

Teasing out the tantrums

Tantrums are an everyday occurrence for parents around the globe. Some are carried off with little fuss and are over within the blink of an eye, while others, unfortunately, seem to be vying for a place in the tantrum Olympics. The type of tantrum that is dealt with at the speed of a sneeze is by no means the type of incident that adults find themselves concerned with. Instead, it is the lengthier ones that leave them feeling like they have to be scraped off the floor with a spatula that bring the trials of childrearing into sharp focus.

While little can be done to obliterate the existence of tantrums from our lives completely, they can be lessened if the adult dealing with them is savvy to the reasons that make them exist in the first place. In this article two such reasons will be discussed.

What's the motivation?

When getting to the bottom of a tantrum it is helpful to be able to pinpoint what thought or action triggered it in the first place. As human beings, we are all susceptible to a belief system that correlates with our way of life. For example, believing in Santa Clause brings with it the belief to buy gifts to go under a decorated tree. If this belief system is disrupted then unhappiness would likely follow, for instance, waking up on Christmas Day and discovering no presents would invoke emotions ranging from disappointment to anger (depending on the individual).

The motivating factor behind a child's tantrum correlates in the same way as the above example, although it will not always be quite as obvious. For example, a child having a tantrum over not being allowed an ice-cream could be driven by as little as the child's belief that they should be allowed.

Being able to identify the motivation behind a tantrum can help direct the flow and severity of the pint-size eruption. For example, if a child's motivation rests with their belief that they should be allowed the ice-cream one of two things can be done. Firstly, the adult can state that the child is not having an ice-cream. Such a statement will naturally be met with an increase in emotional outpour, achieving nothing else than the adult's intended outcome of the encounter. This in itself is not bad, providing the adult has a strong resolve. Secondly, the adult can steer clear of mentioning anything about ice-creams, focusing on the child's direct feelings of sadness or anger only until the eye of the storm has passed. Once the bulk of emotional intensity has passed then conversations about the ice-cream whys and why nots can be had without a second flare-up.

An overload of emotion

Emotions are a wonderful thing, because even though we do not often acknowledge it, they help to guide us towards understanding when things are and are not right in our world. For the child who cries when they fall over their tears let us, and them, know that they need comfort. For the child who laughs loudly at a chicken crossing the road joke, joy lets them know they have found a true cord of happiness and that they should seek out other similar moments throughout their lives.

The shortfall of emotion is that it is easily influenced by different parts of our body, thus meaning that a minor unhappiness can be hijacked by multiple things, all of which have a negative effect on the part of our brain that helps to keep us cool, calm and rational. When rationality is lost, tantrums gain intensity.

It is fair to say that the less is more rule applies to instances where children are lacking the ability to remain rational. This means that when adults adopt a response to a child's tantrum they often do better if they say and do less. For example, trying to talk children off their tantrum ledge is less effective than riding out the storm with fewer words. Another less is more example might be when an adult wordlessly cuddles a child to help them calm down. The opposite of these examples is when an adult tries to lend the child their rational

thinking, offering up all the very valid reasons as to why the child should see the adult's point of view. Unfortunately this is often a ploy set to fail.

Gauging when to go into battle with a child is and always will be dependent upon a particular circumstance; however, one of the best ways to fashion a response is to understand if the brain has lost its rational plight. If it has, it can be wise to wait for rationality to tap on the windowsill once more before proceeding. Once rational thought is back on the road then the child will be more respectful to hear that the ice-cream, for now, is remaining tucked away in the freezer.

The long and short of it

No matter what, when children are near, tantrums will always exist. Tantrums are motivated by belief systems that ignite reactions within our body, some of which lead individuals to lose their ability to think and behave rationally. When rationality is lost it can be tempting for adults to lend children some of theirs; however, such attempts are rarely fruitful.

Instead, the less is more proverb comes into its own, meaning that less talk and action can yield greater results. The long and short of most situations involving tantrums is that talking must become as taboo as an unmarried man and woman living together in Victorian times. Adults who spend their time learning how to identify children's motivations can be afforded the luxury of knowing what words, if any, will help the child get their emotions back in control. When timed carefully, words and actions can work together to avoid repeat tantrums and help restore an equilibrium back into the day.

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