealing with energetic toddlers who insist on doing the things you've repeatedly told them not to do is enough to try the patience of a saint – let alone an ordinary mum.

Why does your toddler persist in this behaviour, you ask? After all, you've taught him the difference between good and bad behaviour.

The problem is, as he gets older and wiser he'll start to push at those boundaries.

"A toddler tests us to see how we'll react and to find out how much he can get away with," says Naomi Richards, founder of The Kids Coach ([www.thekidscoach.org.uk](http://www.thekidscoach.org.uk)). It's his way of asserting his independence. If you've got a little one who's particularly good at pushing your buttons, we're here to help.

## Running away

Despite telling your tot for the umpteenth time not to leave your side when you're out and about, he does, and even worse, he has to run so you've got little chance of catching him.

The good news is, there are plenty of tricks to try to keep your toddler at your side. "Play a game like getting him to step on the squares on the pavement instead of the cracks as this will keep him close to you," suggests Naomi. "And when you want to take your toddler's hand to cross the road always say, 'Which hand do you want to hold?' as then you're not giving him the option of refusing it and potentially running off."

If you think your toddler's running away because he's bored, it's time to make that walk to nursery a lot more exciting. Get him wildlife spotting or help him count the different coloured cars. "If you think he can be trusted when you're on the pavement tell

him he can run but he has to stop when he gets to a specific driveway or tree," says Naomi.



**"I give my tot something else to focus her mind on"**

**"If I chase Scarlett when she runs off at the supermarket it**

**just adds fuel to the fire, as she then sees it as a naughty game, so she runs even faster. Even if I just hold her more firmly she goes into floppy mode so I've found the best way to deal with it is to give her something else to think about.**

**I give her a small shopping bag and because she's concentrating on keeping it on her shoulder and packing it with food, as well as the fact she has to stay close by to know what to put in it, she forgets about wanting to run off."**

**Hayley Bury, 36, from Lincolnshire, mum to Scarlett, 3, and Poppy, 7**

## Not listening

You ask your toddler to put his coat on, he doesn't. You ask again, he still doesn't. You ask a third time and there's just a little face looking stubbornly back at you, but no move towards the coat. Sound familiar?

Often a toddler hears you but he's choosing not to respond. "You'll probably find this is most common if you're asking your toddler to stop playing and put on his coat so you can go out," says Maggie Redshaw, child development expert for Pampers Village Parenting Panel ([www.pampers.co.uk](http://www.pampers.co.uk)).

Rule number one: give your toddler warnings about how soon you're going to be leaving. Number two: when it's time to leave be as positive as you can about what's happening next. Going to the doctor's with mummy for her appointment becomes much more exciting if you remind him about the play table with lots of fun toys.

"It's also important to set a good example," says Maggie. If your toddler's trying to talk to you and you're half doing a job in the kitchen and half listening, then your toddler will think it's OK for him to do the same. "When you find yourself in this situation tell your toddler you'll have a chat in five minutes and then make sure you stop your job to take that time out to talk to him," says Maggie. You could try giving instructions in a fun way to motivate him. Dramatic mums, why not try singing, 'Please put your coat on,' or say it in a funny voice?

## Repeatedly saying 'no'

At some point, nearly every parent will fall victim to a toddler's endless use of the word 'no'. As soon as he's learnt it it's like no other word exists, right? Where possible it's best to take a step back and ignore it. Giving him a reaction will just encourage him. You can also use diversion and distraction to get him to stop. But the most effective way to handle it is to get clever...

"Give your toddler two choices so there's no opportunity to respond with a 'no'," says Naomi Richards. "The other trick to try is to make whatever it is you want him to do sound too exciting to miss out on." Asking him if he wants 'a delicious banana' or 'a scrummy orange' sounds a lot more appealing than 'Do you want a banana or an orange?'

"Try making the use of the word 'no' into a fun game, too," says Maggie Redshaw. "For example, if you're asking your toddler to put his hat on to which he replies 'no', put his hat on your head and say, 'Should I be doing this?' His response will be 'no', but you'll have got him to use the word with a different spin on it - instead of it being negative and challenging, it's being used in a funnier, more positive, way."



### "How we've restricted the 'n' word."

"Jack says 'no' to anything from getting dressed, to eating his dinner and not

flushing the toilet. We use a reward chart. It has things on it like getting dressed when asked, not saying 'no' in the mornings when we're in a rush, not saying 'no' to eating dinner. If he does well, he gets to pick a treat each week, like going to the park, which seems to be working. I've noticed he uses the 'n' word more when he's busy playing, so if I know I need him to do something soon I explain it to him before he starts."

*Emma Wisnia, 33, from West Yorkshire, mum to Jack, 3, and Joshua, 5 months'*

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## Leaving the dinner table

Can't get your tot to stay in his seat at the table? If your toddler does get up before he's finished use humour to get him back on it. "I find saying: 'That seat looks awfully lonely and looks like it needs a bottom on it' works well," says Naomi Richards.

Remember too, that the promise of dessert is often a good bargaining tool. "Explaining to your toddler if he leaves the table when he's still eating it shows he's finished and if that's the case he won't be wanting any dessert," says Naomi. See how quickly little bottoms return to the seat with that explanation.

Try and eat as a family as much as you can too, as sitting down together and talking about your day is likely to keep your toddler staying put for longer, as to leave the table would make him feel like he's missing out on something.

## Answering back

Did you know that this is normally only an issue if you add an older sibling into the mix? "A younger child may copy a bigger brother or sister by answering back. Or he might see it on a TV programme the older child is watching," says Naomi. Getting your older child to stop answering back in your toddler's presence would be the best plan but isn't always realistic. Instead, concentrate on keeping an eye on what they're watching and if anything seems unsuitable only allow your older child to watch it when your toddler's gone to bed.

"If you're unhappy with the way your toddler is talking back to you, ask him how he would feel being spoken to like that?" says Naomi. Chances are he'll agree it doesn't feel nice. **PPP**

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## Snatching

Whoever knew little people could move so quickly? But when they snatch it's faster than the speed of light. Particularly when the object in question is a toy. "This is the time to introduce the concept of turn-taking," says Naomi, "and a little bit of mummy persuasion to show that another toy is just as fun as the one your little one's just grabbed," says Naomi.

It's also a good idea to explain to your toddler that if a friend comes over to play with his toys he isn't going to take them with him when he leaves. "You'll be surprised at how many toddlers think this unless they're told otherwise," says Naomi.

"It normally helps if you tell your child it's OK for a friend to borrow his toys and it's a nice

thing to do, especially as he'll have the toy when his friend goes home."



### "He snatches when he's having a tantrum"

"When Henry's having a paddy over something he can't have, he'll snatch things. I tell him to say

'please' before he demands something and if he does this, I let him have it. If he's having a full blown tantrum where he'll scream if he can't take what he wants, I find walking away normally resolves it."

*Celine Peniston-Bird, 27, from Surrey, mum to Henry, nearly 2*

## INSTANT WAYS TO HALT A TRYING TOT

■ **ALWAYS EXPLAIN** why you want your toddler to do something. "As adults we'd expect to be told why we're being asked to do a particular job so do the same for your toddler," says Naomi.

■ **KEEP MOTIVATING** Make activities, however dull, sound fun and let your toddler do things he's capable of, like getting dressed, even if it takes longer.

■ **DON'T EXPECT** too much. Tackling a lot in one day can overwhelm a little one so don't insist your tot finishes breakfast on the same morning you need to leave early.