# **Gentle Parenting: Are toddler tantrums ‘bad’ behaviour or a call for help?**

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When I was expecting my child I was pretty confident about being fully prepared to manage my little one. But as they say, you are never fully prepared for parenting a child until you do it. And I learnt this when I realised my son reacted far more emotionally to situations than other kids of his age. [I had prepared myself for ‘tantrums’ and ‘naughtiness’.](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/learning/play-based-learning-for-toddlers-let-kids-explore-the-why-and-how-of-things-7193614/).. but not for this. I started researching alternate styles of parenting to learn how to manage my highly sensitive child well.

Gentle Parenting is a style which advocates accepting children for who they are, and nurturing them to become the best versions of themselves, rather than what we would like them to become. It is basically mindful parenting and places a high amount of focus on the child’s needs and being [mindfully responsive to those unmet needs.](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/health-fitness/early-years-toddler-not-listening-to-you-thats-actually-healthy-5930157/)

It stands on four pillars of Empathy, Respect, Understanding and Boundaries. The Gentle Parenting style believes that a tantrum is not because a child is manipulative, but because the child is under some stress. Rather than punishing or reacting strongly to this behaviour, it is important to understand the root cause to avoid and resolve such behaviour in future.

It is also important to understand that kids are not mini adults. Their emotional maturity is still developing and expecting the same behaviours we expect from adults like sharing of their toys, sitting quietly in a public setting is beyond the grasp of a developing child’s brain. A gentle parenting approach requires parents to [set their own expectations according to the age](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/family/handy-tips-for-working-moms-to-keep-their-toddlers-safe-amidst-a-pandemic-7233958/) of the child. It does not mean relaxed parenting where every behaviour of a child is accepted. It means having set firm boundaries about a few things that really matter and firmly and constantly reminding about these select boundaries. Gentle Parenting says that children reflect adults’ actions and we should model the same behaviour we would like our kids to display, and act as a positive reflection for kids.

Whenever I watch TV these days, I am left flabbergasted at the amount of early learning the system is enforcing on kids. Everyone expects their kid to become the next Steve Jobs even before he or she is born. Children are enrolled into coding classes even before they learn their ABCs!. As parents, I believe maybe we just need to keep a clear focus on one thing – let the kids be themselves! Very often when one enters a toy shop, the first question you are asked is – is it for a girl or a boy? How does it matter? A girl can play with a toy car and a boy can spend hours in his pretend kitchen. Why are the designs and colour palettes for girls filled with every kind of pinks and princesses, and that of a boy filled with reds, blacks and superheroes?

[Kids are naturally gifted](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/sponsored-parenting/fear-of-needles-and-injection-in-children-7672000/) with a huge amount of creativity and the power of imagination, at least in the first few years of life. They do not immediately fall prey to the set notions that have become a part of our mind-set. It is difficult, but not impossible, to keep our kids away from such biases and let them explore their innate abilities.

While learning their ABCs is important, more important is their interaction with the environment, which boosts their natural curiosity and is the greatest source of learning for them. So I firmly believe in letting my son be and hope to encourage many parents and their children to do that as well.

As the author Naomi Aldort quotes, “Children don’t need us to shape them, they need us to respond to who they are.”