

Q & A with Jo Frost

Jo Frost, global parenting expert, New York Times best-selling author, and star of popular TV programs such as *Supernanny*, *Jo Frost: Family Matters*, and *Family SOS* chats to *Tots to Teens* about some of the best ways to navigate through the toddler years.

1. In terms of picking your battles with toddlers, what do you believe are the non-negotiables?

I believe any behaviour that shows a lack of respect for others, animals, belongings, other people's belongings, our environment and anything in it, are non-negotiable. So too is accepting a situation that could potentially put your child in harm's way. As parents who set good examples and are positive role models in our children's lives, it is vital that we teach our children such standards and values. When we know that with conviction, it becomes very easy to pick your battles.

2. Can you describe your SOS strategy and in what circumstances it should be used?

The SOS strategy is a method I have used for many, many years. I felt compelled to teach parents this technique so they could be more disciplined in their approach, eliminating all confusion and feelings of helplessness when they find themselves in a situation that they find highly emotional.

Step back. This allows us to look at the whole picture – not just the child making noise and not just the pandemonium happening around us. Actually step back so we can physically create some space between ourselves and the situation.

Observe. Look at both sides of the coin. This allows us to listen and see, to observe the whole jigsaw puzzle, rather like what a first responder would do in an emergency. It keeps us calmer as a parent and stops us from becoming emotionally entangled in the 'eye of the storm', ie, the drama. Only then can we move to the next step ...

Step back in. Do this with decisive action that teaches our children how to resolve such circumstances in a healthy manner.

When you get really good at practising this, you can actually mentally detach yourself from the drama, because you have more composure and confidence.

3. How can parents plan their toddler's day to ensure they are getting the right balance of stimulation and relaxation?

The most effective way to plan a toddler's day is by establishing a routine. When we have filled in the cornerstones, such as lunch and nap times, we are able to look at our toddler's biological rhythm (their body clock). Based on their wake times and their overall mood, we can



Credit: David Carlson

then make sure there is plenty of time left over for early learning and developmental skills, as well as imaginative and creative play.

It is important to remember that not everything should be structured and that we also ask our children what they would like to do. Children need time to potter around, daydream ... and stick sellotape around erasers and call them 'presents' if they want to!

4. What are your main words of advice to parents struggling through the toddler years?

Everybody has moments when they feel lost. They don't have the answers, they want to do right by their kid, and they are fearful that they might screw them up somehow. I say, read people's opinions, collect information, observe your own child. Whatever you do: make a decision. If it's the wrong one, learn from it and don't repeat it.

No one is perfect but that's why our children love us unconditionally – because imperfection is perfection. Shrug off the bad days with some adult humour, don't take things so seriously that you can't breathe. Let your hair down, have fun with your kids, and be as silly as you can because you can't go back in time, and time creates moments that they will remember and cherish when they are adults.



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1: In terms of picking your battles with toddlers, what do you believe are the non-negotiables in terms of certain behaviours you believe parents should never accept?

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** Jo Frost is a worldwide parenting expert etc etc etc (to come).
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