

## Your kid is melting down. Why it's important to keep your cool

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The next time you're about to lose your patience and freak out on your kid, take a deep breath and consider the findings of a new study.

Parents who “overreact” or anger easily are more likely to have toddlers who throw temper tantrums and show problem behaviour when they reach school, according to a study published in the journal [Development and Psychopathology](#).

“This is an age where children are prone to test limits and boundaries. However, research consistently shows that children with elevated levels of negative emotionality during these early years have more difficulties with emotion regulation and tend to exhibit more problem behaviour when they are of school age,” lead author Shannon Lipscomb, an assistant professor of human development and family sciences at Oregon State University-Cascades, [said in a release](#).

To determine whether genetics plays in the dynamic between parent and child, the study looked at data from 361 families linked through adoption (including birth parents and adoptive families). Researchers also collected genetic information from birth parents and children.

When researchers looked at the children at three different stages of the kids' early development – at nine months, 18 months and 27 months old – they found that the behaviour of adoptive parents who were quick to anger when children made mistakes or tested boundaries had a “significant effect” on their children. These kids acted out more than was normal for their age and were also found to have more temper tantrums.

The takeaway: If you lose your patience with a child who is having a melt down, you might just be creating a vicious circle, rather than helping matters.

But the problem doesn't end there.

The study also found that children who exhibited the most increases in “negative emotionality” (science-speak for acting out and throwing fits), from the age of nine months onward were more likely to exhibit the most behavioural problems at age 2.

“Researchers have looked at this aspect of emotionality as something fairly stable, but we have been able to show that although most kids test limits and increase negative emotionality as they approach the toddler age, the amount they increase can affect how many problem behaviours they exhibit as two-year-olds,” Prof. Lipscomb said.

And since pretty much every toddler explores boundaries, and most are prone to an emotional freak out once in a while, it is up to parents to keep their cool so that children can learn to model their behaviour.

“Parents’ ability to regulate themselves and to remain firm, confident and not overreact is a key way they can help their children to modify their behaviour. You set the example as a parent in your own emotions and reactions,” Prof. Lipscomb said.

**Parents, how do you deal with temper tantrums and screaming fits?**