

## Chapter Two: Conventional Temper Tantrum Wisdom

During all of the forty-plus years I have been parenting, the most consistent advice from tantrum “experts” has been for parents to ignore the tantrums. The theory behind the technique of ignoring tantrums, as I understand it, has been that ignoring tantrums prevents the validation of them. The ignoring parent avoids rewarding the child for the tantrum and avoids reinforcing the negative behavior with any kind of attention.

According to this don’t-reinforce-negative-behavior theory, in this situation the underlying assumptions are that the child is throwing the tantrum for the purpose of getting undeserved attention (which is negative behavior), and if the parent avoids reinforcing this negative behavior, it should go away, stop, and cease to occur. Despite this theory behind the ignoring-tantrums technique, throughout modern history of parenting advice, most “experts” who’ve recommended using the technique haven’t claimed that it will prevent tantrums or stop them in progress.

A few decades ago, “experts” still weren’t putting the word “prevention” in the same sentence as the word “tantrum.” Their advice was given only to help parents know the best way to manage and deal with the tantrums, pretty much the same as it is today. However, today’s parenting “experts” now teach parents to prevent *some* of the temper tantrums by managing the child’s temper tantrum triggers, such as frustration, tiredness, and hunger. In other words, these “experts” teach parents to prevent the frustration, tiredness, and hunger in their children. They really aren’t teaching parents to prevent tantrums in the face of normal

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living, which occasionally includes frustration, tiredness, and hunger.

One current parenting advisor, for example, initially claims to help parents learn to eliminate temper tantrums. He later clarifies that by "eliminate" he means to stop fifty percent of them in progress and prevent fifty to ninety percent of them from happening at all. This can be done, he explains, by incorporating his communication techniques and being vigilant for temper tantrum triggers.

My method of temper tantrum elimination and prevention is *vastly* different from other methods. I teach parents how to respond to their infants and children in a way that makes it totally unnecessary to be vigilant and to have to watch for temper tantrum triggers. This is because the typical infant and childhood frustrations no longer trigger temper tantrums.

I teach parents how to totally, one hundred percent eliminate temper tantrums from their child's behavioral repertoire so that there are no longer any temper tantrums in progress to have to try to stop, manage, handle, or deal with. I also teach parents how to consistently respond to a newborn infant in a way that the child never develops a pattern of throwing temper tantrums. I teach parents these skills with as much clarity as possible and with many examples in the hopes that they will be able to learn them quickly and easily.

You might be wondering why I refer to other parenting advisors as "experts" (with quotation marks that suggest a negative attitude on my part). Also, given that I claim to know the secret to preventing and eliminating temper tantrums, you might be wondering why I don't refer to myself as an expert (without quotation marks). By using the quotation marks in referring to other professionals I mean no disrespect to those who actually have expertise. And I

don't have a problem with assigning expert status to myself and others solely based on the word's meaning, which is as follows:

- **Noun:** A person who has a high level of skill or knowledge relating to a particular subject.
- **Adjective:** Possessing, involving, or showing great ability, dexterity, understanding, or knowledge based on experience and/or training.

I *do*, however, have a big problem with attributing expert status to parenting advisors who adamantly tell parents that temper tantrums are unpreventable and a normal part of all children's development (which is most parenting advisors, in my experience). My opinion (based mostly on my personal success with totally eliminating and preventing temper tantrums in my own children and others) is that these advisors are mistaken on this premise.

In fact, I believe the professional advice I heeded at the beginning of my parenting career—that tantrums are inevitable and should be ignored—contributed greatly to the temper tantrum behavior of my first five children.

I finally learned to stop blindly trusting “expert” status and I chose to be, as much as possible, an informed consumer of parenting and other advice. I learned to consciously assess the advice of professionals while putting it to a test, or to get second opinions before following advice that seemed questionable. I came to believe that this is *my* life, and it's up to me to minimize my wasted time and energy from following faulty advice.

An additional problem I have with assigning expert status to myself and others is the connotation that accompanies it: that the “expert” is the person in the advising relationship that is the healthy, functional, educated, or wise one and that the recipient of the advice is the unheal-

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thy, dysfunctional, uneducated, or unwise one. I believe that using the term "expert" creates this unnecessary and disrespectful imbalance in the advising relationship. In my opinion, this alone is adequate reason to avoid the use of the word.

