

YOU AND YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR

A Guide for parents whose children
have tantrums



THIS
BOOKLET
CAN
HELP
YOU

	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	No: 3
2. SOME QUESTIONS	4
3. KEEPING A RECORD	5
4. CHANGING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR	7
• Change by Praise	8
• Main Points	9
• How to deal with "build-ups"	10
• How to deal with Tantrums	11
• Using a Star Chart	12
5. LAST POINTS	14
6. SAMPLE RECORD FORMS	15/16
7. STAR CHARTS	17/18
8. READING LIST	19

So, you have a problem with your child's temper tantrums.

First of all remember:

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Temper tantrums are common and the chances are that a number of the parents living around you are experiencing the same kind of problem with their child – you may even know some.

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

Remember, tantrums are common in children and children vary in their character just as adults do. Some children sail along smoothly with little effort from parents, but some children don't and those children need a little extra effort from you.

IT WON'T LAST FOR ALWAYS

It might seem endless now, but it will be a thing of the past one day. Most children's tantrum period is fairly short



YOU CAN CHANGE THIS PROBLEM

This Booklet has been made to help you manage your child's tantrums. We know that most of the time parents know how to manage their child's problems; sometimes, however, parents get stuck and need a bit of help, and tantrums are problems that many parents complain of.

The ideas in this booklet are not new – some of the ideas you may use already. What may be new to you is that rather than trying a few things [often at the same

time because you are “at your wits end”), instead you will be advised to follow one approach only, but to use it every time and to stick to your plan like glue.

HOW TO YOU KNOW IF IT’S A REAL PROBLEM ?

As far as we are concerned, it’s a problem if your child is often having tantrums and/or the tantrums are severe enough to worry you.

AND this has been causing problems in your family life for a number of weeks or months

AND you know that your child is not all. This is important – it is safest to have your child checked medically so that you can at least out that worry out of your mind and move on to do something about the tantrums.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THIS WILL WORK ?

We can tell you that many parents have been successful with this method. It is based on sound psychological theory [“learning theory”] with a precise set of guidelines and rules. Success varies from 100% to about 60% and to a large extent depends on how **exactly** you carry out your plan. What often happens is that parents are very successful in changing their child’s behaviour for a time and later when a check is made to find out if everything is still OJ [follow-up] the problem has returned to a slight extent. What this usually means is that the parents have “slipped” a bit and have forgotten to keep to the plan in every detail.

If you want to know more about the success of this method and how it has been used to solve other problems, we have included a reading list at the back of this booklet.

WHO HAS TRIED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE TEMPERS [Including yourself]: WHAT HAVE YOU/THEY TRIED ?

[Make a note here of anything **you** have tried and information from anyone else].

Often what happens if there is more than one person trying to deal with the problem, is that they are using different methods [sometimes unknown to each other]. And, sometimes there is open disagreement between people, e.g. mother and grandmother, husband and wife, about how to tackle things.

So, firstly you must have:

A UNITED APPROACH

Everyone who is having to deal with the tantrums has to agree on the **same** plan for managing the tantrums [what we do know from our research is that if even one person doesn't stick to the agreed plan and does something different, then the tantrums are likely to continue and may well increase].

KEEPING A RECORD

The first step in the plan is for you to make a careful note of just when tantrums are happening at the moment, how long they last, how they build up and how you are dealing with them and so on.

We find it helps if you divide up your information about the tantrums in a set way. It is called the 1,2,3 BEFORE/AFTER method.

What you need to know is this:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. BEFORE | What is happening before a tantrum, and how it builds up ? |
| 2. TANTRUM | How often it happens, how long it lasts, where does it happen, does it happen at certain times , does it happen with certain people and so on ? |
| 3. AFTER | This is about how you are dealing with the problem – what you do immediately after or during a tantrum |

Most parents have a great deal of information about their child's tantrums and this is very helpful, but often they don't know how to sort this information, or the information they have is not exact enough. When you keep good records, you will know exactly what is happening rather than feeling that it is happening "all the time" or thinking that it might be "when s/he's tired" and so on. Parents who

keep good records are much more likely to be successful in changing how their child behaves.

