

Tears and Tantrums

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Managing tears and tantrums

Fostering the child's emotional development by supporting them to work through their upsets.



Kids getting upset that things are “unfair”

How should we react?



“It’s not fair”

Older child always wants what his sister gets

He got upset because little sister and mum went to the park when he was at school

How should parents react when child complains?



Why do children complain about things not being fair?

Sometimes when children get upset, it's because they NEED to offload big feelings
And the sadness and stress of being apart from their parent and not at home



With both physical and emotional challenges

- Things go wrong, things are hard and upsets push to the surface
- It's our job to give them the message that it's understandable that they're upset
- We listen, we empathise, we show them that we get it and that we understand
- It's not about doing everything possible to avoid our child being disappointed



Most parents do their best to be fair and avoid disappointments ..

- This is good and considerate and fair
- Yet life isn't always fair and parents can't and shouldn't always protect their child from feeling disappointment
- Children need opportunities to feel, express and work through these emotions



Physical and emotional challenges can lead to upset

What can we do?



Physical and emotional challenges can lead to upset

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Tantrums

- When a child has a tantrum, they've reached a breaking point and now need to offload huge feelings that their brain is not yet mature enough to cope with without adult help.
- The child's fight-flight response is usually activated. The trigger has likely either caused them complete overwhelm, or perhaps appears to be something very small but may be the last straw or has triggered something much bigger that's still unresolved.



Tantrums

- Tantrums are often misunderstood to be misbehaviour which perpetuates the advice to ignore the child when they're in this state of distress. Yet when a child is in distress, they have an attachment instinct to maintain close proximity and access care from their attachment figures.
- Tantrums are an instinctive expression of overwhelm. When the caregiver offers calm loving support and stays truly emotionally present, there can be an important opportunity to help the child work through some very big feelings that are weighing them down and affecting them in many unseen ways.
- With this awareness parents can often connect the tantrum to something overwhelming that had happened to them in the previous couple of days, or general stressors the child is dealing with.
- Tantrums can sometimes happen when something in the present touches on something in the child's unconscious that's still unresolved from the past, even going right back to birth trauma.
- Some children are more vulnerable than others to experiencing flooding and over stimulation of their senses. So often we parents don't know the source of our child's upset, but the child's very real and raw expression of their feelings are clearly crying out for care and empathy.
- Seeing the child's tantrum as distress and overwhelm helps adults draw on greater levels of patience and empathy and help them feel more empowered and constructive in reassuring the child that it's hard but it's ok and they'll get through this.



Centre, Connect, Communicate

- If your child is unhappy about your limit or request, you don't have to back down (unless it no longer feels right or relevant, in which case you're modelling being flexible and reasonable). But you also don't need to demand that it happens immediately, you don't need to force them or demand instant compliance.
- Slow down the communication to diffuse the situation and help your child feel reassured that you are staying calm.
- **Centre:** Check your emotional state knowing that your high stress can cause your child to feel overly pressurized and hence shut down or rebel. Breathe, get centred, release that sense of urgency (save that for actual emergencies).
- **Connection through empathy, warmth and when possible, make it fun:** Show warmth, interest and care for their possible feelings, reflect what you imagine, show some empathy and show that you're available for some nice warm connection and affection. Re-state your limit or request while showing them that you really care about the feelings it's bringing up for them. This can largely be communicated by coming down to a child's level, touching them affectionately and inviting eye contact. If it's time to leave and your child refuses to respond when you ask them to put away toys or books, then you know that it's more than the information about time that they need, they need some emotional support with the feelings they now have.
- **Communicate calmly and clearly:** For example; "it's time to leave honey, there's no more time to look at books, they need to go back on the shelf AND I can see that you're finding that hard to do, aren't you? You really wanted to look through more books didn't you (sympathetic warm look) and it's frustrating that we've run out of time and need to leave. I sometimes find it hard to leave as well (relating, message that their feelings are understandable), so come on I'll help (or sit here with you while) you put the books back on the shelf and how about we then hold hands and run to the car!" (speaking with confidence, clarity and showing genuine empathy with your facial expressions and tone of voice).



Then AFTER they've expressed and released those feelings

- They can return to clear thinking
- They can let us help them expand their thinking
- They can accept limitations OR problem solve to find a solution
- They can access the energy, the courage and the motivation to face their challenges



If children are given what they want every time they get disappointed ..

- They would be denied the opportunity to develop their emotional (self-regulation) muscles
- They would be denied the opportunity to develop self-discipline
- They would be denied the opportunity to develop delayed gratification
- They gain unrealistic expectations



Supporting them to feel and work through upsets

- They repeatedly discover that even though they get disappointed, sad or frustrated, they can show those feelings and “mum/dad will hear me and I can release those feelings”
- They internalise “I feel it, I express it and can feel happy and calm again”



Healing from emotional trauma

What does the child need to heal?

