

Help us get it right

If you have a complaint, concern, comment or compliment please let us know by speaking to a member of our staff. We learn from your feedback and use the information to improve and develop our services.

If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the **Patient Experience Team** on **0113 220 8585**, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm or email lch.pet@nhs.net

We can make this information available in Braille, large print, audio or other languages on request.

How to contact us

You can talk to your 0-19 Specialist Public Health Nurse (health visitor) about a referral to our service. You can contact us directly on **0113 843 0841** to find out more or look at our web page:

www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk

Infant Mental Health Service
Hunslet Health Centre
24 Church Street
Leeds LS10 2PT

Marvellous Meltdowns



Information for parents and carers

Produced by the Infant Mental Health Service

What is going on?

Toddler's behaviour is how they tell us something the best way they can often without words. When we see a 'toddler meltdown' (i.e. biting, hitting, screaming, crying), they may be trying to say:



Why is it happening?

The upper area of a toddler's brain is still developing, which means:

- Toddlers have less control of their body and impulses (so they may hit, bite or fall to the floor).
- Toddlers can't name feelings and emotions (so may scream and cry).
- Toddlers find it hard to see your point of view and can't understand logic (so responding with reasoning doesn't work!).



Did you know?

- Meltdowns are a sign of healthy development!
- Conflicts with toddlers can happen hourly.
- Challenging behaviours tend to reduce as children get better at talking and problem solving. Every time you talk to your toddler, or respond to them, you're shaping their brain development.



Try to remember...

Toddler behaviour can be frustrating and upsetting - you may want to shout, lash out or teach your child a lesson. While these reactions are understandable, they are not useful. Here's why:

- They do not teach your child what to do instead of biting, hitting, etc.
- They learn to keep emotions inside rather than how to handle them.
- Your toddler needs you to stay with them until they feel calm again because they don't have the skills to do this by themselves. They need 'time in' not time out.



What can I do?

You can help your toddler with their big feelings using these 10 steps:

1. Start with you being calm. Take a deep breath (ask for help if you find it hard to stay calm).
2. Help soothe your toddler's big feeling - some toddlers will need a cuddle, older toddlers might need you to stay nearby, some toddlers may need soothing with a soft blanket, teddy or music. The next steps work best once you and your toddler are calmer.
3. If your toddler is biting or kicking, it is ok to safely put them down and step back, but calmly explain why – **"I know you are cross but biting hurts."**
4. Name the emotion – **"I wonder if you're angry that you can't have the toy."**
5. Separate the behaviour from the toddler so they know it's the behaviour that you are unhappy with, not them. It might help to say **"It's ok to be angry but it's not ok to throw."**
6. Stay calm and nearby until the emotion has passed – the message here is that you are there for them and they are not left alone to manage the big feeling.



7. When the toddler is calmer, offer a different activity that interests them – **"let's play with this toy instead"** or **"shall we look out of the window for birds?"**. This means you and your toddler can reconnect while you stay 'in charge'. It also helps your toddler to learn how to problem solve.
8. Keep the boundary but make it short-lived ie keep a toy that was thrown out of sight until your toddler is ready to try again or help your toddler join in a game when they are calmer.
9. Name the emotion – **"you look happy to play with this toy."**
10. Connect with your toddler by giving them your time and attention when they are back to being calm, curious or playful.

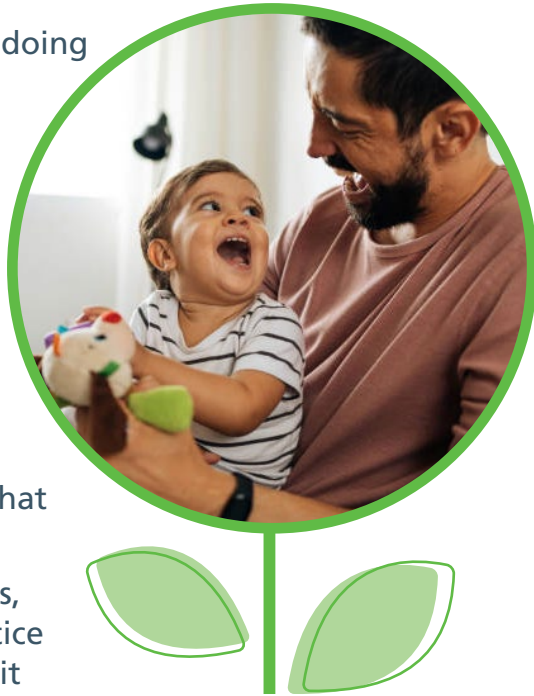


More time connecting, less time correcting

- Talking with your toddler is really important. When they ask for your connection, responding to them helps them learn and grow.



- Notice what your toddler is doing in small, everyday moments (e.g when getting them changed or going to the shop) so they feel 'seen and heard' and know they are important to you.
- So... when your toddler looks at you or an object, let them know you have noticed with a simple response (i.e. smile or say what you see them doing).
- When your toddler responds, remember to pause and notice this - give them space, take it in turns.
- Find ways to delight in them, again the small things count (i.e. I love how you keep trying).



- Share your toddler's enjoyment.
- Be ready to welcome them coming to you for help or for play.
- Try to set some time aside to have moments of quality play time together – and allow your toddler to take the lead.

Remember:

- 'Perfect parenting' doesn't exist. Feeling angry or frustrated is normal – you are doing your best. We all struggle at times to 'get it right'. Try thinking about 'good enough parenting' and how we might do it differently next time. Take this chance to show your toddler how to repair by re-connecting in a way that is safe and soothing for your toddler (this might include you as the adult saying sorry).
- Be consistent; it will take time, support and practice for children to learn how to deal with big feelings.
- It is hard for adults to manage big feelings! If you are finding it hard, ask friends or a professional for help.
- The 0-19 service, GP or local Children's Centre are good places to start. Outside of these times, crisis assessments are carried out by specialist practitioners.