So, to recap, these are the reasons why I am using quotation marks with the word "expert:"

- As a challenge to the connotation that the advisors know it all, and the advisees know nothing.
- As a caution to advisees to critically evaluate all advice they are given (and to not blindly follow advice forever after just because of the professed "expert" status of the advisor).

Instead of "expert," I much prefer to call myself a mentor, which I define as:

- A wise and trusted advisor or teacher.

The term "mentor" has not acquired the same aforementioned connotation that "expert" has, plus "mentor" implies an earning of the trust involved, which is as it should be. I believe the "mentor" designation creates a more respectful dynamic in the advising or helping relationship. My methods of preventing and eliminating temper tantrums in children are based on the concept of respect, and hopefully so is my style of sharing what I've learned from my experience.

Let's get back to conventional temper tantrum wisdom. Have you ever witnessed (or been subject to) a tantrum in progress during which a parent (perhaps yourself) was actually following the traditional ignore-the-tantrum advice? Perhaps in a store, a child or infant was in a scream-

ing rage. The parent responded by (1) ignoring the tantrum and the child, (2) remaining calm and cool, (3) acting nonchalant and unruffled, and (4) as quickly as possible (while maintaining an unhurried demeanor) getting through the checkout and out of the store. All this was much to everyone's relief, except probably the child's—whose anger by that time had escalated to an extreme level.

Let's look more closely at this paradigm. (I promise—that's the only super-annoying scholarly word I will use in this whole book.) Dealing with tantrums by ignoring them is part of a decades- or possibly centuries-old parenting model or set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a misguided or wrongheaded way of viewing temper tantrum reality.

The "experts" have all along been telling parents to ignore tantrums simply because (according to them) it's unarguably the best way to deal with tantrum behavior in children. But "experts" mostly admit that responding by ignoring will not change or eliminate the tantrum behavior—because, after all, tantrum behavior in children is normal, natural, and inevitable.

### **MegaMom Tantrum Theory:**

**Tantrum Probability:** Tantrum behavior + responding by ignoring = tantrum behavior.

This circular theory begs a few questions. What measure is there for parents to employ so they can know if they're ignoring the tantrums well enough or thoroughly enough? *Just kidding.* I don't think anybody asks that question. But seriously, how can parents know if ignoring tantrums is even a valid and beneficial technique like the "experts" say it is?

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There's absolutely no success or change to measure and nothing with which to evaluate this technique's effectiveness. In fact, it doesn't purport to be "effective" by way of creating a change. Using this technique is not supposed to solve anything. If the tantrum behavior stays the same or even gets worse, parents are just supposed to keep responding by ignoring simply because the "experts" say so.

And that's what I did at the beginning, as a novice parent. I consistently ignored the tantrums of my first four children until each of them outgrew the tantrum behavior, typically at about the age of two as the parenting advisors predicted they might. I also responded by ignoring the tantrums of my fifth child until I discovered that this technique was actually contributing to and provoking his tantrum behavior.

I learned that ignoring tantrum and pre-tantrum anger is part of the cause of tantrums. And I learned that as long as tantrums are ignored they continue to occur.

### **MegaMom Tantrum Theory:**

**Tantrum Probability:** Pre-tantrum anger + responding by ignoring = tantrum behavior.

After belatedly discovering this truth—that ignoring tantrums and pre-tantrum anger actually provokes tantrum behavior—and learning a few related tantrum truths, I developed, tested, and proved my new theories on my fifth child, and every additional child thereafter. Unfailingly, I was able to prevent tantrum behavior when I finally stopped ignoring the tantrums and started to respond to them in a functional way.

In total, I've succeeded in raising temper-tantrum-free children more times than I've failed, and all of my

failures occurred before I discovered what I needed to change in my parenting style. Many people I've passed on my insights to (including some of my grown children) have reported back to me that my methods have also worked with their children.

I can and will (in detail and with confidence) tell you what causes, provokes, prevents, and eliminates temper tantrums in babies and children. And I can tell you that if and when you implement my methods (which I call Infant Anger Management), your child's tantrum behaviors are supposed to stop, go away, and disappear.

**MegaMom Tantrum Theory:**

**Solution Probability:** Pre-tantrum anger or tantrum behavior + Infant Anger Management = no tantrum behavior.

If you apply my Infant Anger Management techniques, and they ultimately don't work to totally eliminate or prevent temper tantrums in your child, I see only three feasible explanations for the lack of success. They are:

1. You aren't yet understanding or implementing my methods well enough.
2. You have a parenting partner or assistant caregiver who isn't using the techniques.
3. Your child has something else going on that a medical doctor or mental health professional should help you assess.

