

# TANTRUMS, TEARS, AND FRUSTRATION IN KIDS

When children are emotionally charged and full of frustration they can lash out in tantrums, tears, and even aggression. Frustration is an emotion that stirs us up when we want something to change or want something to stop. When a child is frustrated a caring adult needs to decide if there is something that needs to be changed for the child or whether the child needs to adapt to the things that cannot change.



Children are born without understanding the limits and restrictions that are part of everyday life. This lack of 'programming' allows adults to help a child adapt to the environment they will be raised in. Caring adults can help present the realities of life to a child (the things that cannot, will not, should not change), and help them move through their emotions such as disappointment and sadness.



## Common Realities That Children Struggle With



- You can't hold onto good experiences
- You can't avoid failure
- You can't win all the time
- You can't be the best at everything
- You can't control people's decisions
- You can't do what whatever you want
- You can't avoid upset
- You can't send your sibling(s) away
- You can't possess your parent or anyone else
- You can't turn back time

## Helping a child to adapt and move to sadness

### 1 PRESENT REALITY



Identify what cannot and will not change without a big explanation so that a child is clear on your "no" (in a caring way)

### 2 MAKE ROOM FOR THEIR UPSET AND EXPRESSION OF EMOTION



Acknowledge and accept that they are frustrated by the limits or restrictions they face.

### 3 DRAW OUT SADNESS



Acknowledge and comfort a child who is stirred up and make room for their disappointment or tears.

## THREE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES TO FRUSTRATION

There are three possible outcomes when kids are frustrated, and adults can help steer towards CHANGE or ADAPTATION which will lead to emotional rest and well-being.

MAD  
Must Move  
to  
SAD

### FRUSTRATION



#### CHANGE



The adult works at changing what isn't working for the child or that needs to stop

Sometimes a child is hungry, tired, or upset and their frustration is an emotional signal that something isn't working for them. We can provide for a child's needs and reduce their frustration by altering the environment around them.

#### ADAPT



Help the child to adapt and accept what cannot change by supporting their sad emotions

When we acknowledge and come alongside a child's emotions it will help them to express their sadness and disappointment, make it safe to feel upset, or to cry. Telling a child to 'calm down,' or 'cut it out' can prevent adaptation as these statements interfere with vulnerable expression.

#### AGGRESSION



Attacks can happen when a child does not adapt and can't change what doesn't work.

Attacks like hitting, yelling, biting, acting mean, throwing, and screaming can occur. We need to focus on the frustration driving the attack and lead towards CHANGE or to ADAPT. If a child no longer expresses vulnerable emotions, (e.g., I am sad, scared, or I care), then we will need to restore these first before moving a child to adapt.

## WHAT TO DO WHEN A CHILD ATTACKS?

- Acknowledge their frustration
- Control the environment, not the child
- Lead through the impasse
- Convey that the relationship is okay
- Don't identify the child with their attack
- Talk to them when emotions are down
- Solicit good intentions for next time they are upset



Did you know that according to research, whining is the most annoying sound to the human ear?

## WHAT DOESN'T WORK AND WILL MAKE MATTERS WORSE:

- Telling a child ...
- To cut it out
- To calm down
- That it's not that bad
- That there is something wrong with them
- Punishing them



## THE GOOD NEWS!

With ideal development children will be able to control their frustration and think twice before they lash out in attacking behaviour (5 to 7 years of age or 7 to 9 for sensitive kids)

Based on the relational and developmental approach of Dr. Gordon Neufeld at the Neufeld Institute



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