

**Parenting Discussion Group Article & Questions
For Parents of Children 6yrs and under
Topic: Tantrums**

Article: Who's in charge around here, Perspective Magazine, Adapted from Hacer Familia

Please read the following article and then answer the questions at the end of this document.

The Parenting Discussion group should not run for longer than an hour.
If you have any feedback about this topic or the questions used, please forward your comments to elisabeth@familyeducation.org.au

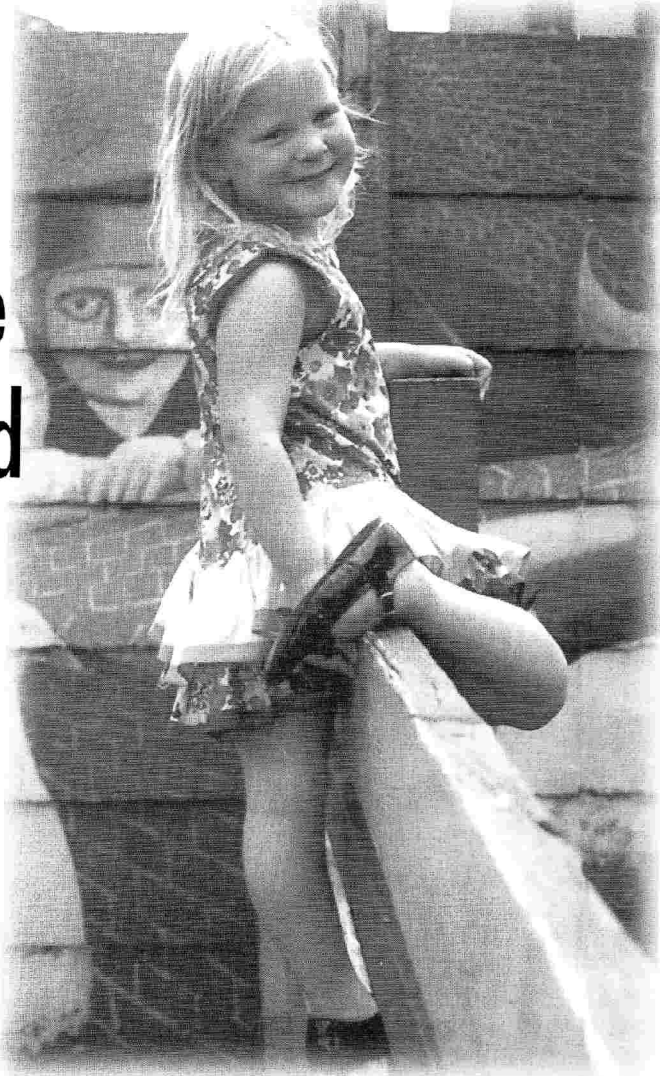
How to Manage the Small Group

- select a small group leader for the session
- know the time limit and organise time accordingly. Leave time for summing up at the end.
- try to include everyone without letting someone dominate
- don't let people talk too much about their own children.
- avoid unnecessary digressions. This can be done by refocusing the group's attention back on the question and using questions like:
 - "What does everyone else think?"
 - "Does everyone agree?"
 - "What about.....?" or
 - "Do you think....?"

YOUR kids



Who's in charge around here?



Sooner than you realise, children learn how worried grown-ups get when confronted with sobs and screams. But there is nothing to worry about when such incidents occur. On the contrary, they provide splendid opportunities to educate toddlers, to teach them how to obey, how to ask for things and how to behave.

The shrieks of a young child are not necessarily alarm bells. To a certain extent, they are only natural up to about the age of six. It is a time of life when most children feel insecure. They don't know how to handle strange situations and tantrums are often provoked by their own fears.

So don't think that a bout of screaming and shouting is the re-

sult of a deeply-rooted character defect. It's part of growing up and particularly, of strengthening a child's character with respect to his or her parents. From about 18 months, a child begins to become aware of his or her own personality, to realise he is different from his parents and that he has a will of his own.

This discovery leads him to behave in a way which reaffirms his own personality. He wants to assert that there is a difference between what he wants and what

Mum wants. In principle, this is a very positive development, so long as Mum and Dad don't allow it to become a tyranny of tears.

