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## Goals

### Reflect:

- ⇒ Childhood Experiences with Tantrums
- ⇒ Caregiver Experiences Responding to Tantrums

### Learn:

- ⇒ Tantrum Arc & Response Suggestions

### Practice & Plan:

- ⇒ Choosing Strategies and Self-Care
- ⇒ Self-Reflection and Self-Care

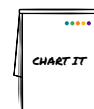
## Key



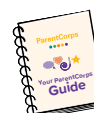
**Read out loud**  
(purple text)



**Facilitator information**



**Chart it**



**ParentCorps Guide prompts**



**Session notes**

# Facilitator Preparation

## Tools and Links

### Tools for Session:

➡ ParentCorps Guide

➡ Link to [weareparentcorps.org/caregiver](https://weareparentcorps.org/caregiver)

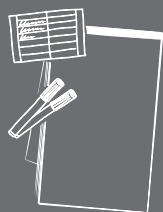
### Personal Examples to Prep

➡ Before you facilitate this session, remember to consider how caregivers are judged differently when their children exhibit challenging behaviors in public depending upon who they are, where they are, how they appear, etc. Also consider how these factors impacted your experiences with tantrum as a child, and now as an adult.

➡ Complete the prompts on **page five** to reflect on how you experience stress and decide what you will share with the group.



### In-Person Considerations and Materials



If possible, place tables and chairs in a way that enables everyone to see one another.

Have the following facilitator materials ready: markers, pens, name tags, flip chart, attendance sheet and feedback form.

## Activity & Charting Prep

➡ Consider typing (if virtual) or writing out on chart paper (if in-person):

CAREGIVER STRESS AND OVERWHELM

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS DURING A TANTRUM

TANTRUM TYPES

TANTRUM ARC

REACH OUT  
TO YOUR  
PARENTCORPS  
COACH,  
AS NEEDED!

## Tech Time & Welcome (5-10 minutes)

- ➡ Welcome new and returning caregivers as they join.
- ➡ If virtual, support any technology troubleshooting.
- ➡ Remind caregivers what they might want nearby for the session (paper and writing utensil, water, etc.).

## Self & Community Care (5-10 minutes)



### Check-In

? How are you all doing?



Participants may need to utilize this part of the session more on some days. Use your clinical judgment to decide how to weave whatever comes up here into the session's topics.

### Self-Forgiveness

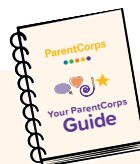
We start each session with an activity related to self and community care. Today we will focus on the power of self-forgiveness. Having small children can be very challenging and **it is normal to find yourself feeling frustrated or angry, and then in turn experience guilt or shame.**

It is important to give ourselves grace and accept the range of feelings and experiences that come with the difficult work of caregiving. I am going to share three self-forgiveness statements with you today. I invite you to repeat them after I read each one. I will go through the statements twice.

- 1. I acknowledge my faults and forgive myself completely.**
- 2. I let go of all urges to criticize myself.**
- 3. I exchange my shame and anger for self-love and self-compassion.**

? How did it feel to say or hear those words?

Thank you for your participation.



Your **ParentCorps Guide** contains a **self-care** activity in each chapter.

# Bring it Back (5 minutes)



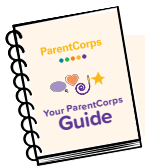
Today we are going to talk about tantrums. Before we do that, let's check in about last week's topic and strategy.

**? Does anyone want to talk about anything from last week?  
What do you remember from last week?**

Last week, we discussed how and why we make the discipline choices we do. We also shared two strategies — Active Ignoring and Effective Follow-Through — that can be tools to support you with your discipline goals for your children.



If short on time, skip these prompts and give a quick overview of the last session.



Your **ParentCorps Guide** includes a summary of each week's **session topic**. We encourage you to bring it each week to the group.

# Content (40-50 minutes)



## Intro to Tantrums

In today's session, we will spend time discussing how we experience and respond to one of the more challenging behaviors children exhibit: tantrums. When we say tantrum, we mean a **behavioral and emotional outburst**.

As we talked about in prior sessions, tantrums and crying are normal for pre-K children who are still learning to make sense of strong emotions like anger, frustration, sadness or disappointment.

Even though tantrums are normal, they can be overwhelming for caregivers. It can be very difficult to think clearly and react calmly when your child is having a big behavioral or emotional outburst. Today, we will reflect on our experiences responding to our children's tantrums, discuss some of the typical characteristics of tantrums, and explore strategies to respond to tantrums.

