

Tics, head banging & unusual behaviour

Can mean lots of things

Extreme and unusual behaviour can be lots of things such as children hurting themselves on purpose, developing a tic or head banging.

Stress is something as adults we come to accept and manage. Young children are unable to recognise and cope with stressful situations. Instead, they often show their anxiety in physical and emotional outbursts. Sometimes stress can lead to a 'tic' - a sudden, repetitive, non-rhythmic movement involving a distinct muscle group, like uncontrolled eye blinking. Head banging or banging the head against a wall or cot on purpose is also common, especially in boys. They are not trying to be naughty or annoying.

In rare cases, a tic or another behaviour pattern may be the symptom of a more complicated condition. Your health visitor or GP can advise if you are worried. In general, the best thing to do is just ignore the tic, help minimise stress and make sure your child is getting enough sleep.

With head banging or other forms of self-harm like severe nail biting, scratching or hitting, keep your child safe and get them to stop by distracting them. Try to get them to vent their frustration in another way, like stomping their feet or throwing something really hard (maybe a ball at a wall outside). These are the best measures to help your child deal with a problem that will most likely disappear in a short time.

Health visitor says

Possible reasons your toddler may bang his head:

- **Self-comfort.** Most children who bang their heads do it to relax.
- **Pain relief.** A child is more likely to bang his head when he has an ear infection or is suffering from some other physical discomfort.
- **Frustration.** Your child may bang his head during temper tantrums as a way of venting strong emotions.
- **A need for attention.**
- **A developmental problem.** Head banging can be associated with autism and other developmental disorders, but in most of these cases, it's just one of many behavioural issues. Rarely does head banging alone signal a serious problem.

1

My son is almost a year old, and has started to bang his head on the wall or the floor when he's cross or frustrated. We try not to react too much, but we are shocked!

2

This behaviour is very normal in a pre-verbal child, especially in a boy. He does not have the verbal skills to express his frustration so this is a way he can make his feelings known to you.

3

Interrupt the banging by teaching him less hurtful ways to express his frustration (such as stomping his feet). Fortunately, extreme behaviours in children this young often end as suddenly as they start. Talk to your health visitor or GP if this continues.