



## IS MY CHILD'S TEMPER TANTRUM NORMAL? DEFINING A TEMPER TANTRUM AND DIFFERENTIATING ITS FUNCTIONAL CAPACITIES

BY: ALI WEIN, MSW, LCSW

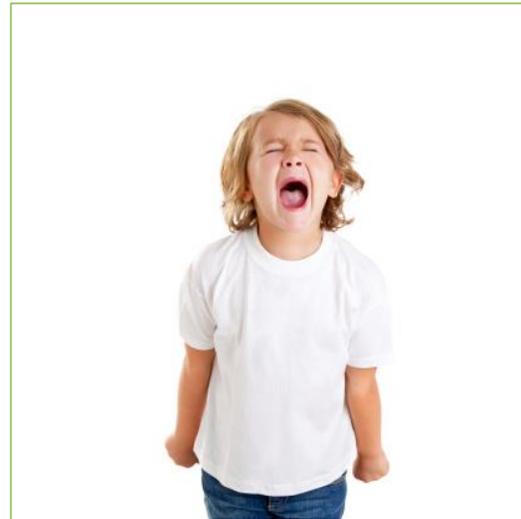
### WHAT IS A TEMPER TANTRUM?

A temper tantrum is a child's age-appropriate response to frustration and lack of control over his environment. With a reduced vocabulary to use to assert his needs and effectively resolve frustrations, behavioral and physical reactions occur.

### IS MY CHILD'S TEMPER TANTRUM NORMAL?

Deciding if a tantrum is normal or not is defined by several factors. The "normal" range for having temper tantrums is between ages 1-4.

Developmentally, it is at this time that children are still gaining mastery and control over their world and have fewer skills to manage frustration and cope with negative emotion. However, all children (and even adults) may be susceptible to having a temper tantrum when they feel overwhelmed. **But what defines the normalcy of these reactions lies in the recovery time, intensity, and nature of the response.** A typical tantrum can last anywhere from a couple of seconds to a couple of minutes. More intense reactions that involve violent or aggressive acts, limited success with self-soothing, and longer recovery time may be indicative of a more atypical response pattern. Additionally, since all children are liable to have a tantrum, another factor to consider is the frequency. According to a study conducted by researchers at Northwestern University, it was found that, "although temper tantrums among preschoolers are common, they are not particularly frequent; less than 10% of young children have a daily tantrum." The significance of this finding suggests that the frequency can determine tantrums as being problematic. If a child has frequent episodes of tantrums, has a long recovery time from becoming dysregulated, and has unidentified triggers for becoming upset, this can indicate atypical tantrums.



# Knowledge Nuggets

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO A CHILD'S TANTRUM:

- ★ **Age**- Does your child have the language and vocabulary to communicate their feelings?
- ★ **Awareness into how parents respond to the outburst**-Does the child know that the more violent and aggressive they get, the more likely it is his parents will give in?
- ★ **Sleep and Feeding**- Is the child tired or hungry? Being tired and hungry can reduce tolerance to frustration that could facilitate a negative, behavioral reaction.
- ★ **Clear triggering event**- If you know that asking your child to eat vegetables will make them become dysregulated, you can plan ahead and engage in de-escalating tactics to prevent huge, upset reactions.



## HOW TO RESPOND TO A CHILD'S TEMPER TANTRUM:

- ★ **Keep your emotions in check**-Despite the embarrassment, frustration, or helplessness you may feel as the result of a tantrum, staying calm and in control is imperative to reduce the duration of the tantrum. The more stressed out the parent gets, the more the child experiences the success in this mode of reaction.
- ★ **Stay firm and maintain boundaries and expectations**- If your goal is to get your child to bathe and they are resisting, keeping firm to your expectations will not only achieve your aim but will continue to educate your child that when you say something, compliance is key. Shifting your expectations and giving into non-compliance teaches your child that throwing a tantrum works and it then becomes a learned behavior to avoid non-preferred tasks.
- ★ **Ignore the behavior and stay calm**-Tell your child you love them and that you'll get through this with him. Model for your child what he is feeling, why he is feeling that way, and what positive things he can do when this request is completed. For example, hug your upset child and recite to him that he appears mad and frustrated because he doesn't want to take a bath and would rather read a story.
- ★ **Allow him to know that its ok to be mad** and that instead of crying, he can try the following choices:
  - 🌀 Take 10 deep breaths (i.e. blow up an imaginary balloon, blow trumpet)
  - 🌀 Use his words
  - 🌀 Think of a fun topic or story that can make bath time more pleasurable
  - 🌀 Then reinforce to him that he can do the preferred activity afterwards.

**Tantrums can be a difficult part of raising a young child. Contact us anytime at 847-486-4140 or [info@NSPT4kids.com](mailto:info@NSPT4kids.com) if you have questions or concerns about your child's tantrums.**