

Challenging behaviour at one year #2

Trying to climb out of the high chair

At around a year old, some babies begin to take a dislike to being in their high chair – refusing to get in, or trying to climb out. Here are some tips on what's happening and why, and how you can deal with it.

What's behind the behaviour:

- Many babies, once they can crawl or walk, resent being 'trapped' in a high chair (or car seat). It's not the seat itself – it's just that they object to being prevented from moving around.
- Babies of any age want to practise new skills (such as standing and walking) at every opportunity – and they want to show you what they can do.
- If your baby isn't particularly hungry he may be ready to move on to a new activity before the meal is over.
- If there have been any big changes in your baby's life recently, such as starting nursery or stopping breastfeeding, he may need to spend more time being held, for reassurance
- Your baby may be uncomfortable in the high chair. Check to see that it's the right size and, if his legs are long enough to hang down, that it has a foot-rest at the right height to help him feel stable.

What to do:

- Don't try to force your baby to sit in her high chair if she really hates it – that will only make things worse.
- Allow your baby to sit on someone's lap during mealtimes for a few weeks. This can work wonders, especially if there have been any big changes in her life.
- Sitting your baby in a low child's seat for a few meals may make her feel less trapped (although it can make eating together at the table tricky). Some older babies need only a little help to be able to get in and out of a low chair by themselves – and once they know they can do this they stop needing to try. Help your child to learn this new skill rather than trying to stop it happening.
- Once your child can safely climb on to, and off, an adult chair, sitting on a booster seat alongside everyone else may be more attractive to her than being put into a chair with fixed sides.
- Allow your baby to get down from the table once or twice during the meal if she seems bored.
- If your baby resists being put into a high chair at the beginning of a meal don't try to persuade her. Instead, make a big show of putting food on the table, then

encourage everyone else to sit down and start tucking in. When she lets you know that she doesn't want to be left out, say: "Yes, X, you can have some – do you want to sit in your chair?" You may even find that she is already trying to climb in! Putting the child in the position of having to ask for what they DO want instead of rejecting what they DON'T want works extremely well with toddlers, and often with babies as young as ten months.

- If possible, have a picnic now and then, so that your baby doesn't start to associate mealtimes with something she hates. You can even have a meal on a rug on the kitchen floor!

Having your baby refuse to sit in his high chair can be very frustrating but the chances are it's only a temporary setback. Remember that he's behaving this way for a reason, not just to be difficult. Listening to him, and figuring out what's causing the problem, will help you to handle the situation in a way that meets his needs and supports his ongoing development.

Gill Rapley, September 2017