- Children need to feel secure and loved (emotional safety).
- Children need to recall or re-experience the trauma (partially or symbolically).
- Children will heal through crying, raging, play, and laughter.



Common misinterpretations of the child's upset

- When a child gets upset because they can't have what they want, adults can make it mean: "he's a spoiled brat" – but is it true?
- "He always has to have it his way" – is it true?
- "He always has a meltdown when things don't go his way" – is it true?



Reframe

- **Instead of:** “My child has a meltdown whenever she doesn’t get what she wants”
- **Reframe:** “Whenever my child doesn’t get to do what they want to do or have what they want to have, they really struggle to deal with that frustration.”



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- My child needs more emotional support



More common misinterpretations

- “they’re ungrateful”
- “they don’t appreciate what they do have”
- “no matter what you give them it’s never enough, they’re never satisfied”
- “they’ll never grow up”,
“I’m a failure as a parent”,
“how will they cope when older?”,
“I’ve spoiled my child”.



Keeping things in perspective

- We as parents need to keep things in perspective (the good and the bad, the ups and the downs) if we're to help our child get better and better at managing emotions.
- We want our child to keep getting better at holding “I'm upset, I really wanted this, this isn't fair, I'm not happy, but it's ok” – they feel it, express it and then expand their awareness to see the bigger picture.
- They feel, they express, they feel heard and THEN put things back in perspective



Emotional support **BEFORE** reasoning

It's only when a child has felt and expressed their upset, can they expand their awareness to see the bigger picture



Help your child avoid globalising and catastrophising

- i.e. “she always ...”, “I never ...” black and white thinking
- We need to keep things in perspective and be a calming influence when our child gets upset
- So they can get better at feeling their feelings, expressing their feelings and getting to the other side
- Our reassurances really help; “I care so much”



Helping our child develop resilience

The more we can centre ourselves and remain calm and supportive when they're upset, the more our child can internalise:

I'm upset, I'm disappointed but I'm going to be ok. Other people get upset and that's ok.



The core issue relates to our child feeling cared for

- Our children want to know that we are caring equally about both (or all) children
- When we help them work through their upset, that's the time to help them see the bigger picture and put things in perspective
- Being generous with your empathy helps them move through it quicker



Managing OUR stress

- What happens in you as the parent when your child gets upset? Do you feel a surge of emotion?
- To give them the empathy they need, we need to get centred
- Getting centred means becoming mindful of OUR feelings and acknowledging our feelings



We need to be centred to be genuinely empathetic

- From a place of frustration and stress, we can express caring words that are not genuine
- When our response is a bit cold, curt or dismissive, they'll likely be **more upset about our lack of empathy than the actual event**
- When our child feels cared for, our reassurances, empathy or problem solving tend to work better



Explore your triggers

- What's really going on for you as the parent in these situations?
- Is this a recurring issue for you? For your child? For both of you?
- If you have a reaction to your child complaining, they will be less successful in expressing their upsets and getting it out of their system



Take on the emotional project to process those feelings

- Maybe do some journaling
- Or take the issue into your meditation (hold it somewhere in your mind while you meditate)
- Talk it through with a listening partner or close friend
- Grab some paper “when my child complains, I feel ...” or “I hate when my child complains because”



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In the moment when your child is upset

- Try to take a moment to get centered (self-empathy)
- And genuinely connect with him, genuine empathy;
- “it IS hard isn’t it!”
“you wish that you had been with us today” (granting their wish in fantasy)



Effects of stress on children's behaviour

Hyperarousal response

- Hyperactivity, impulsivity, distractibility (ADHD symptoms)
- Aggression, violence
- Sleep disturbances
- Fears, anxiety, exaggerated startle response
- Frequent temper tantrums



Effects of stress on children's behaviour

Dissociation (numbing, shutting down)

- Withdrawal, isolation, passivity, resistance, unresponsive
- Self-stimulation (ex: thumb sucking, self rocking)
- Somatic complaints (ex: fatigue, headaches, aches & pains)



Membership resources to help you learn PP approaches

- Work through the PP Step by Step eCourse (7 modules), the Discipline without Punishment video eCourse, the 10 day Peaceful Parent Challenge.
- Resource kits: Meeting aggression with connection, Kids conflicts, Strong Willed Kids, Ending Parental Conflict
- Parent and child scripts
- Genevieve's videos and audios



Membership resources to help you better manage your stress

- The Overcoming Overwhelm eCourse
- Parenting when overwhelmed audio
- The Mindful Parenting Resource Kit
- The self-healing group
- Ending parental conflict resource kit
- Reach out and share in the forum