This is not to say that I view myself as perfect or all knowing in all things parental. But, based on my lengthy experience and assessments of these particular techniques (which I sincerely believe can succeed with all children in

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general), I believe that any lack of success with them in totally preventing and eliminating temper tantrums would not be the fault of the theories or techniques.

For parents who see some improvement but not total elimination of tantrums, I would suggest the first of the above lack-of-success explanations is most likely. For parents who see improvement for one caregiver and not another, the second of the explanations is most reasonable. And for parents who see no improvement whatsoever, I would highly suspect the third reason or possibly the first reason in the extreme.

Unlike traditional ignore-the-tantrum advice, Infant Anger Management techniques have a thirty-two-year track record of eliminating tantrum behavior and making a discernible difference. Ultimately, you should be able to judge the validity of these methods from your own experience.

Before I get into the nuts and bolts of my tantrum prevention methods, I do need to go over some theoretical concepts. Speaking of theory, I once was given the exciting gift of a gourmet sauce cook book. It turned out to have four chapters of sauce theory before getting into the almighty-then-let's-make-sauces! part of the book. So much for gourmet sauces in *my* kitchen. I know theory can be boring and tedious, but I'll try to make it not.

So why has conventional temper tantrum advice, historically and currently, not helped parents rid the world of their children's temper tantrums? In addition to the faulty concept that ignoring tantrums is a beneficial technique, there are three misguided and wrongheaded concepts that conventional temper tantrum advice is based on.

### **Misguided Concept Number One:**

**Babies less than one year old (or for sure less than six months) are incapable of experiencing real anger and of throwing real temper tantrums.**

Many child development theorists and a variety of related professionals have perceived newborn infants as not yet emotionally functional human beings—that is, not yet able to experience real live emotions. Many of the professionals I have researched have written that babies cannot feel real anger until six months to one year or more of age. Every angry-sounding expression of younger babies is not real anger, they say. Not that these are some *other* kind of anger or fake anger, false anger, pre-anger, or simulated anger, but not any kind of anger at all. Rather, we're told, they are simply instinctual crying responses to hunger and other discomforts.

It's unclear as to what these professionals believe happens at the magical age of six months or one year that enables babies to finally actually *be* angry when they *sound* angry. But I'm guessing that, in their minds, it's probably something akin to a baby gradually developing fine-motor skills or gradually gaining the ability for language.

Decades ago, when I was researching this particular child development theory and realized that I disagreed with it, I asked myself, "How did they come up with the perception that newborns are pre-functional in the emotional department?" It's not like we can see that the screaming infant is or isn't actually angry like we can see that a baby can or can't yet pick up tiny objects. By definition an emotion is a mental state that is un-seeable, and we can only interpret our perception of its expression.

Here's an example of what I mean. If spouses appear to be angry with each other, it is not a guarantee that they

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are. Conversely, if spouses appear *not* to be angry with each other, there is no guarantee that they aren't. It's quite easy to imagine adults experiencing different emotions than what they appear to be feeling. In reality, only the person with the emotion can know, for sure, what is or isn't going on emotionally for them. Logically, that concept also applies to children and infants, and child development specialists have no actual ability to know that an angry-looking child is not really angry.

I don't know exactly how current theorists arrived at this scientifically unproven concept of infant emotional pre-functioning, but, in partially absolving them, I'm thinking they must have been taught this at university (including at the Masters and Doctorate level). That's where they studied the accumulated knowledge of the previous generation of child development theorists. That generation may have learned this belief from their behaviorism-based ancestral scholars, who generally viewed as irrelevant—even for adults—all subjective phenomena, such as emotions.

It appears to me that somebody, somewhere, sometime just made this concept up out of thin air and most of the other theorists went along with it.

In addition to this generational passing on of what I believe to be a mistaken child development theory, we've also had dysfunctional social theories and practices that contributed to the dehumanizing, devaluing, and emotional discounting of infants and children (among other social groups). As examples, children were the legal property of their fathers, they could legally be subjected to physical and emotional abuse by parents, and they were expected and taught to be seen and not heard.

It was common in my childhood days for crying children to be confronted with the parental warning, "Shut up, or I'll give you something to cry about." Thankfully, this kind of emotional neglect has greatly diminished in the childrear-

ing of more recent decades. Despite the historical social failure to recognize infants and young children as fully functional emotional beings who have equal rights to feel and express their emotions as adults, our current knowledge can help parents to now recognize the very real anger and tantrums of their very young infants and children.

