

SUPPORTIVE MINDS

PARENT GUIDE • TANTRUMS

Tantrum Behavior Blueprint™

Understand the purpose. Change the pattern. Teach the replacement
skill.

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE™

Guided by understanding. Driven by purpose. United by possibility.

What is a tantrum?

A tantrum is an emotional and behavioral response that often occurs when a child wants something, wants to avoid something, is frustrated by a limit, or has learned that escalation changes the outcome. The child generally retains more awareness of people, boundaries, and results than during a meltdown.

Important: A tantrum is not always carefully planned, and it still reflects an unmet skill or need. It is not proof that a child is “bad” or manipulative.

TANTRUM

The child is communicating a want, avoiding something, expressing frustration, or repeating a strategy that has worked. Calm boundaries and skill teaching remain possible.

MELTDOWN

Capacity is disappearing. The child may lose access to language, choices, familiar skills, or awareness of the original goal. Switch to safety, fewer demands, and co-regulation.

Switch plans when needed: A tantrum can escalate into a meltdown. When capacity is lost, stop boundary-teaching in the moment and use the Meltdown C.O.R.E. Path™.

Step 1: find the function

Begin with: "What does the child get, avoid, communicate, or change through this behavior?"

GAIN SOMETHING

Toy, snack, screen, activity, attention, or preferred outcome.

Ask: What happened immediately after? Did the child gain something?

AVOID SOMETHING

Task, transition, limit, social situation, or uncomfortable demand.

Ask: Was something delayed, removed, or completed for the child?

COMMUNICATE FRUSTRATION

The child may lack a reliable way to say "no," "wait," "help," or "I need a choice."

Ask: What message might this express?

REPEAT A LEARNED PATTERN

The behavior has worked before, so the brain expects it to work again.

Ask: Has the response unintentionally made escalation effective?

Step 2: respond before 60

	Requests, protests, or shows disappointment
	Repeats the request or begins bargaining
	Voice rises; arguing increases
	Cries, drops, refuses, or demands
	Yells, throws, or tests the boundary
	Escalated behavior - or capacity may be disappearing

The child's 10-20 signals:

The child's 30-40 signals:

The child's 50-60 signals:

Steps 3-6: the response blueprint

03 • Regulate yourself

Slow down. Use a neutral voice and relaxed body. Avoid arguing, threatening, bargaining, lecturing, or matching intensity.

Say: "I hear that you're upset. The answer is still no."

04 • Hold the boundary

If the limit is reasonable and safe, keep it consistent. Giving the desired outcome only after escalation can teach that escalation works.

Do: Acknowledge the feeling while keeping the limit short.

05 • Offer a usable choice

Give two acceptable options that do not erase the boundary. Choice creates agency without turning the moment into a negotiation.

Say: "The tablet is finished. You may color or build."

06 • Reinforce the replacement

Notice the first calmer request, accepted choice, help request, or recovery step. Reinforce the skill, not the escalation.

Say: "You told me you were mad safely. That helped."

Step 7: teach what to do instead

“Stop,” “calm down,” and “use your words” are not complete skills. Teach a specific response the child can use in the same situation.

ASK AND WAIT Ask once, then wait for the answer.	NAME DISAPPOINTMENT Say or show “I’m disappointed.”
CHOOSE AN ALTERNATIVE Pick between two acceptable options.	ASK WHEN Ask when the item or activity will be available.
REQUEST A SHORT BREAK Take a brief break without escaping the whole task.	USE A VISUAL CARD Use help, wait, choice, or finished.

The replacement skill we will teach:

Words, gesture, card, or visual the child can use:

Step 8: prevention plan

PREPARE

Give clear expectations, transition warnings, and predictable limits before the difficult moment.

PRACTICE

Rehearse accepting “not now,” choosing an alternative, waiting, and asking for help during calm.

REINFORCE

Notice when the child handles disappointment safely, even if they are still unhappy.

STAY CONSISTENT

Coordinate adult responses so escalation does not work with one person but not another.

The common trigger or limit:

How we will prepare the child:

How adults will respond consistently:

How we will reinforce the replacement skill:

Safety note: If there is immediate danger, prioritize physical safety and seek appropriate emergency or professional support. This educational guide does not replace individualized medical or mental-health care.

Need an individualized plan? Schedule at calendly.com/optimizemylife/newclientintake or email mary@supportiveminds.us.

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