

Introduction

FOUR TYPES, FOUR UNDERLYING ISSUES, AND FOUR APPROACHES = THE ONE-MINUTE TEMPER TANTRUM SOLUTION

1. *“Ahhhhhhh!” (flaying on the floor) “Ahhhhhhh!” (peek to see who’s looking) “AHHHHHHH!” (hitting a higher pitch). “I’m going to hold my breath, if you don’t let me have it! Give it! Give it!”*
2. *“Ahhhhhhh! Nooooo! No! (sniff) No! No! (sniff) No! I don’t like it!! (sniff) Please! Please! Please . . . ! I don’t want to! PLEASE! Waaaah!”*
3. *“Ahhhhhhh! I was here first! She pushed me! That’s not fair! She always gets to go first! I never get to go first! NO! . . . NO . . . No! . . . No . . . no! . . . no . . . It’s . . . not . . . fair . . .”*
4. *“Ahhhhhhh! (deep breath) Yeah, yeah . . . (sniff, sniff) What? . . . (deep breath, deep breath) . . . I’m OK now.”*

Isn’t there just one simple magical solution to all the tantrums? To put it succinctly, “No!” This or that self-appointed expert (who, me?) will present the magic plan or perfect prescription on how to raise the perfect child or student, with or without sound experience, research, or logical theories. Some adults look for another magical teaching or parenting plan rather than examine who and how they are as teachers or parents. Something “new” sometimes works like magic. Normally, the “magic” comes from clarity of logic. There is no real magic or magical techniques, but when you are conceptually clear regarding the reasons behind behaviors, it is almost magical how readily you can make appropriate teaching or parenting decisions.

This book presents a conceptual foundation that can keep tantrums from becoming your horror story. Each of the four tantrums described above have distinctly different qualities. If you cannot tell the difference

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among these four types of temper tantrums, you and your child could be in for a lot of frustration, because there are four matching interventions or approaches for handling each type of tantrum. Many children can be challenging, and tantrums are, perhaps, the most challenging behavior. Standard techniques for support, intervention, and discipline often work wonderfully well. Other times, these standard techniques are not quite wonderful but rather unmitigated disasters! There is something distinctive about the behavior or the tantrum; otherwise, the “regular” responses do not quite address the child’s underlying energy. When the adult response should work, what is going on that it doesn’t work? The principles to support all children are basically the same: nurturing, boundaries, and guidance. Children’s response to support or lack of effective support is

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basically the same: depression, anxiety, frustration, accrued stress, low self-esteem, and acting-out behaviors. Temper tantrums and other dysfunctional and disruptive behavior may erupt and become habitual. Unaddressed or ineffectively handled (FOUR types of temper

tantrums? Oh my!), longer-term social and emotional damages can lead to future relational, academic, and vocational failures. Ominous folk tales and professional warnings often terrify caring adults rather than empower them to effectively discipline children.

Externalizing behaviours such as temper tantrums and management difficulties (e.g., non-compliance) were associated with adult convictions, in particular with violent offences . . . studies have shown an association between temper tantrums at age 8–10 years and a range of difficulties in adult life in both genders, including downward social mobility and divorce . . . the association between temper tantrums at age 3 years and adult violent crime is maintained when these other factors are controlled for. (Stevenson & Goodman, 2001, 192–202)

More than a temper tantrum, but budding juvenile delinquency and candidacy for the FBI’s 10 Most Wanted List! Less apocalyptic, but still worrisome is Dr. Wegmann’s (2007) recommendation:

Children older than 4 who have such tantrums should be evaluated by a professional . . . Temper tantrums in children between the ages of 1 and 4 are normal. Tantrums that go beyond this age, especially if they are frequent, severe, and associated with aggressive behavior,

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are a sign of a larger behavioral problem. These children are at risk for having more serious behavioral problems later in life. Children older than 4 who have such tantrums should be evaluated by a professional.

Although seeking professional consultation may be prudent for some children, adults would be well served to evaluate their own tantrum. This book will help with this.

**MEETING THE CHALLENGE
AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN**

Age of child and the percentage of children who throw temper tantrums:

18 to 24 months: 87 percent

30 to 36 months: 91 percent

42 to 48 months: 59 percent

On average, tantrums lasted for

- two minutes in one-year-olds
- four minutes in two- to three-year-olds
- five minutes in four-year-olds

and occurred

- eight times a week for one-year-olds
- nine times a week for two-year-olds
- six times a week for three-year-olds
- five times a week for four-year-olds (Potegal & Davidson, 2003)

You always wanted the children you care for to be special! You have children who tantrum way longer and way more often than average. Lucky you. You would be ecstatic if your children's tantrums only lasted a few minutes! If you have a 5-year or older child in your class who still throws tantrums, statistics do not offer you any comfort. Many older children, teenagers, and other adults throw temper tantrums as well. For some, the problem is the frequency, whereas for others, it is the violent intensity or disruption; for others, it's the whole package. Temper tantrums truly challenge adults, and children need appropriate support