Here is an example of a problem and a record form. There are some record forms for you to use at the back of this booklet.

EXAMPLE OF A PROBLEM: Tom’s mother asked for help with his tantrums etc.

1. **BEFORE a tantrum:** Tom refused to do as he was asked, or ignored a “telling off”. When his mum told him again or told him off more strictly, things built up. Tom would begin to shout at her, then stamp his feet, scream and sometimes throw nearby things

2. **THE TANTRUM:** Tom’s mum kept a record. Tantrums happened 2/3 times a day, and each lasted about 20 minutes. Tantrums happened more at mealtimes. If Tom’s dad was there, tantrums did not happen so often, but if Tom’s older brothers and sisters were there, tantrums were more often. Tantrums did not happen at Tom’s grandparents’ house or at the play group.

3. **AFTER a Tantrum:** [Or when Tom’s mum saw the “warning signs”], she sometimes gave in. At other times, she stopped small treats like sweets and biscuits and sometimes she smacked him. Tom’s dad, on the other hand, always gave in – he said that although Tom won, at least he was quiet.

EXAMPLE OF COMPLETED RECORD FORMS

DATE: 27th May **TIME:** 8.25 am **EVENT:** Breakfast
PEOPLE PRESENT: Mum, Tom, James, John, Kate [older brothers and sister]

1. BEFORE	2. TANTRUM	3. AFTER
Mum told Tom to put down a spoonful of food he was waving. Tom ignored her. Mum told him off again, more sternly. Tom shouted, threw his food from his bowl and started screaming.	Tom lay down on the floor, screaming and stamping. His sister tried to speak to him. Tom continued	Mum at last gave him a biscuit to stop the tantrum as she wanted the children off to school.

HOW LONG DID THE TANTRUM LAST ? 12 minutes

DATE: 28th May **TIME:** 3.35 **EVENT:** Collecting children from school
PEOPLE PRESENT: Mum, Tom, John and Kate

1. BEFORE	2. TANTRUM	3. AFTER
<i>Mum told Tom to stop playing in a puddle outside the school. Tom ignored her. Mum pulled him away and Tom started screaming</i>	<i>Tom shouted and screamed at Mum, stamped his feet in the puddle</i>	<i>Mum promised him some sweets when they had collected James from school. Tom stopped the tantrum. Mum worried about being late for James and was "shown up" by everyone watching Tom at the school gates.</i>

HOW LONG DID THE TANTRUM LAST ? 5 minutes [Mum's guess]

Keep your record in the same way as the example for about a week before you try to change your way of dealing with the tantrums.

Please keep your records up even after you have started on your new way of managing the tantrums. This is very important because then you can see if things are improving, rather than just hoping they are. You will have real proof of change.

After you have kept your records for about a week, look at them carefully. Is there any pattern to your child's tantrums ? You may find that they usually happen at a certain time [e.g. in the evening] or at a certain event [e.g. mealtimes, being told "No"], or only with certain people.

You may also find that attention and pleasant things always or almost always follow a tantrum e.g. attention from others ["playing to the audience"], your attention [good or bad], being talked to, being cuddled/hugged, drinks, sweets, and so on. You may find that when you're busy or are embarrassed by other people seeing the tantrum, you give in and use some of these things. If this is what follows a tantrum, it is very important for your child to keep the tantrum going so that s/he can enjoy those rewards ! We will talk more about this later.

CHANGING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR

Before we can deal with tantrums, you need to look at when your child is good. This is know as "catch them being good" and is not as easy as it sounds. Many parents tend to expect their children to be good naturally and they fall into the trap of **ignoring** good behaviour. This usually breeds problems because children like getting attention. If they can't get your attention by behaving well, then they will get it by behaving badly.

