

Thar She Blows!

Let's TALK Kids

Claudia Quigg

You can observe the gathering storm. First the pressure in the air is palpable, so thick you could cut it with a knife. Next you see the clouds crowd in. Then before you know it, here come the sudden movement and thunderous noise.

You might think I am describing a weather event. But instead, I am trying to capture the onset of a temper tantrum.

Most toddler and preschool-aged children experience these events at some point. They are occasions in which the child is so overwhelmed with his own emotions that he can not contain them. His feelings overtake him and are expressed in kicking, screaming, pounding and sometimes even breath-holding. A tantruming toddler is a terrifying sight.

Just this week I spoke with a mother whose gentle nature is a gift to her children. Her three-year-old is tantruming regularly right now, and the violence of those episodes is downright shocking to my friend. As we talked about these displays, she and I shared several insights about her otherwise charming daughter and discussed the management of these tantrums.

First, she recognizes that tantrums are the child's problem, not hers. Tantrums are the result of an immature person experiencing emotions which she lacks the experience or judgment to manage.

This mom wisely understands the need to separate herself a bit from these tantrums rather than being drawn into their drama. She quietly tells her daughter that she is sorry she is having such a hard time managing her feelings, and will be happy to cuddle her once she pulls herself together a bit.

While the screaming doesn't stop immediately, her daughter will be comforted that Mom is not overwhelmed by the same feelings which swamp her, and that she is ultimately safe because of her mother's quiet confidence.



Years ago, my husband and I were faced with a toddler who cried so long and hard that she would occasionally become oxygen deprived. The resulting seizure-like convulsion which lasted a few seconds after such breath-holding was frightening to watch.

Once we figured out what was going on with her, we could prevent our own over-reactions, and remain calm in the face of her explosions. As she learned to manage her intense feelings, the breath-holding became a thing of the past.

Parents know their own children best. Often, they can observe the threatening storm, and take steps to prevent its eruption. But sometimes, even with the wisest parents, children fall apart.

When faced with tantrums, parents do well to remember two things. First, stay calm. Just as your child is responsible for his own emotions, you are responsible for yours. Don't buy into your child's hysteria. Your calm response will give him the reassurance he needs to pull himself together.

And second, remember that in dealing with tantrums (and every other challenge of raising your children), just because something doesn't "work" the first time doesn't mean you are doing it wrong. You may actually be doing everything right. When it comes to raising children you might have to do the "right" thing many times before you get the result you seek.

So when the storms are gathering with that child you love, remember to stay calm, seek shelter and know that the sun will be shining again soon.

Claudia Quigg is Founder and Executive Director of Baby TALK www.babytalk.org. Contact her at cquigg@babytalk.org

Let's TALK, Copyright © 2012 by Claudia Quigg. All Rights Reserved.