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when they tantrum. That support, however, needs to adjust to meet the specific underlying issue (potentially, four different underlying issues) of the particular tantrum. Handling the tantrum well has profound consequences in many areas of a child's overall development, over and above relieving the adult of the negative behavior (the screaming, stomping, swearing, or throwing!). The book will emphasize the relationship of various emotional, social, psychological, and other developmental theories in the socialization process of discipline. In addition, to benefit from and

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apply the knowledge of this book, one must understand the different styles by which various people and children throw temper tantrums. Not all tantrums involve throwing oneself crying and screaming red-faced on the floor. A tantrum could be throwing a fit, throwing a toy, throwing down a huge piece of chocolate cake, or, as individuals get older, throwing down a six-pack of beer,

throwing a charge card on the counter, throwing away relationships, or throwing caution to the wind. As definitions of acting out and temper tantrums are merged, the applicability of the concepts broadens into many areas of childhood and adult lives.

PREVENTION STARTS WITH KNOWLEDGE AND RECOGNITION: EIGHT CONCERNS

A list of steps from Down Under, on the Australian Parenting Web site for dealing with persistent or severe tantrums (Raising Children Network, 2006), is representative of many approaches available. This list includes common recommendations and some suggestions that prove problematic upon closer examination.

1. Keep a diary of your child's tantrums for 7–10 days. Record the day . . . where it happened, what happened just before it, and what happened right afterward.

The first step may be useful for some teachers and parents in applying the other steps, or more formal than necessary for others. The next three steps are the most helpful.

2. Identify the situations that make tantrums more likely to occur. Plan ways of avoiding those situations or making them less stressful for your child.

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3. Identify the triggers for your child's tantrums. Look for ways of reducing or avoiding tantrum triggers.
4. Identify the consequences of the tantrum. Can you see ways that the behavior is being accidentally rewarded by your actions or the actions of others?

This book examines and expands extensively on Steps 2, 3, and 4, using different terminology. The next steps have the potential to be useful but also to be problematic or ineffective.

5. Establish a reward system to give your child extra encouragement for staying calm.
6. Help your older child learn and practice coping skills in situations where he or she would normally have a tantrum.

Step 5 may be useful if all it takes is rewards or encouragement. That becomes nearly impossible for a child in full tantrum. Offering a reward when the child is in tantrum mode may inadvertently reward the tantrum (depending on what type of tantrum it is). For other types of tantrums, it would have negligible effect and potentially intensify the tantrum. Practically speaking, a calm child is the default setting, normally neither noticed nor rewarded. Step 6 is essentially socialization. Socialization is usually completely forgotten in the full arousal of the tantrum for both the child and the adult. The eruption of tantrum for toddlers and older children means that socialization has been overwhelmed. Many experts very unfortunately echo the last step and recommendations of the list.

7. Here are two possible options when your child throws a tantrum:
 - Ignore the tantrum: do not look at or speak to your child while they tantrum.
 - Use time-out.

Ignoring a tantrum may be the worst thing to do when a child throws a tantrum. Ignoring a child flies against the fundamental premises of child development. The recommendation comes from an often false assumption of the child's motivation to tantrum. This book explains the logic and the underlying illogic of ignoring a tantrum (besides that, it usually doesn't work!). Time-out as a strategy is based on a false belief that avoiding punishment effectively overwhelms any underlying motivation. Furthermore, it is based on the simplistic but inaccurate assumption that all tantrums are about power and control. For a detailed discussion on the three problematic theories and the one effective theory of time-out, you may want to read my book, *Difficult Behavior in Early Childhood: Positive Discipline for PreK–3 Classrooms and Beyond* (Mah, 2007).

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In this book, readers will learn how to assess eight potential factors or issues that challenge children and how these may ignite temper tantrums. The eight areas of concern are presented in a progressive sequence for assessment. Although some issues are commonsensical, others are more complex and potentially problematic. There is significant discussion of developmental principles, temperamental traits, systemic influences on children, and particularly challenging conditions that create greater vul-

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nerability to frustration, acting out, and temper tantrums. Adults can keep intervention simple through progressing through these issues. Simpler theories or issues should be examined first, and more complex ones considered after earlier interventions prove insufficient.

Successful application of this hierarchal investigative process prevents the very harmful assumptions of the eighth set of issues.