We respond to tantrums based on a variety of factors — how we were raised, our culture, our personal experiences and personality, our child's personality, our beliefs about how children should act and about how to parent, and more.

Given all of these factors, each of you, as caregivers, **has to find strategies to respond to tantrums that work for you, your children, and your families.**

## Big Feeling Reflection

**?** What does it look and feel like when you are overwhelmed and stressed out?

Thank you for sharing.

We all have moments when we feel overwhelmed by strong emotions. These moments may look different for each of us. As an adult, you may feel the need to yell or cry when you're stressed out. You may also have learned ways to handle strong emotions from your childhood. Or, perhaps you received messages that you should not show or express strong emotions at all. Whether or not you express them out loud to others, **strong emotions affect both our bodies and our minds.**

Now let's focus on times when your child is having a tantrum.



### Chart it.

Reflect and affirm caregiver responses. Look for and reflect similarities among caregivers' experiences.

CAREGIVER  
STRESS AND  
OVERWHELM

Reflect and affirm what caregivers share. Be prepared to share a personal example that you feel comfortable sharing with the group.

What does it look and feel like when you are overwhelmed or stressed out?



? What thoughts and feelings come up for you when your child is tantruming?



Chart it.



It may be helpful to ask parents to think about a specific real life example. For example, “My child refused to put on their pajamas at bedtime and that experience really made me feel angry.” Or, “My child tantrums at the grocery store when I tell them, for the 100th time, that they are not getting any candy. I feel embarrassed, and like a bad parent.”

Give caregivers time to recall these moments when their child misbehaves.

Thank you for sharing.

It can be really difficult to think clearly and react calmly in the face of a tantrum. As we’ve discussed in previous sessions, we all hold beliefs about **how we want to parent**. Sometimes we make choices consistent with our beliefs, and sometimes we react in the moment because of how we’re feeling, who is watching, or how stressed we are.

Many of the strategies we’ve discussed in other sessions are useful in preventing tantrums. These include setting aside time to play with your child, giving a reminder or warning when transitioning to a new task, having consistent routines in place, and teaching about identifying and responding to feelings.

However, even with all of these proactive strategies in place, young children are still bound to have tantrums. Tantrums are developmentally appropriate for young children. They are **small humans with big feelings**.

## Typical Tantrum Responses

Just like adults, children can become overwhelmed by big emotions. And, just like adults, how these feelings are expressed will look different for different children. **Whether your child is sad and tearful, or angry and yelling, the underlying cause of a tantrum is the same: an overwhelming emotion.**

So, the first place to respond to the tantrum is to focus on the emotion, and not on discipline. Tantrums do not necessarily require discipline.

**We are not suggesting that any and all behaviors are okay and acceptable when a child tantrums, especially if anyone is put in danger.** Instead, what we are suggesting is this: **if a tantrum involves behaviors that do warrant a consequence, focus on the emotion first, and then come back to the discipline later, if needed.**

A tantrum is a form of communication. Children are showing us that they are struggling. Young children tend to tantrum because they are in emotional distress, and they want or need something they can't express with words. They are learning to cope with their big feelings, and are sometimes unable to make sense of strong emotions like anger, frustration, sadness or disappointment.



As adults we tend to interpret and respond differently to different kinds of tantrum behaviors. This is often based on:

## 1. What we think and feel about a child's "reason" for the tantrum:





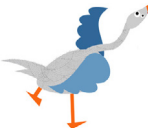
- If we believe the child has a good reason for being upset, we're more likely to have a gentle, understanding approach.
- When we can't make sense of why a child is tantruming – e.g., they usually use their words and should "know better," or we believe they have no good reason to tantrum and are overreacting – we often react more harshly.

## 2. How a child expresses their overwhelming emotions:

- Children may express the same emotion in many different ways, and forms of expression may also change day to day for one child.

## Types of tantrum behaviors

Here are some common responses to what may be the same overwhelming emotion. These types of tantrum behaviors are organized by animal (based on the work of Dr. Yamalis Diaz). I invite you to think about which of these animals sounds most like your own young child.

