

pictured: green arletty pants
by ismodern



Together, they made a list of each activity's pluses and minuses to help Dylan pick one.

A preemptive move can also be as simple as blocking off the stairs so your toddler's not always frustrated at being told not to climb. Alex Oliver, 18 months, became upset over and over because he wasn't allowed to drink fruit juice like his big sister, which she sipped from a plastic straw built into her cup. The solution: His mom, Candita Oliver of Olympia, Washington, simply had her daughter drink from a grown-up cup, which didn't appeal to Alex.

Other ways to avoid disappointment:

● Under age 2

Call ahead. Make sure the toy store or museum is open. Keep small toys and books in the diaper bag or in the car for emergency distractions.

● Ages 2 and 3

Intervene. If another mom is in the habit of canceling playdates, either skip playdates with that family or simply bring the child to your house.

● Ages 4 and 5

Have a backup plan. When taking a plane trip, for instance, remember that airport travel is unpredictable. Without alarming your child, explain what you'll do if the flight is delayed. "First we'll go to the kids' play area, and then we'll get a snack."

● Ages 6 and up

Explain that it's part of life. No sports team wins all the time. Point out famous athletes who win some and lose some, and that someone *always* wins in board games.

As for my son, Drew, and his *Winnie the Pooh* tantrum, I seem to have played that one right, because he quickly

forgot that he'd been so upset. But he didn't forget about *Pooh*—the next day he very sweetly requested a trip to the library. And you can guess which video we borrowed. ■

Contributing editor Jane Meredith Adams is the mom of 8-year-old twins and a contributor to Searching for Mary Poppins: Women Write About the Intense Relationship Between Mothers and Nannies, from Hudson Street Press.

don't make it about you

When things go wrong, it's easy to imagine your child's as upset as you are, but that's often not the case. Young kids don't have the complicated reactions to disappointments that adults do. If we're not invited to a friend's birthday party, we wonder why we've been excluded: Did we say the wrong thing? Wear the wrong clothes? And does this mean we won't get invited to other parties?

Your kids are much more concrete and in the moment. If your child's not invited to a birthday party, his disappointment might center on something as simple as not getting to eat ice cream.

To keep the focus on your child:

Ages 3 and under Don't telegraph your disappointment. Your child will find plenty of things to be upset about on his own without your example. Try not to be so attuned to his every mood that you offer big comfort for teeny setbacks.

Ages 4 and 5 Listen. Focus on specifically what he's disappointed about.

Ages 6 and up Separate your dreams from his. You loved being in school plays, so you want him to love them, too, but he doesn't. Of course you're disappointed, but don't let this blind you to his real interests.