The other important reason for looking at good behaviour in your child is that if you are going to try and wipe out the bad behaviour [tantrums], you need to put something good in it's place. If you don't and there is a gap which used to be filled by your attention [remember how much time and attention you have already spent on those tantrums !], then your child will fill that gap with poor behaviour. We find that some parents think that it's best to leave the child well clone while

s/he is being good “in case they set it off again”. **Please remember, you cannot expect success by trying to wipe out a problem behaviour and leaving a vacuum in its place.**

So, let’s learn about **CHANGE BY PRAISE.**



Your praise is a powerful way of changing your child’s behaviour. Praise tells your child you are pleased with what s/he has done. It gives your child attention for behaving well. If you praise good behaviour, your child learns to get your attention by behaving well. Children also like cuddles and hugs when you are pleased and sometimes small rewards. When you give praise, your child feels good and you feel good by giving it.

HOW TO USE PRAISE

Here are some helpful hints on how to use praise to change your child’s behaviour.

- Praise needs to be given **immediately** after the behaviour you want more of. Delay in praise only confuses your child about what you want.
- Praise needs to be **clear**. Your child needs to know exactly what you are pleased about.

For example, better to say “You’re very good to put your toys in the cupboard”
And “you’re being good today”.

Better to say “ you’re being very good at eating up your breakfast” than “ you’re better today”.

- Praise needs to be given **each and every time** your child is doing something you want to encourage more of. If it’s new, good behaviour, praise it every time so that the good behaviour is well established.
- Praise needs to be the same from everyone. Make sure everyone involved agrees on what you want to encourage the child to do more of, and then all do the same.
- Praise small improvements as they happen. Don’t expect change to all in one go, and don’t give up.

For example, Jo was taking half an hour to get dressed, and this sometimes ended with a tantrum as mum tried to get her to hurry up.

Lets look at it this way:

Jo takes half an hour to get dressed

- Encourage her to do it in 25 minutes.
 - When she takes 25 minutes, praise her, and when this is well established, encourage her to do it in 20 minutes.
 - Repeat this until she is dressing in good time.
 - Remember, small steps make it easier.
- Small rewards, like praise, should be given **soon after** the behaviour you want more of. They don't have to be anything special: an extra story, a favourite pudding, a walk to the park.
 - The promise of a reward can help to encourage the behaviour you want. For example **“after** you've put your toys away, I'll read you a story”, **“after** you've tidied up your room, we'll go to the park”.

MAIN POINTS ABOUT PRAISE

1. Praise needs to be given **immediately** after the behaviour you want more of.
2. Praise needs to be **clear**.
3. Praise needs to be given **each and every time** after the behaviour you want more of.
4. Praise needs to be **the same** from everyone.
5. Praise **small** improvements – don't expect big changes in one go.
6. Small treats and rewards, like praise, should be given soon after the behaviour you want more of.

HOW TO DEAL WITH “BUILD-UPS”

Sometimes, you are going to have to deal with your child's poor behaviour. Before we get to the real tantrums, lets look at other ways of dealing with your child before it reaches a proper tantrum. Most parents know the “warning” signs of a tantrum, and usually the message is **“get in quick”**. Also, many parents know the places and times their child is likely to have a tantrum – for example, when told “No” in the supermarket or shops; the message here is **“get in early”**.

With many children, you are likely to know in advance the trouble spots, and you will have to change how you deal with these events. Like the child who likes to ride on the bus from the shops, and today you need to walk; or the child who shows you up at the check-out by demanding sweets or else a tantrum.

Better to plan it like this “ Today we’re walking home. If you walk home nicely, then we’ll have (favourite lunch) for lunch.

Or before you go into the supermarket “ When we’ve finished shopping and you’ve been good, then we’ll have some crisps / go to the swings / some sweets / a rosy apple” (whatever is a good reward for your child).

