



What to do when your toddler screams

Why does my toddler scream?

Believe it or not, your toddler's volume isn't turned up high to annoy you, but because she's full of energy. She's exploring the power of her voice, and experimenting with what she can do with it.

And why does she always let rip when you're [at the supermarket or the museum](#)? It's because there's a lovely echoing effect when you scream in big open spaces!

Some toddlers scream whenever they want their parents' attention. It's their way of saying, "Hey, look at me!" Others scream when they want something they can't have, such as a biscuit or a friend's [toy](#). In that case, the shrieking means, "I want my way. Give it to me now!"

Shouting at your toddler to lower her voice won't help. It'll just send the message that whoever shouts loudest wins. Your best bet is to avoid situations that tempt your toddler to raise her voice and to divert her attention when she does scream. Here are some ideas:

Pick toddler-friendly times and places

Whenever you can, work around your toddler and her sleep and food needs. Try to make sure she's well rested and had a [bite to eat](#) before you leave the house. If you were tired and hungry, you wouldn't have the patience for shopping, either.

When you're out with your toddler, stay away from quiet, intimate or formal places. Instead, go where other families go.

If you're in an already-loud restaurant, you won't be as embarrassed when your toddler screams. You'll also be less likely to reinforce her behavior by spending ages trying to settle her down.

Ask her to use her "indoor voice"

If your toddler's screaming because she's happy, try not to comment or criticize. But if it's really bothering you, ask her to use her indoor voice instead. Lower your voice to a whisper so she has to be quiet to hear you and calmly say, "I can't stand that screaming, darling. It's giving mommy a headache."

Make a game out of it (outdoors)

Indulge her need to be loud by saying, "Let's both shout as loud as we can," then join her in letting rip. Afterwards turn down the volume by saying, "Now it's time to see whose whisper is quietest." Then, like a [Simon Says](#) game, switch to other movements, such as putting your hands over your ears or jumping up and down. This will make screaming seem like just one of many fun things she can do.

Acknowledge her feelings

If your toddler's screaming because she wants your attention, ask yourself whether she's genuinely uncomfortable or overwhelmed. If you think the environment you're in is too much for her, finish what you're doing and leave fast. If shopping at a busy supermarket is the problem, visit at off-peak times, go to smaller shops for a while, or shop online.

If you think she's just bored or grizzly, acknowledge what she's feeling. Say calmly, "I know you want to go home and we will in a few minutes, once we're finished," and push on. She will be comforted that you know how she feels, and you'll also help her learn how to put her feelings into [words](#).

If you know your toddler's raised the volume because she thinks she can get you to hand over a biscuit, don't give in. You'll just reinforce her behavior by giving her what she wants when she screams. Instead, say calmly, "I know you want a biscuit, but we have to finish this first. You can have a biscuit when we get home." Don't bother saying she can have the biscuit later if she behaves better. By the time she gets it, she won't remember how she earned it. Simply offer her a biscuit once you're home.

Keep her occupied

Make trips out more fun for your toddler by engaging her in an activity. Here are two tactics to try:

- **Play a game.** Talk to your toddler when you're out shopping. Tell her what you're doing, point out what's going on around you, and so on. Get her to help with choosing fruit and vegetables, and items off the shelves, to make it more fun. Or make up a song about what you're doing. She may even be happy to sing her favorite nursery rhymes with you to help pass the time.
- **Offer toys and snacks.** Just make sure you give them to your toddler before she screams. If you wait until she's screaming, you'll give her the message that she gets what she wants when she raises her voice. Offer her a snack or toy while she's being quiet. You could even keep a special toy in the car and allow her to play with it only on car trips.

Finally, ignore the onlookers. For many moms, the hardest part of [coping with a toddler who loves to scream](#) is brushing off other people's judgmental looks. If you're somewhere such as a library or a quiet restaurant and your child's screaming is disruptive, take her outside. But in a busy supermarket or shopping mall, let them look. They'll get over it!

Last reviewed: June 2017