

TAMING TANTRUMS

A Connect Four Parenting Approach
to Raising Cooperative Toddlers



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This is a picture of me heading to a Police concert the week before my first child was born.

Introduction

As a psychotherapist, former teacher and parenting educator, I felt pretty confident heading into my first pregnancy. All the happy pictures on social media told me that having a baby meant I'd be infused with the angelic delight of a baby's love and smiles, basking in the joy of motherhood.

That did happen. Sometimes.

Most days however, were filled with tears, shouting, and exhaustion. I definitely didn't sign up for any of that—particularly because I had two miscarriages previously and felt I had already worked tirelessly just to get these two babies *into* the world. I was baffled—why didn't anyone say this was going to be so **hard**?

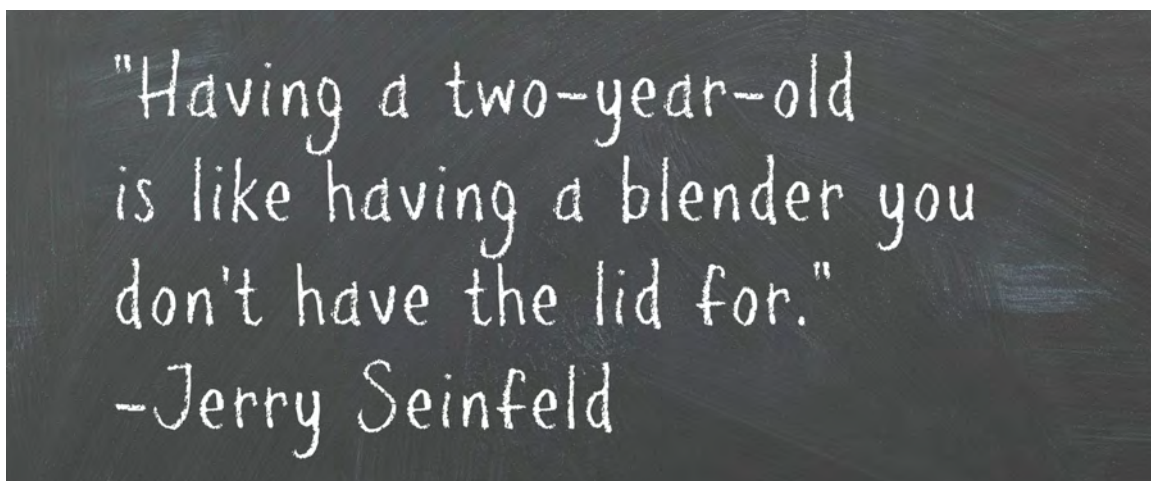
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I didn't want to admit I felt like I was in a daily marathon because I thought that would make me look incapable or like a *bad mother*.

I was surprised that my background and education wasn't helping me figure out how to raise small children. I was equally surprised that my maternal instincts seemed to be silent—being a mom wasn't coming naturally to me. In my therapy and parenting practice, I discovered that I was not alone; there are huge numbers of mothers out there who share these feelings and experiences.

One teary mom said, "We don't do a good job of admitting how brutally difficult parenting young children can be... to ourselves, to our partners, or to our friends. I wish moms could stop hiding behind their happy Facebook statuses, competing to be better at it than me, and say, "This sucks. Can I have some help, please'?"

Other than the physical demands, I found the continual hitting, shouting, and throwing that young children do to be very taxing because I wasn't used to these kinds of behaviours. I began flinching each time a child moved suddenly, readying myself to block a projectile or verbal attack. Jerry Seinfeld was bang on in saying, "Having a two-year-old is like having a blender you don't have the lid for."



On one particularly challenging day, I crumpled into a sobbing heap alongside my screeching children. During that moment, something must have been triggered in me because, after we all calmed down (an hour later), I actually felt motivated. With a pounding heart, headache and tear stained face, I realized I was not the parent I

wanted to be. I also realized that I was starting to believe my children were making my life unhappy. I was determined to change that.

In my quest to understand small children better, I dove into books, research and my colleagues' offices for some answers. I discovered there was a lot of information about babies, toddlers and school aged children, but very little about children aged



two to four. I did find articles about the “terrible-twos,” the “terrifying threes,” and heard about the “f-ing fours” but nothing that resolved my sense of being overwhelmed, while giving me practical methods to make life better during this time. Although, I did feel validated by seeing things other parents had posted like, “Three-year-old for sale. Cheap” on kijiji.com.

Taking what I could find, I created and continually tested methods that would actually help me enjoy my time with my children. Through the process of improving my life as a parent of young children, I discovered there were **steps** to follow that **made children more cooperative, yell less, and reduce the intensity and duration of complete meltdowns**. Thankfully, these steps also **reduced my frustration and increased my patience!** Hallelujah! I started sharing these steps with others and discovered they were helping their families, too.

The early years are often referred to as the “formative years,” because how adults interact with children affects how that child sees himself, the world, and others for his or her *whole* life. A child’s experiences before the age of five form his or her abilities to keep an even keel, be friendly, think clearly, and connect with everything and everyone around them. No pressure, right?! I think most parents feel this pressure and try so hard to be a *good* mother and not screw up their kids!