The secret is to plan and to try and see where trouble might happen.

Let’s go back to early “warning” signs, when you have to say “No” and so on, and you know that your child is likely to object / not co-operate, it is better to get in quick again and remind the child about what happens for good behaviour.

For example:

“When you’ve finished dressing, you can have some (favourite drink / favourite cereal)”.

“When you’ve put away your things, then we’ll play (a favourite game)”.

Remember too, once you have said something like this, stick to it. If you break the rules (by giving in or doing something else), then you can expect your child to break the rules by poor behaviour. **Do not strengthen bad behaviour by giving in.**

HOW TO DEAL WITH TANTRUMS

There are times when tantrums will still happen even if you have followed the new rules of change by praise. It may be that you have decided that it is something you cannot allow your child to get away with, and it turns into a tantrum. It also may be that your child has been having lots of tantrums and they won’t go away all at once even if you are trying out new ways with praise and rewards.



This is where we use **TIME OUT**. This means removing the child to a place where s/he is not rewarded with attention. Many parents use the child’s bedroom, or outside the main room such as a hall or the bottom step of the stairs. What is important about this method is that the child gets

no attention for bad behaviour. But there are important rules to remember when you use time out: -

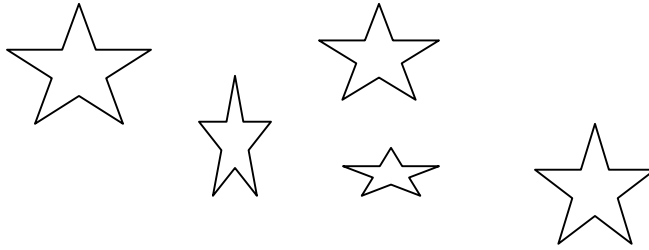
- RULE 1 Remove your child from the scene immediately s/he has a tantrum. Do not threaten or argue – act.
- RULE 2 **Do not use TIME OUT for long periods.** About 5 minutes is often enough for most children. Tell your child that when s/he is calm / stopped screaming you will bring him/her back in. Use words that your child understands.
- RULE 3 **Whenever** your child is calm, bring him/her back.
- RULE 4 When your child has returned, do **not** talk about the tantrum. Remember any attention (even your angry attention) is likely to keep the tantrums happening.
- RULE 5 If you're going to use TIME OUT, you will have to find a way of giving your child more attention for good behaviour (that is, no tantrums). We would advise you to use a special star chart. There are two sample star charts for you to use at the end of this booklet.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If your child has been having lots of tantrums for sometime, we can warn you that **it often gets worse before it gets better**. This is because your child has become used to your attention (and probably others!) for his/her tantrums. When you cut off your attention by removing your child and using time out, s/he will object strongly and is likely to try and keep up the screaming/shouting/and so on for as long as s/he can. After all, the tantrums have been a good way of getting your attention in the past and suddenly that has stopped – but your child hasn't had time to learn the new rules yet, so s/he is likely to stick with the old behaviour and even more so! This is what we mean by getting worse before it gets better.

It is very important that you do not give in during this time and “rescue” the child. Even if you only occasionally “give-in”, this will **increase** the tantrums. Have you noticed how people keep on going with one-armed bandits (a win now and again) yet wouldn't keep on going with an empty drinks machine (no win!).

Also, if time out seems very harsh to you, we think that from the child's point of view, that 5 minutes in the bedroom/hall/other suitable place is better than being sent to bed early/losing out on other rewards/being smacked or a parent losing their temper.

USING A START CHART



A very helpful way of strengthening your child’s good behaviour is to use the “prize” of a star chart. From your records you will know how often tantrums are happening, and then you can decide how often you need to use the star chart during each day. Simply put, if the tantrums are happening often, you will need to use the chart often. Divide the chart into chunks of time.

