

Taming your toddler's tiresome tantrum: A silly idea that sometimes works

I spent about six years working with children in two different therapeutic treatment centers. I've seen more tantrums than anyone should ever be allowed to see. I've seen sixteen year-old males transform into three year-old girls at the drop of a hat when they didn't get their way. Kicking and screaming, stomping and yelling... it's really quite a sight.

It wasn't until about half-way through my years working with these challenging children that I learned an interesting "trick" from a co-worker. Its philosophy is based on the old adage "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em."

We were sitting outside the seclusion room at our facility watching a young boy as he tried ever so diligently to destroy an item that he had snuck in there. The item belonged to the center, but it was nothing of value and therefore we didn't care if the item was destroyed. The boy was having a tough time breaking the item but was relishing in the "power" that it gave him. He was basically rubbing it in our faces..."Ha ha, I'm breaking something that belongs to you!"

I remember being puzzled as my co-worker stated to the child, "It looks like you're having a tough time breaking that. Here let me help you." She then walked into the seclusion room and helped him break the item. I sat there thinking to myself, "What the heck is she doing?" It didn't take long for me to figure it out. She was taking away his power.

I later used variations of that same technique in a number of situations, often with success. Though it didn't always work, it always made ME feel better!

Fast forward to the present time. My wife and I now have two beautiful little girls who, like all toddlers, occasionally throw a tantrum or two. I decided to apply the above technique to the tantrums of my little two year-old. She was lying down on the floor one evening throwing a tantrum because she had just been told the most tantrum-inducing word ever... "No."

As she lay there flopping around on the kitchen floor, I decided to try something a bit unusual. I said loudly, "You're not doing it right!" "If you want to throw a good tantrum, you need to kick your feet harder then pound your fists on the floor." I then got down on the floor with her and demonstrated. I was very loud and intentionally annoying. She stopped immediately and watched, somewhat in horror, as I instructed her on how to do an appropriate tantrum. Surprisingly, hers ended and she appeared confused.

Ever since then, all I have to do when she throws a tantrum is say, "Would you like me to join you?" The answer is usually a firm and loud, "NO!" I then tell her, "Okay, if you stop, then I won't need to join you." Most of the time she stops. Sometimes I just join in on the tantrum, and when she screams for me to stop, I tell her that I'll stop when she does.

I then ask her to use her words to tell me what she needs. I explain to her that a tantrum isn't going to change my mind about anything and it may end up getting her sent to her room on top of not getting what she wants.

Tantrums are now few and far between in my house thanks to an idea that was born while watching a destructive child pass time in a seclusion room.