I got back on track to *forming* a nice, happy person by first using my psychotherapy training to reel in my very out of control self-talk. After taking steps to put my rational mind back in the driver's seat, I then focused on taming my huge anger reactions. Doing these two things really improved my quality of life.

Once I felt even-keeled, I focused on tricks and techniques to connecting with my children better and speaking with them in a way that invites cooperation. The number of battles in our house was coming down drastically.

I discovered that the key to being the parent you hope to be is by understanding the processes involved in thriving while raising little ones. Learning techniques, tips and tricks might help a bit but unless you understand how a person's inner voice forms or how to release emotions, the tricks won't *work* (which is a comment I often get from parents when they first come to see me, "I've tried everything but my child still *won't listen!*") *Taming Tantrums* happens as a by-product of connecting, positively communicating, and empathizing with our little ones.

■ ***Taming Tantrums happens as a by-product of connecting, positively communicating, and empathizing with our little ones.***

To address the underlying processes and create techniques that actually work, I created a four-step approach for parenting success called *Connect Four Parenting*. Each step creates the underpinning for the next and ultimately grows a strong, positive relationship between a parent and child, gets rid of what prompts *bad* behaviour and creates a foundation for that child to be his or her very best in life.

The **first step** in *Connect Four Parenting* is for the parent to connect with positive and negative core beliefs. These core beliefs, the deep down thoughts that are the foundation of identity, influence how we look at the world at large and specifically how we interact with our kids.

Often it is the sneaky self-talk coming from these beliefs that whips parents into a frenzy, making the interaction with our children difficult. Knowing how positive and negative core beliefs develop, and how they affect us, will help parents control their own self-talk, facilitate the growth of positive core beliefs, and spot the development of negative ones in their children. As Peggy O'Mara, former editor and publisher of *Mothering Magazine* says, "Be careful how you speak to your children; one day it will become their inner voice."

After fostering self-connection through the understanding of core beliefs, the **second step** focuses on improving your connection to your child through empathy. Parents need to know how it greatly influences a person's life and why it is critical in raising children. Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person, and is the key to staying connected with kids when sleep-deprived, frustrated, and dealing with the routine challenges that come with raising children between two and four years old.



The **third step** to my *Connect Four Parenting* approach is to facilitate the connection of your child to you. I call this filling a child's *ALIVE* tanks: **A**ttachment, **L**ove, **I**mportance, **V**oice and **E**ncouragement. A secure connection to a primary caregiver greatly reduces defiance and wild behaviour in children. This connection gives children the feeling they are capable, important (heard and seen), and belong; it provides the foundation for positive development. Defiance is born from the loss of these feelings—a person requires a positive connection from another to fulfill basic and deep needs, and may turn to negative methods if these needs are not met.

The **fourth step** to enjoying life and our little children is to be able to connect with and process strong emotions. The parenting strategies used when we were children, although filled with love, often missed the steps necessary to enable us to fully experience and process emotions (if you are searching the term for this, it is “self-regulation”). Intense feelings were often looked at as dangerous things that needed to be stopped or avoided.

We won't blame our parents, because they did the best they could with the information available at the time. I'm sure they would have taught us this skill if they knew how to, but you can't teach someone another language without first knowing it.

The skill of processing emotions is like any desired ability; it takes learning and practice to do. In this section, I will explain specifically how to do this, and how to create a plan that facilitates this process. Being able to calm ourselves, regroup and still be friendly (or at least not be mean) when filled with intense emotions can radically change a person's life. Parents and their children who don't look at big feelings as dangerous things feel the world is their oyster.

The **fifth and last step of *Connect Four Parenting*** goes through specific techniques parents can use to reduce frustration, improve patience and invite cooperation—***how to get kids to listen***. These techniques will land on deaf ears if the connection between a parent and child is weak so that is why they are found at the end of the book. I have broken these tricks and tips into sections that focus on setting the stage for cooperation, characteristics that make instructions easier to follow, specific communication tips, and how to create successful routines.



Many parents have found that after feeling competent with the first four steps, the techniques become secondary, as their children are much easier to communicate with and be around. Throughout this book, I will share my process to growing cooperative kids with you. Considering how unnatural of a mother I felt, even with all I had learned to that point, I really do believe that if I could turn my life around, so can you.

We can rely on these processes to help us out of the hardest moments and improve our experience with our children.

My Background

I began my professional career as a junior high and high school teacher. After completing a Master's Degree in Arts in Counseling Psychotherapy, I began working with therapy clients in private practice. After my children were born, my field of study moved onto the topic of parenting.

My husband (a family doctor) and I live with our children in London, Ontario, Canada. Together, we founded and own The Core Family Health Centre, a medical professional building.

I would love to connect with you!

Please find me on: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), [Instagram](#) and [my website](#). I would also love your feedback. Please email your comments to info@andreanair.com.