For example, if your child is sometimes having 2/3 tantrums during the morning and a few more during the day, better to have a chart like this: -

MONDAY							
BEFORE BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST	BEFORE LUNCH	LUNCH	EARLY AFTERNOON	LATE AFTERNOON		

Or you may do it by time: -

MONDAY							
7.30 – 10am	10 – 12.30	12.30 – 2pm	2 – 3.30pm	3.30 – 5pm	5 – 6.30pm	6.30 – 8pm	

For every period of time that your child behaves well (no tantrums) s/he earns a sticker/star to put on the chart. Most children like to do this themselves – it is part of the prize. Let the child choose where to pin up the chart, and let him/her earn a sticker **immediately** after each slot of time. Remind the child each time why s/he

has earned the sticker – “for getting dressed/for eating all your breakfast/for helping mummy tidy up” and give lots of praise. With your help, your child may also like to draw his/her own chart.

Here are some ideas for prizes: -

1. Things to eat – e.g. favourite fruit, crisps, nuts and raisins, a few sweets, or a favourite food you know of.
2. Things to do – games that the child really likes e.g. playing with water, making a model, a favourite story, a trip to the park.
3. A special treat – “helping with baking”, “getting the paints out and painting mum/dad”.
4. 4. Money – a few pence in a moneybox or special jar.

Remember – probably the best prize is your attention and praise.



The last stage is to take your child off the star chart, and the message here is **small steps**. If you are giving your child a small prize for each sticker, the next step is to give a prize after 2 stickers, for a few days. Then try 3 stickers before s/he gets his/her reward, and so on. If you're going too fast and your child becomes difficult again, move back a step. After a time, you should be able to go through

a whole day and then give a sticker and a prize at the end of the day. Then you do it after 2 days, and so on, until you have slowly faded out the chart.

But, remember; never fade out your praise and attention for good behaviour.

DANGEROUS BEHAVIOUR:

Some behaviour is dangerous to your child and/or to others and cannot be ignored. You then have to physically remove or stop your child.

But remember: -

- Do it quickly
- Tell your child (briefly) why you are doing it.

LAST POINTS:

1. It is important to try some of the plans given in this booklet even if they fail the first few times.

DON'T GIVE UP! Remember sometimes a child's behaviour can get worse when you begin to try and change it. Expect it to take at least a few weeks before you see a real change. Keep up the records.

2. There is no magic plan for each child. Your child may not take to all of the ideas in the booklet but we think s/he'll take to some.
3. Following the ideas and plans in this booklet may at first be a bit of extra work. It is a good idea to think of someone who can give **you** help and support, and encourage you to keep going.
4. If the problem seems to be getting worse and worse, contact your G.P. or Health Visitor again, or come back to us – our address and telephone number are at the end of the booklet.

RECORD FORMS

DATE:

TIME:

EVENT:

PEOPLE PRESENT:

1. BEFORE	2. TANTRUM	3. AFTER

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HOW LONG DID THE TANTRUM LAST?

DATE:

TIME:

EVENT:

PEOPLE PRESENT:

1. BEFORE	2. TANTRUM	3. AFTER

HOW LONG DID THE TANTRUM LAST?

RECORD FORMS

DATE:

TIME:

EVENT:

PEOPLE PRESENT:

1. BEFORE	2. TANTRUM	3. AFTER

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HOW LONG DID THE TANTRUM LAST?