**MegaMom Theory:**

**Newborns are real people with very real emotions. They can and do sometimes demonstrate real anger, even potentially from the minute they are born, and maybe even before.**

Assume, for a few moments, if you will, that newborns are certifiably fully functional emotional beings. And imagine that *you* are about to be born. You have not yet learned your language, but you can still see, think, feel physically and emotionally, and react to what goes on around you. You experience the following.

After a confusing, scary, squished, and pressured ride, you poke your head into the world and take your first surprising breath. Waaaaaaahhh! You squint against the annoying bright lights and whimper. You gag on the intrusive, sucking, poking thing in your throat and try to scream for help. Aaa...aaaa...ahhh! You are grabbed by a human shape and turned, and abruptly you start to slip and slide the rest of the way, right out of your private room. Whooooaaa! You try to hang on, but there's nothing to grab and your arms are pinned. You feel helpless. You pop into the

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cold, drafty, foreign, frightening place and shriek. Waaaaaaahhh!

You're lost and scared and you want to know just exactly what is going on, but you have no way to know. You startle with all the banging and clanging. Waaaaaaahhh! You have a very serious top-of-your-head ache. Waaaaaaahhh! You shiver as your wet skin starts to dry in the cold air. You hear happiness and you're offended that your misery is not being addressed. You want to go back to your warm room and make the scary, attacking shapes go away.

Panic-stricken and angry, you wonder where your warm water went. You squeal in your very best language imitation, "Give it back!" But they don't. They poke you. They prod you. They come at you with a sharp thing, and you yell the equivalent of, "Don't cut that. It's mine!" But they pay no attention. They cut off your lifeline, leaving you detached. They jostle you. With wetness still evaporating from your skin, they place you on your back on a wiggling, wobbling contraption, and you flail. Again, you scream your multitude of fears and angers at them. Waaaaaaahhh!

This is the *worst* day of your life! And *nobody* cares.

Of course, this exercise proves nothing. But it demonstrates some immediate situations in which newborns could potentially experience anger if they were capable of it. Thirty years' worth of observations of effective anger-calming methods has con-

vinced me that newborns are indeed capable of feeling anger.

When infants' needs are unmet, anger is their natural human reaction. And in my parental experience infant anger can and does escalate. Furthermore, even newborn infants can actually interpret parental response (or lack of it) to their anger. By that I mean newborn infants (who desire the same kinds of responses to their anger as do older children and adults) are very aware of whether or not the responses they get meet their anger needs.

If infants consistently don't have their anger needs met, they learn to trust that likelihood, and they become predisposed to escalate quickly to temper tantrums. On the other hand, if infants consistently *do* have their anger needs met, they learn to trust *that* likelihood, and they become predisposed to *not* escalate to temper tantrums. In other words, the total prevention of temper tantrums in two-year olds can start as soon as they are born. This is done by teaching them that their anger is understood and will consistently be responded to appropriately. (I will be explaining later on what I mean by an appropriate anger response.)

### **Misguided Concept Number Two:**

**The causes of temper tantrums are the children's low tolerance for frustration, inability to express themselves with words, lack of problem solving skills, lack of other ways to let out their emotions, need for attention, and determination to get their own way, all of which naturally lead to tantrum experimentation.**

**MegaMom Theory:**

**These things are not the real causes of tantrums. They are the causes of the initial anger that precedes the tantrums. If a child's initial anger invokes the needed response from a parent, the anger will quickly go away and not develop into a tantrum. One of the real causes of temper tantrums is the parent not meeting the initial anger needs of the child.** (Again, I will be explaining what kind of responses children need to their pre-tantrum and tantrum anger.)

**Misguided Concept Number Three:**

**Temper tantrums are a normal, natural, inevitable, and highly unpreventable part of raising children. Tantrum-free child rearing is not possible, so we might as well hunker down and tough it out until the tantrums naturally disappear by the child's fourth or fifth year (at the latest).**

It's not difficult to see where this misconception came from. (Besides, that is, that it has been handed down for generations.) I don't know for sure how many children each parenting "expert" has had on the average, but, from my admittedly limited pre-Internet, pre-Wikipedia library research twenty years or so ago, it appeared to be maybe one or two. And I seriously doubt that the average number of children per "expert" has increased in the last two decades. I've noticed that disclosure of biases is not all that common among book-writing "experts" and many of them won't say how many children they've had. You often have to

guess their family size by how many people they've dedicated their books to. It's true.