<p><b>Prickly Porcupine</b></p>  <p><b>Mood</b> Angry Irritable</p> <p><b>Behaviors</b> Aggressive May: yell, hit, insult, etc.</p>	<p><b>Sad Bunny</b></p>  <p><b>Mood</b> Anxious Fearful Sad</p> <p><b>Behaviors</b> May: cry or curl up</p>	<p><b>"Stand Still" Turtle</b></p>  <p><b>Mood</b> Anxious Fearful</p> <p><b>Behaviors</b> May: freeze, not respond</p>	<p><b>"Freak Out" Fox</b></p>  <p><b>Mood</b> Panic</p> <p><b>Behaviors</b> Restless May: appear worried or agitated</p>	<p><b>Silly Goose</b></p>  <p><b>Mood</b> Overstimulated Hyperactive Sensory-seeking</p> <p><b>Behaviors</b> May: run around, climb, talk fast, etc.</p>
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Your ParentCorps Guide includes a visual of the different types of tantrum behaviors.

Adapted from Yamalis Diaz (2021).

- ⇒ Some of these tantruming behaviors, like the Sad Bunny or the Anxious Turtle, may be seen as less "intense," and easier to empathize with. We may be more likely to respond in a gentle and comforting way.
- ⇒ Other tantrum behaviors, like the Prickly Porcupine, Freak Out Fox or Silly Goose, may be more aggressive or disruptive. We may respond to these types of behaviors more harshly, with more anger than empathy.

It is understandable that some behaviors may make us more upset or irritated than others. It's easier to remain calm when a child is crying quietly than if they're hitting us. But, we want to try to remember that **children experience strong emotions, stress, and frustration the same way adults do, and have fewer tools to handle them.**

# Content



Tantrums, whether they involve silent tears or hitting and screaming, are communicating the same thing: “I am overwhelmed and need support.”

Keeping this in mind (which can be very difficult in the midst of a tantrum!) can help us empathize and support our children through the most challenging moments, whether they are acting like the porcupine, or the bunny.

- ❓ Would anyone like to share which animal seems most like your child, and why? Are they more bunny, porcupine, turtle, fox, goose or something else?



Reflect and affirm caregiver responses. Acknowledge the different challenges caregivers face with the different tantrum behaviors their children exhibit. Turtles may seem “easier” for those caregivers whose children tantrum like porcupines or foxes. Draw connections between the feelings caregivers experience when their children tantrum, regardless of the type of tantrums their children have.

## Tantrum Arc

Even though they may look different for different children, tantrums generally follow a consistent pattern:

1. A **heating up**, where a child is becoming increasingly agitated.
2. A **peak boiling over point**, when those tantrum behaviors happen (Prickly Porcupine, etc.)
3. And, finally, a **cooling down**, when a child comes back to a calmer state.



Prepare to share the Tantrum Arc on your screen if virtual.



Your ParentCorps Guide includes a visual of the Tantrum Arc.

Adapted from Yamalis Diaz (2021).





Here are effective ways to respond to the different phases of a tantrum, suggested by Dr. Yamalis Diaz:

## Trigger/Heating Up:

⇒ **Focus on the feeling**, like we talked about with the FEEL technique:

- **Name and validate the feeling**, in a calm way, why the child might be upset. Ex: *“You seem angry you can’t get the candy. I understand why that would make you mad.”* You can try this once or twice, but stop if the child is not responding.
- **Avoid asking questions or making demands**, as the child is likely too overwhelmed to really hear them. We acknowledge that this may feel hard to do, especially in public. However, this is important to try.
- As a caregiver, **it is not your job to make strong feelings go away** for your child. This may be new information we are sharing. Expressing strong feelings is healthy and necessary for child development. Your job is to provide a safe place for a child to share strong emotions, where they can expect acceptance and validation.

## Peak:

- ⇒ When your child is exhibiting their most intense tantrum behaviors (often the hardest moment for you and them), your most important job is to **make sure your child is safe**. You might calmly say, “I cannot allow you to hurt yourself or others.” Stand in the way of or remove items being used and/or other people, when possible.
- ⇒ **Remain calm**. We know this is so much easier said than done, yet the more reactive we are, the more reactive a child will become.
- ⇒ **Encourage coping strategies**, but try only once or twice. If it's not helping, stop.
- ⇒ In a calm voice, **remind them of expectations**. Ex: *“I know you're really upset, but it is not safe to throw things, so I have to take this away from you.”*
- ⇒ **Avoid mentioning negative consequences or trying to implement them**. This will come later, if needed.