Failure to recognize what you are dealing with or incorrect assumptions about what is happening is likely to frustrate the child and make things worse for the both of you. What's worse than a child throwing a tantrum? A child and an adult both throwing tantrums back and forth! "Remain calm and do not argue with the child. Before you manage the child, you must manage your own behavior. Spanking or yelling at the child will make the tantrum worse. Think before you act. Count to 10 and then think about the source of the child's frustration . . ." (Harrington, 2004). "1, 2, 3, 4 . . . I'm thinking about MY frustration!" Aggravation caused by the child's tantrum ignites us all too often. When we are frustrated, we are not calm, do not think, and become argumentative! In addition to the four approaches for addressing the four underlying issues of the four tantrum types, the book presents a fifth intervention approach for dealing with a tantrum when you cannot quickly identify the type of tantrum. This allows for recovery after initial adult frustration and failure with handling the tantrum. It finally all comes together in the "One-Minute Temper Tantrum Solution," in dealing with an active tantrum.

THE ONE-MINUTE TEMPER TANTRUM SOLUTION

I can hear the screaming and crying from my office (I'm the director of this preschool). It has been going on for a couple of minutes. I can hear Mickey screaming, "It's my turn!!" and the teacher screaming, "No, it's not! You can't run this group! You stop it!!"

Here they come again! The teacher stomps into my office, with Mickey in tow. Angrily, she puts him on the couch, "He's got to learn he can't

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just have his way all the time! I don't have time to deal with his tantrums!!" She stomps off to rejoin her group of three-year-old kids, which is now, of course, in chaos.

Tears are streaming down Mickey's face; his face is red; his entire body shakes with the hiccups. I turn my chair toward him. . . . Less than a minute later, he has calmed down, acknowledged how he needs to behave, and goes off to rejoin his group where he is able to cooperate again. Why? What had been going on? What happened? What did I do?

When someone throws a temper tantrum, whether he or she is an adult, teen, child, colleague, or supervisor or employee, we often get sucked into a miserable, fruitless, and escalating battle. Who was throwing a tantrum? Mickey was, but so was the teacher! She couldn't handle him, when he desperately needed to be supported. Even as she began the battle, she already knew that it was going to be fruitless and escalating. We get into stupid arguments with children and adults. You realize that you are saying the same thing over and over again . . . and so are they! There seems to be no gracious way to end the argument without losing something precious—perhaps our self-esteem? When we are finally done, we chide ourselves for having fallen into it again! Later, we think what a stupid argument it all was. Yet we get emotional, physical, fight to the death, divorce, or even risk our livelihood or employment. We berate and humiliate children, and we berate ourselves in our own frustration and humiliation.

What was so important to fight for so vehemently and to risk so much? It could not have been just whether the child dropped or threw the toy . . . whether you already told the child and he or she had heard you clearly. Or whether the other employee took five minutes longer at lunch. The facts of the situation are almost irrelevant compared to the underlying issues of the tantrum or argument. What appears to the outside objective observer as a nonsensical argument or tantrum over trivial matters is, to the participants, a desperate life-and-death struggle to maintain their sense of worth, self-esteem, and rights. Many teachers and parents discipline from the frustration of their own life experiences, acting out personal, emotional, and psychological turmoil with children. The information and guidance presented in this book has to pass through your personal process before you interact with a child. Instincts and intuition are often good guides to discipline, but personal work is necessary to tell the differences between instincts and intuition and your neuroses! Each of the four types of tantrum has high potential to ignite adult reactivity that exacerbate or interfere with resolving the tantrum. Personal resolution and development creates healthy adults who are best suited to support children. Such adults are able to give and receive respect and affection. Their core values

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and identities to be conscientious individuals and community members are reflected back as children internalize the modeled morals. Healthy adults recognize others' power and control issues from their own healthy sense of power and control. They also create secure boundaries in the home and classroom where children can flourish without fear of rejection or abandonment. The intensity of temper tantrums often ignites funda-

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mental issues and raw nerves in adults that waylay positive responses. Children need adults to provide positive responses from the very beginning. It starts with a teacher welcoming his or her class on the first day of school. For parents, it starts in infancy. Children have the

greatest need for healthy and wise adult responses at the times of their greatest needs. They often express that greatest need with behavior that we call temper tantrums.

You thought that I was going to give you the One-Minute Temper Tantrum Solution in the introduction? Nope! Now, don't have a hissy fit! Get your tea or coffee or glass of wine (or Red Bull), get comfy in your favorite chair, take a deep breath, and turn the page. As you read, you'll find there will be many One-Minute Temper Tantrum Solutions, whether they actually take a minute, a couple of minutes, or more. I was able to handle Mickey's temper tantrum in less than a minute. Most important, no matter how long it may actually take, once you gain the background and understanding, you can more efficiently and effectively handle all the tantrums and acting out thrown at you.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- There are four different types of temper tantrums with four different underlying issues that require four different interventions.
- Meeting the challenge and supporting a child's temper tantrum facilitates self-esteem, social skills, and psychological health, increasing options and future success; failure, on the other hand, can lead to many future problems.
- Prevention starts with knowledge and recognition of eight potential tantrum triggers.
- Misunderstanding tantrums results in adult responses that cause greater problems for children and adults.
- Personal resolution and development create healthy adults who are best suited to support children, even when they are throwing a tantrum.