Now, personally I did have a lot of parenting skills figured out at the very beginning of my parenting, as most parents do, but certainly not everything. Many things unexplainably took years for me to learn. Some things took a specific child to learn on. Some took specific circumstances to learn in. And some required prerequisite learning of other things. Perhaps some things took readiness or maturity on my part.

I don't believe any parent can possibly know all there is to know about parenting by one or two preschoolers or even by one or two teenagers. I learned some very crucial skills with my fourth and fifth children. I'm still learning things after forty-one years on the job. It's common, though, for parents to want to hide their parenting imperfections. No one likes to openly admit (especially with something as important as parenting) that they have faults or failings or even a lack of knowledge.

There are some people, though, who seem to actually and truly believe (and some who even declare) that they have achieved early-on perfection in their parenting abilities. Most of us have probably met at least a few of these boasters. I've noticed, though, that most of them typically start to come out of their delusional thinking patterns somewhere around the time their child enters elementary school and provides them with some publicly embarrassing, rude awakening sort of behavior. Truly hard core "perfect" parents, though, may not be provided with such helpful eye openers until their child's teen years, or on really rare occasions, never.

Anyway, here's how I think it works. Many parenting "experts" (who got that status mostly from attending college and not so much from raising children) obviously have an

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even deeper-than-average parental need to present as “perfect”—I mean over and above the normal it's-not-fun-to-admit-your-mistakes kind of thing. When they present themselves as “experts” in raising children, the accompanying implication is that they are “perfect” at it.

Soon after becoming parents the “experts” suddenly have temper-tantrum-throwing children of their own. This proves to them their textbook theories about the universality of tantrums because if even themselves, the “experts,” raise tantrum throwers, certainly no “inexpert” or average parent could possibly do better. Right?

But—and this is a very big but—if ostensibly all children throw tantrums, then how do we account for parents of the self-confessed imperfect variety who insist that their child or children have never thrown a temper tantrum? I've met some of them, and I'll bet you have too. Are they simply all lying to us? Or is the theory of tantrum inevitability just plain wrong? I believe the latter.

Parents of tantrum-free children may not all know exactly everything they do that's different from what the parents of tantrum throwers do, probably mostly because they typically don't have “failures” to compare with their “successes” like I did. In other words, I'm guessing that most parents who raise tantrum-free children are able to do it with all of their children, right from the very beginning of their parenting. Somehow they get on the right track at the start and don't follow the prevailing tantrum advice. They don't usually do the before and after like I did, being able to articulate, “Here's what I did when I was failing, and here's what I changed in order to succeed.”

But even if these parents can't tell us exactly how they raise tantrum-free children, they still provide evidence for my theory. They still demonstrate that tantrum-free child rearing is possible for those who somehow manage to figure out the right techniques.

**MegaMom Theory:**

**Tantrum-free child rearing is possible and preferable. And compared to the alternative, it is a much more enjoyable form of parenting for everyone involved, including the general public.**

## Chapter Two Summary: Temper Tantrum Wisdom

- Parenting “experts” have consistently advised parents to ignore tantrums so as to not reinforce the child’s negative behavior.
- Tantrum Probability: Tantrum behavior + responding by ignoring = tantrum behavior.
- Tantrum Probability: Pre-tantrum anger + responding by ignoring = tantrum behavior. (Ignoring a child’s initial anger is part of the cause of tantrums.)
- When infants’ needs are unmet, anger is their natural human reaction.
- If infants consistently don’t have their anger needs met, they learn to trust that likelihood, and they become predisposed to escalate quickly to temper tantrums. On the other hand, if infants consistently *do* have their anger needs met, they learn to trust *that* likelihood, and they become predisposed to *not* escalate to temper tantrums. In other words, the total prevention of temper tantrums in two-year olds can start as soon as they are born. This is done by teaching them that their anger is understood and will consistently be responded to appropriately.
- The causes of temper tantrums are NOT the children’s low tolerance for frustration, inability to express themselves with words, lack of problem solving skills, lack of other ways to let out their emotions, need for attention, and determination to get their own way. These things are the causes of the initial anger that precedes the tantrums.

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- If a child's initial anger invokes the needed response from a parent, the anger will quickly go away and not develop into a tantrum. One of the real causes of temper tantrums is the parent not meeting the initial anger needs of the child.
- Tantrum-free child rearing is possible.