- Temper tantrums

Taking the heat out of holiday tantrums

Tackling bad behaviour while away requires a mix of proactive strategies and calm responses, say the experts. CAMILLA FOSTER finds out more...

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HOLIDAYS are often seen as a time to relax and recharge – but young children don't always get the memo.



New surroundings, sensory overload and changes to daily routines can easily spark emotional meltdowns.

Although temper tantrums can be incredibly frustrating – especially when you're trying to unwind – they are a normal part of childhood development.

Understanding what triggers these outbursts and knowing how to respond calmly and effectively can make all the difference.

Here are some practical tips to help you anticipate, manage and minimise tantrums so your holiday can stay enjoyable for the whole family.

TRY TO STICK TO NORMAL ROUTINES

"So much of our early years and family life is built around routines, and that provides a sense of comfort and predictability," says Clare Shaw, early years music specialist and founder of Mini

Mozart. “Therefore, it can be really discombobulating for young children when those things are knocked out of whack.”

So, although you won’t be able to control everything on holiday, try to keep some of their regular routines the same.

“Try sticking to your normal book, bath and bed routine,” recommends Clare. “Building musical routines into that, like a bath-time song or a night-time song, can also help because they are familiar.”

STAY CALM

“Stay calm, because if you’re emotionally dysregulated, then your child is going to be dysregulated,” says integrative psychotherapist Deborah Keenan, senior accredited member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

“Children are highly attuned to the emotional states of their parents, so the more calm you are, the more they will pick up on that.”

TRY MUSICAL BREATHING

“If a tantrum feels imminent, you can try to slow things down with musical breathing,” suggests Clare.

“Encourage them to breathe in for the four and then out for four in time with the rhythm of the song – it’s a bit like box breathing in yoga. It’s very calming as it helps naturally slow the breath and helps shifts the body out of fight or flight mode.”

GO DOWN TO THEIR LEVEL

“When I see younger children, I get
down to their level,” says Deborah.

“It’s all about the eye contact. If you get down to their level, foster eye contact and demonstrate a calm and compassionate stance.

“This will hopefully lead to a more positive outcome and will help calm them down.”

TURN YOUR TENSION INTO SOMETHING JOYFUL

“If you are feeling frustrated, turn some music on and have a dance or wiggle your fingers, as this can help release some of your own tension,” suggests Clare.

“This can also be a good distraction for toddlers. They’re usually not particularly upset about anything during a tantrum, it’s just a feeling that they can’t express. So, try to shift some of that energy and feeling into something joyful.”

BE PREPARED

“When there’s unmet needs, like hunger and tiredness, young children are going to get dysregulated,” says Deborah. “So, preparation is key. Make sure you’ve got plenty snacks and drinks for long journeys and travelling.”

KEEP THEM OCCUPIED

“If there’s a delay at a restaurant, for example, bring toys that they can play with and make it as fun as possible,” recommends Deborah.

CREATE A HOLIDAY PLAYLIST

“Get them to choose some of their favourite songs for a holiday playlist,” suggests Clare. “If you’re going to Greece, for example, you could find a Greek song that gives them an idea of the

music and culture of where you're visiting."

"Then, if you can see a tantrum brewing, you can say should we get the music out? I think a lot of toddler tantrums are about agency and about them feeling out of control, and if a playlist is something that they've had agency in, it can definitely help them reclaim some sense of control."

TRY THE TAP IN, TAP OUT TECHNIQUE

"There's a thing called tap in, tap out that you can do with another parent," says Deborah. "If you feel like you are getting dysregulated with the child, maybe get your partner to step in so you get a bit of space to calm down."

TALK TO THEM CALMLY AFTER THE TANTRUM

"After their tantrum has ended say, listen, I can see you were a bit upset there, when you're ready, we'll just have a little chat," advises Deborah. "Obviously make it age-appropriate, but you could say that we'll have a little chat about what we can do if you feel like that next time."

EXPOSE THEM TO NEW SITUATIONS

"Drip feed them new experiences to help desensitise them and get them used to unfamiliar environments," says Deborah. "Gently make them aware of new settings rather than chucking them in at the deep end."

VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

"It's really important to validate their emotions and talk about how they're feeling," says Clare. "It doesn't work to just shove your emotions down, and actually one of the most valuable things you can do for a child is to name emotions.

"Talk through that thought process and role-model healthy behaviour for little ones by naming your own emotions."