When an infant falls into a fit of rage, keep cool! Your serenity

will be transmitted to him. He has to realise that he will not win anything by violence. But neither should you cold-shoulder him and make him feel abandoned.

Sinking to his level and losing your temper will not calm him down. Instead, he will feel even more afraid and will weep harder. And if his sobbing stops, it may simply be through fear, which means that both of you have made a big step backwards in the job of educating him.

A violent response from Mum

or Dad, even if it is just slamming the door in frustration, simply makes a child feel more insecure and instills violent attitudes.

Even though you might feel — desperately — like putting a stop to this nonsense by shouting or giving him a good smack, the best response is to treat the incident as something unimportant. Allow him to cry alone for a few minutes. This will give him time to let off steam. Trying to stifle a protest delivered at the climax of the child's wrath will only provoke him to further heights of rage. When he has calmed down a bit, dry his tears affectionately and give him a big hug. Even if he pretends to resist, a cuddle is really what he wants from you.

Once the thunderstorm is over, when the air is no longer electric with *angst* and when he is reasonable, try to explain how badly he has behaved and how he ought to ask for things. Don't indulge yourself by accusing him of being naughty, selfish, crabby, etc. This will only make him feel needlessly guilty. What he should understand is that he behaved badly, but that you have forgiven him and that you trust him not to do it again.

There is always a reason for tantrums. Something is making the child feel helpless and afraid, however ridiculous it might appear to an adult. You should always try to get to the bottom of the matter — either by observing him from afar or chatting with him at his level, whether he is two, three or four.

The reason may be irrational or whimsical, but there will be a reason. Perhaps he is afraid of the magpies outside; perhaps he saw something frightening on the tellie; perhaps he can't open a drawer to get at his toys. It also

might be the case that he feels frustrated because you don't let him do anything and because he feels that all of his own initiatives are contradicted and quashed. In response to this he falls into repeated rages. In such situations, the best thing is to give in sometimes and make him toe the line on other occasions.

Mum and Dad have to make a common front against tantrums. If he sees that there is unity between his parents, the child will see that he has to be more civilised in the style of his requests.

Never should parents give in to angry demands. Perhaps later on you can give him whatever he is asking for, but he must grasp that angry scenes win him nothing. And above all, your decision to put your foot down should be unanimous. If there is a split, the child will learn to play one parent against another in a very clever way.

The causes of tantrums can be quite different, but many times what is happening is that a child is trying to test grownups' powers of resistance. Sobs and tears and wailing are his way of assessing how far he can go.

This is another good reason to keep your own temper in check. Anger shows him that it hurts you to refuse. If your resolve weakens visibly before his tears, then you can be sure that there is trouble ahead. You will find yourself besieged by more beguiling tactics — hugs, smiles, nagging, favours, and so on. The negotiations may be peaceful, but he gets his way in the end. This softness buys Mum and Dad a few years of peace — until an adolescent crisis develops and he wants something that you cannot possibly give.

*Adapted by Margaret-Maria
Dudley from Hacer Familia*



Tantrum tips

- *A child needs serenity, not hysteria or violence. If you cannot make him calm down quickly, let him cry for a few minutes by himself. Don't leave him alone for too long and don't smack him. If you stoop to his level of reasoning, he will only get angrier.*
- *When he has worn himself out and is calmer, give him a big hug and tell him how much you love him. Then tell him that he has been naughty and how he should have behaved. But make sure that he understands that you have for-*

given him, even if he can't have what he wants.

- *Don't trade words with him until the tantrum has blown over.*
- *If your child throws a tantrum because he wants something which is basically reasonable — to play outside, to have morning tea and so on — don't give in then and there. Later on, when things have calmed down, tell him that he must ask for things nicely and give him a second chance. This way, he learns from his own experience how to ask for things politely.*

Questions:

Q1) Share ideas on how to keep your cool when your child falls into a fit of rage.

Q2) Discuss ways to help children avoid throwing a tantrum. E.g: the way you speak to them, giving them choices etc

Q3) Discuss when you think it is a good time to reprimand your child and when to shower them with affection after a tantrum.

Q4) Discuss what you should do when your child is being destructive during a tantrum.