

# LET'S TALK ABOUT TANTRUMS

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## *What is a tantrum?*

Tantrums are underdeveloped communication--it's our children's way of regulating strong emotions with the inability to cope using words...because their words have not fully developed yet. Many times, they are unable to articulate their strong emotions, so they just act it out. When that happens, we need to look at ourselves and pay attention to how we react. What do we do when faced with tantrums? We respond in kind really. Think about it. We scream, gesticulate, shout, spank and give time outs. We reinforce their negative behavior by our example. So what do they learn? They learn that when they feel strong emotions, keep on "throwing a tantrum" because that's what mom and dad do.

## *What else do they learn?*

Remember, tantrums are underdeveloped communication. Our children are trying to communicate with us using these "tantrums", and instead of focusing on what may be the matter, we react negatively. Doing that teaches our children not to communicate with us; which is even worse than a little "bad behavior".

We teach our children that their strong emotions are not welcomed by us, that we are not there to you would have successfully communicated to your child more adaptive alternatives several times, and over time, your child will be able to manage their big emotions on their own.

Tantrums are teachable moments. Sometimes we miss the opportunities. Do not beat yourself up when that happens! It is more important to pay attention to what you could have done and try again next time, than it is to spend that time feeling guilty for what you may not have done in the moment. Keep in mind that tantrums are underdeveloped communication and our children do not try to manipulate us using tantrums. Tantrums are golden opportunities in which we can teach our children and build an even stronger bond together.

### *When it's time to talk, speak softly and calmly*

This will help soothe your child. It is similar to listening to soothing music when you have had a particularly difficult day. The music slows you down. It helps you to isolate one thing from the next and separate them into manageable pieces. When we speak calmly, not only are we helping to relax our children, we are also being an example of how they should react to stressful situations.

### *Talk about it*

After they've calmed down, help them name their emotions so they can better communicate and cope in the future. *"Let's talk about what happened just now. Do you think you were hungry? Did something make you feel bad? ....Hmm, what that sounds like to me is maybe you're a bit angry. It's okay to be angry. Let's talk about some things you can do next time you feel angry. What are some things you think may not be a good idea to do next time?"*

Having this type of conversation with your child validates their emotion. It helps them to find solutions while being interactive and allows them the autonomy to analyze the situation and come up with their own outcomes. Having this conversation does not mean that the next time will not result in a tantrum; but it does mean that

you would have successfully communicated to your child more adaptive alternatives several times, and over time, your child will be able to manage their big emotions on their own.

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