

“It is a good distraction tactic and reminds her that she already has many toys at home.”

MS NAH LI CHUAN (right, with husband David Boh and their two-year-old daughter Megan) on her tactic of taking her daughter's favourite toys on their shopping trips



ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

DEALING WITH TANTRUMS

- Stay as calm, reasonable and low-key as possible. Try to move your child to a quieter area to diffuse tension and avoid embarrassing your child.
- Develop a plan to deal with public misbehaviour before leaving the house. Parents could tell their child that if they misbehave, mum or dad will move away – but still stay within line of sight – and that the child could come over when his tantrum is over.
- Avoid using words or phrases such as “bad”, “wish you were never born” or “don’t want you any more”, to avoid associating a child’s behaviour with his self-worth.
- While reasoning with a brawling child, squat down so that you are at his level, look him in the eye and say his name. Repeating a person’s name has a calming effect on the one being called.
- If you are going on an outing that involves waiting for a long time, pack books, toys and snacks to keep your child occupied. Children enjoy doing the same activities adults do, so let him help with grocery shopping, such as looking for items on the shopping list.
- Manage the child’s expectations before heading out. Explain where the family is going. A reward system may also work. For example, tell the child that if he behaves well during a trip to the supermarket, he gets to pick a dessert for the family’s Sunday dinner.

These tips are from child experts at Singapore Children’s Society, Touch Family Services, Heart@Fei Yue Child Protection Specialist Centre and Temasek Polytechnic’s Preschool Learning Academy.

Coping with kids’ public tantrums

Parents should have a plan to manage public tantrums and be firm, but keep their cool



Kezia Toh

A trip to a toy store turned into a frantic search exercise for Ms Yasmin Lazaroo, when her six-year-old son ran off and disappeared among the aisles.

She found Ethan 15 minutes later and hauled him home immediately.

Ms Lazaroo, 31, a senior marketing and branding executive, says: “He ran off and did not listen to my instructions to stay close, so I told him that we were leaving without a toy. He will learn not to do it next time.”

Ethan has not repeated the episode.

Parents such as Ms Lazaroo say staying firm and calm when their children misbehave in public is the way to go, rather

than losing their cool and screaming.

Family counsellors urge similar restraint, to avoid publicly embarrassing the child. They advise parents to develop a plan on managing public tantrums before taking their child out.

Often, tantrums or waterworks ensue when a parent does not agree to buy or do something the child has set his heart on.

Tutor Nah Li Chuan, 29, says she takes a bag of her two-year-old daughter Megan’s favourite toys on shopping trips to occupy the girl with, preventing her from becoming fixated on something in stores and clamouring to buy it.

Ms Nah says: “It is a good distraction tactic and reminds her that she already has many toys at home.”

Having a “reward system” may also help, says housewife Tania Heng, 33.

Her seven-year-old daughter, Faith, sometimes cries and refuses to budge when she wants a toy, so Ms Heng tells the girl she will get it if she practises playing her violin or does well in a test.

Communications executive Angeline Ng tries to reason with her three-year-old daughter Cherice when she insists on buying an item that her friends own.

Ms Ng, 31, reminds her daughter of the toys she has at home to get her to appreciate her lot. She also explains to

the girl that she does not have to own toys that her friends have.

This usually does the trick. But the bigger challenge is to keep tempers in check when Cherice wants to visit her favourite place – the playground.

Ms Ng says: “She usually repeats many times that she wants to go there, then cries out loud. At the height of the tantrum, she stays rooted to the spot and flaps her arms.”

She would carry her daughter to a quiet corner and talk to her about how not all excursions lead to the playground. She adds: “Tantrums are very normal for children, but the challenge is for us parents to keep our cool.”

Moving a child who is in the throes of a tantrum away from the “drama area” diffuses tension, says Dr Carol Balhetchet, senior director of youth services at the Singapore Children’s Society.

She says: “When you move the child away, it lessens the stress of people looking at you and for your child, who is anxious about what is going to happen next.”

Coping with a misbehaving child in public involves bearing the weight of others’ scrutiny, says Dr Balhetchet. The key is to do what you have to do, without being flustered or embarrassed. As young children are likely to forget what happens after a while, it is wise to move them aside and explain what they did wrong immediately, rather than wait till they return home.

If the child will not budge, parents should move away – staying within line of sight so he does not feel abandoned – but not ignore the situation, adds Dr Balhetchet.

Restaurateur Chitra Mirpuri, 38, does this when her two daughters, Diya, seven, and Riana, two, act up. Diya, for example, once threw a tantrum by the swimming pool as



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SERENE LEE

Relationship manager Serene Lee and her husband take turns to take their four-year-old daughter Chloe (both above) for short walks during long meals.

she did not want to leave after an hour. Ms Mirpuri says: “She was lying on the floor, with her hands and legs flying.”

She told the girl that she was leaving, then walked to a nearby seat to wait, but Diya tried to pull her back. So Ms Mirpuri lightly pulled away.

After 15 minutes, the girl stopped crying and went to her. Ms Mirpuri says: “Sometimes you have to let them vent, but still be there.” Her friends were also around the pool

but she stuck to her guns.

She says it is important that Diya behaves, to set a good example for younger sister Riana. “Thankfully, you can explain things to the older one, so that she understands.”

This is echoed by Ms Elysia Tan, a counsellor at Touch Family Services, who says that expectations of children should be age appropriate. For example, coaching older children is easier as they are better able to judge the situation.

She says: “A young child who is allowed to run about and talk loudly while playing at the beach may not understand why it is unacceptable to do so in a library.”

When children throw temper tantrums, parents should determine if they are tired, hungry or restless, says Mr Tony Ong, agency head and principal social worker at Heart@Fei Yue Child Protection Specialist Centre. They react this way because they may not know how to communicate otherwise.

He adds: “It depends on how you perceive bad behaviour. Is it really bad or is it normal for children at that age? The younger the child, the more likely he will behave in a certain way and you can’t tell him to sit still and expect him to do so.”

Relationship manager Serene Lee, 35, for example, takes turns with her husband during long meals to take their four-year-old daughter Chloe for short walks when she starts to get grouchy.

With full-scale outbursts, however, Ms Lee squats to look at Chloe in the eye. She says: “Rather than hovering above her, I talk to her at her level to get her full attention.”

“I believe young children have their own opinions and feelings, and even while out at a public place, adults have to respect that.”

✉ keziatoh@sph.com.sg

OMNI THEATRE
EXPERIENCE IT IN **IMAX DOME**