DATE:

TIME:

EVENT:

PEOPLE PRESENT:

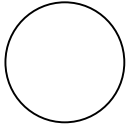
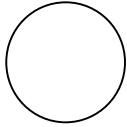
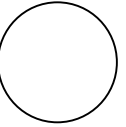
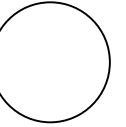
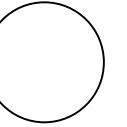
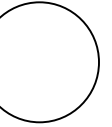
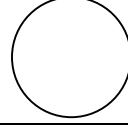
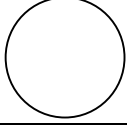
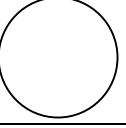
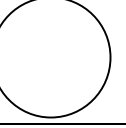
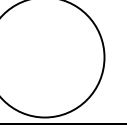
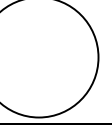
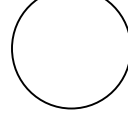
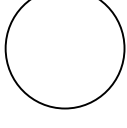
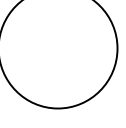
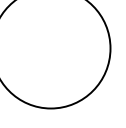
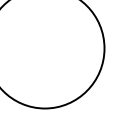
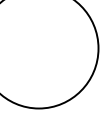
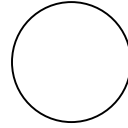
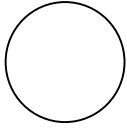
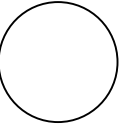
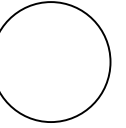
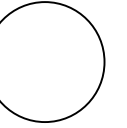
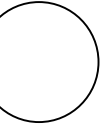
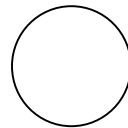
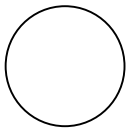
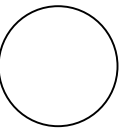
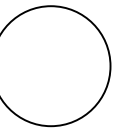
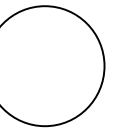
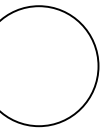
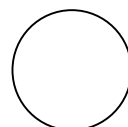
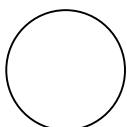
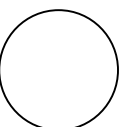
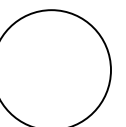
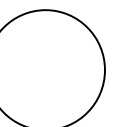
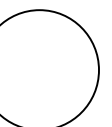
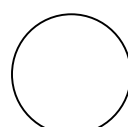
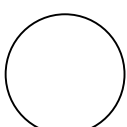
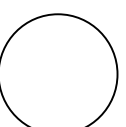
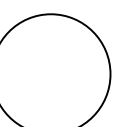
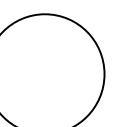
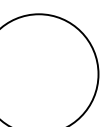
1. BEFORE	2. TANTRUM	3. AFTER

HOW LONG DID THE TANTRUM LAST?

Perhaps allow the child to 'personalise' the chart by colouring it in or drawing patterns or funny faces in the spaces.

STAR CHART






















	7.30 -10am	10-12.30	12.30-2pm	2 – 5pm	5-6.30pm	6.30-bed
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MONDAY						
TUESDAY						
WEDNESDAY						
THURSDAY						
FRIDAY						
SATURDAY						
SUNDAY						

STAR CHART

THIS CHART BELONGS TO.....

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING	
--	---------	-----------	---------	--

MONDAY				TOTAL.....
TUESDAY				TOTAL.....
WEDNESDAY				TOTAL.....
THURSDAY				TOTAL.....
FRIDAY				TOTAL.....
SATERDAY				TOTAL.....
SUNDAY				TOTAL..... GRAND TOTAL.....

READING LIST

“Help These Kids are Driving Me Crazy” by R. Carter (1972), Research Press, Illinois
 “Seven Supertactics for Super Parents” by Kevin Wheldall, NFER-NELSON (1985)

More Advanced Reading

“Behavioural Treatments with Children” by Roger Morgan, Heinmann Books (1984)

“Behavioural treatments of Problem Children” by Martin Herbert, Academic Press (1981)

“Child Behavioural Problems: An Empirical Approach to Management” by R. McAnley and P. McAnley, New York: Macmillan (1977)

This booklet was revised on 9th December 2004