**Note:** *As much as possible, we want children to practice calming down without us. As adults, we often try to stop the emotion or control the situation, and neither of these helps children learn what they can do to calm themselves down.*

## Cooling down:

- ⇒ Give **positive attention** to reinforce the behaviors that helped them calm down (if your child isn’t responding positively, stop).
- ⇒ Try **distraction**, by bringing up something that interests the child. Ex: *“Oh, I forgot to tell you about what I saw on the way to the store yesterday. It was the biggest crane I had ever seen, right down the street!”*



## Once the tantrum has passed...

When everyone is calm, you can revisit the experience as an opportunity to reflect and learn new skills. You might say: “Earlier today you were really upset and screaming. Do you want to talk about how you were feeling? What can we do when you feel like that next time?”

As a caregiver, you may need time to really feel calm before doing this with your child, so you’re not rehashing the child’s tantrum in an angry way.

If your child doesn’t want to talk about it, you can still praise them for their positive calming down behaviors.

If they are willing and ready to look at what happened, you could use the first two parts of the FEEL technique to support them in expressing their feelings and thinking about what they can do next time.

- ⇒ **Focus on the Feeling:** “I know you were so sad and mad earlier that you couldn’t have candy from the store. That makes sense. I sometimes get upset when I can’t have the things that I want too. It is okay to be sad and mad.”
- ⇒ **Explore Possible Solutions:** “What do you think helped you calm down or feel better?” “What can I do next time to help you feel better?”
- ⇒ **If the child’s behavior broke a rule and needs a consequence:**
  - **Reinforce the child’s positive behaviors** in calming down. Ex: “*Great job calming down. I saw you take a break alone in your room. That was a good idea.*”
  - **Remind them of the rule and consequence.** Ex: “*I know you were upset, it makes sense. And, we have a rule: no throwing things because someone could get hurt. When you throw things, the consequence is X.*”
  - **Praise and reinforce the child again** for calming down and for accepting the consequence of their actions. Ex: “*It is very frustrating to not get what you want, and you are doing a good job staying calm.*”

Although these are tools to support your child through tantrums, we acknowledge that even with all sorts of tools, **tantrums are stressful!** It is okay to be frustrated or embarrassed by your child’s tantrum, even if you know that the tantrum is developmentally appropriate.

The big takeaway: when possible, try to **respond first to the feeling** or underlying emotion, reaffirming that you are a safe space that will accept them and their feelings regardless of their behavior. Then, when the child is calm, address the behavior.

- ❓ **So, that was a lot. What might it be like to focus on your child’s feelings instead of going right to consequences? What, if any of this, fits with your culture, your parenting style, or your goals?**

## Public Tantrums

When a child behaves in challenging ways in public, it is common for caregivers to feel judged by observers.

A tantrum, especially a public one, can feel like your child is **intentionally acting up**. As challenging as it may be, remember that a tantrum is their way to express feelings and emotions that they may not have the language for.

Other people watching makes it even more difficult to choose a strategy in real time. It is very common to feel like you **have to stop a tantrum** to avoid others' judgment. Also, it is not always possible or comfortable to "make space for" tantruming, especially at places like the grocery store or on the train.

In these situations, you may find it helpful to gently hold your child or physically remove them from the environment, if that is possible.

 **How is all of this sitting with you?**




Reflect and affirm responses.

## Practice & Plan (10 minutes)

### Self-Reflection and Self-Care

As you think about how you might respond next time your child has a tantrum, it is also important to think about **how to take care of yourself in those very difficult moments**. Challenging behaviors can make your body tense up, your hands clench, and anger rise up inside you.

 **What are some things you can do to take care of yourself in those difficult situations?**



Reflect and affirm responses. If time allows, return to the self and community care activity and repeat the three self-forgiveness meditation statements:

1. I acknowledge my faults and forgive myself completely
2. I let go of all urges to criticize myself.
3. I exchange my shame and anger for love and self-compassion.

# Wrap-Up (10 minutes)



We hope that you will come next week and share what worked for you and what did not.

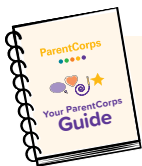
**? What is one thing you're taking with you from today's session or something you are feeling differently about?**

Thank you so much for joining us today! We hope to see you next week for our last group together!

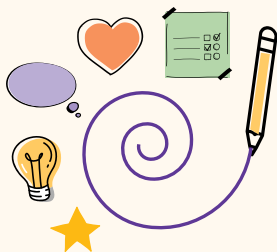


Share [weareparentcorps.org/caregiver](https://weareparentcorps.org/caregiver) where tools can be found.

Share info for next session.



Your **ParentCorps Guide** has the **list of our weekly topics**. We encourage you to bring your Guide next week.



## SESSION NOTES