

TEMPER TANTRUMS

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Anger that is not diffused builds up until it blows up -- like a volcano. I use the reference of a pressure cooker in my talks; some people are afraid to use a pressure cooker because it will violently put your dinner on the ceiling if you build up too much pressure.

People need to learn to "download" their anger, or diffuse it. Otherwise, each person is a victim to everything that happens around them. If you are on overload, anger-wise, the smallest thing can cause you to blow.

The best way to diffuse anger is to RUN! It is far more constructive to get a wound up child to run down the street and back than to give that child a time out in a chair. Running is the best way to diffuse anger. The trick is to get the child to run before he or she explodes.

Children who are asked to stuff anger by controlling adults need a safe place to download that anger. Teaching your child to run off excess feeling of anger will be one of the most valuable tools you give your child(ren).

Behavior that is rewarded continues, behavior that is not rewarded stops. If a child falls on the ground in a fit of temper say, "It is ok to feel angry. When you want to calm down and talk to me, come and find me." The parent simply walks across the room (not down the hall as that smacks of rejection and abandonment). When the child comes over, throw him/herself down again, say exactly the same thing you said the first time without any sarcasm or anger. The child will stop using anger as a way to dis-empower you because it does not work.

See "anger" for more information.

Another solution: Use the Minute Drill. See "Don't Feed the Dragon."

Temper Tantrum Questions (Email Conversation)

Parent: I have a question. My daughter, who turned two has begun demanding her way: screaming, getting mad, throwing food on floor, screaming when I try and dress her (if she doesn't like what I put on her), etc. Otherwise she is very sweet. How should I handle the screaming tantrums?

Sandy: Let's begin with the law: BEHAVIOR THAT IS REWARDED CONTINUES, BEHAVIOR THAT IS NOT REWARDED, STOPS. The question then becomes, how are you rewarding the tantrums?

Parent: They seem to occur whenever she doesn't get what she wants and she doesn't really talk yet so I can't ask her and sometimes I don't know what she wants.

Sandy: Don't discount how much she understands. Talk to her as if she can understand. Remember, small children are VERY intuitive. She knows when you are upset, off balance, distressed--especially about something she is doing. Remember, also about power; she is asking if this is the way to use power.

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Parent: Often she is tired when she does this behavior.

Sandy: Give her a choice of outfits: "Do you want to wear this one or this one?" When she gives another choice say, "Today, your choices are this one or this one." Repeat that statement every time she talks about her choice.

When she gets mad, sit with no comment watch her. Don't try to stop her tantrum. Don't care if she stops. Another choice is to say, "You are too upset about this right now. When you want to get dressed, come and find me." Walk out of the room, but don't act angry. You are not angry, she is!

If you have to get her dressed to be somewhere, set a timer for her to get ready on her own. Then she and her clothes go into the car; she can dress on the way to the place you are going.

When she throws food, tell her, "Do not throw food. If you throw food you will not eat any more dinner." If she continues throwing food, take both of her hands, take off her bib, remove her from the eating place. She is done eating until the next meal. She can have juice between meals, but no food. Throwing food is not acceptable.

Think of a tantrum as a fire. If you fuel the fire it gets bigger. Don't! Do not try to talk her out of it, don't get angry yourself. You can sit down with the child rubbing that child's back--to help calm him/her down. Or you can tell the child to come and find you when he/she calms down--and leave the room. BEHAVIOR THAT IS REWARDED CONTINUES, BEHAVIOR THAT IS NOT REWARDED, STOPS.