

When the Going Gets Tough, Hold On!!

Why Restrain

There are times, albeit infrequent and moreso with toddlers and young children, when your child is physically out of control. He's not getting his way and he's throwing a fit! She wants to do one thing and you want her to do another. Does she say, "yes, Ma'am," and comply? No. She falls down wailing and flailing in a full-blown temper tantrum. What's a parent to do?

Your options are several. You could be embarrassed, especially if he gets out of control in public, like the grocery store. In such cases, typically you ask him nicely to please keep it down. People are staring. You bargain with him, bribe him, to be quiet. This bargaining is in the form of, "If you just can be quiet and cooperative so I can finish this chore, then I will get you what you want."

You could also fly off the handle and match your child's temper tantrum with one of your own. I remember hearing as a child, "If you're going to cry, I'll give you something to cry about." This option would include out-yelling her and popping her bottom to assure she knows who's the boss, who's more powerful. The downside of this option is your running the risk of abusing your child and coming to the attention of the authorities.

Either of these options is lose-lose. Each is about control and dominance. In Christ-centered parenting, control and dominance lead to disaster. When you minimize the fit and bargain with your child, he seems to win. He learns that, if he ramps up his response, he gets what he wants. When you match her temper tantrum with one of your own, you win, because you are bigger and can be more forceful. She only learns to keep her mouth shut; she resents you for bullying her; and you control her by her fear of you.

The Nurturing-Holding Procedure
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The Nurturing-Holding Procedure (NHP) is a third option for extreme cases of out-of-control behavior by your child. The NHP is a calm but firm physical restraint of your child. You identify your child's behavior as out of control and then calmly convey your confidence that he can get himself back in control, and that you are going to help him by restraining him and giving him time to regain control of himself.

The NHP is a firm, parent-in-charge response that teaches him that he is not going to get his way by throwing a fit. It also is a love/respect based parenting strategy that gives her responsibility for her actions and encourages her compliance to your expectations without fearing you.

How Do you Restrain Safely?

The NHP is equally a physical and a verbal response to your child's out-of-control behavior. When a tantrum includes hitting others, destroying property, and putting himself or others in danger of harm, then the NHP is a useful parental response that will end your child's tantrum. The benefits of the NHP are immediate and frequently long lasting. After having successfully brought her out of tantrum behavior, you often only have to remind your child that she is getting out of control. Then ask her if she wants you to control her until she can get herself back in control.

Hold Tight!

As the first signs of tantrum emerge, and you decide that your child is not able to restrain himself, tell him that you are going to physically control him until he can get himself back in control.

1. Hold him from behind, in either a standing or sitting position. Wrap your arms around his body, holding his wrists and crossing his and your arms in front of him. Snugly hold this position with your arms roughly at your child's waist. This position helps you avoid his biting you.
2. If he is kicking as well, wrap your legs around his legs and sit down on a chair or the floor to restrain him from kicking out as best as possible.
3. Keep your head back and away from his head, as many such restrained children will try to head butt if their arms and legs are secure.

Calm Her Down! Even after she is physically restrained, your child will likely continue to strain to get away. She will beg and plead. She will tell you that you are hurting her. She may call you every name in the book. These words are her verbal tantrum and only code for "I don't like what's happening to me. I'm angry. I'm scared. I'm out of control."

As you continue to physically restrain her, begin verbal soothing and reassurance.

1. Slow your breathing. Your bodies are entwined, so your slower breathing will encourage her slower breathing and calming down. You can also add verbally, "Breathe. Breathe deeper. Deep, calming breaths."
2. Say to her, "Stop it. Stop it. Come on. I know you can do it. Calm yourself down."
3. Reassure her that you are only going to control her as long as she is not able to control herself. Define for her that yelling, straining, kicking, hurting or trying to hurt herself or others is evidence that she is still not yet in control of herself. Add, paradoxically, "You are in charge here, sweetheart. You will tell me by your actions

- when you are getting yourself back in control. You will tell me by your actions when to loosen up; when you are ready to be back in control of yourself.”
4. As she calms down, stops fighting you and straining to get loose, reassure her. “Look at you. Look at how great you are doing. You are beginning to get yourself back in control. Good job. I’m so proud of you. Are you ready for me to let go?”
 5. Older children can pretend to be in control and calmed down, but will ramp up after giving you assurance that they are ready for you to let go. If that happens, simply reassert your physical restraint with assuring comment, “Oops! I guess you were not as ready as you thought in getting yourself back in control. That’s okay. I will hold on to you for as long as you need for me to. Let me know when you are ready again.”

Talk With H About It Afterward.

After your child has calmed down and regained control, plan to talk to him about the event. Some children are embarrassed by their behavior and really don’t want to talk about it right away. That’s okay. Other children are exhausted and just want something light to eat and go to bed. That’s okay.

If not right away, at least mark the time within the next couple of hours or day that you will sit down together to review and to figure out how to avoid such drastic parenting in the future. This is the time to understand your child’s feelings and motivations in acting out. It is also the time to reinforce your expectations of his behavior and his problem-solving abilities. Make clear to him that any physical harm to people or property, any shouting match, any extreme attitude are unacceptable. You are a Christ-centered family who are committed to loving each other unconditionally and to raising your children up in the ways of the Lord.

Why Use the NHP?

The NHP has obvious benefits in stopping immediately any further harm to person or property. Additionally, it gives a definitive answer to the question, “Who’s in charge?” Further, effective use of the NHP, with both physical restraint and verbal calming/reassurance, relaxes your child. With his straining to break free, he soon wears out. A useful relaxation technique is to alternatively tense and relax muscle groups. The NHP promotes this relaxation process.

Finally, the NHP is a demonstrative affirmation of your unconditional love for your child. Parents often tell children during an NHP, “I love you so much that I’m going to keep holding on to you and controlling you until you can control yourself. You’re not loving you when you are out of control. It’s okay. I’ll love you for both of us and you will love yourself again soon enough.”

Remember.

The NHP is best used in the privacy of your home and within earshot of only supportive, loving family members. Children who are being physically restrained against their will often cry foul and attempt to enlist support and collusion from family, friends, and even strangers. Especially children who are older than 5 will try to even the power differential by accusing you of child abuse.

Also, just like spanking, the NHP is not a good option for an angry parent. Our children often know what we are feeling even before we know. They will benefit from your calm resolve and loving reassurance. You really can’t pull that off if, underneath, you are angry and your goal is a power play to show your child who is the boss.

Finally, where there is a possibility of extreme acting out in public, such as when grocery shopping or at the mall, it is crucial for parents to plan ahead. Such outings are a growing experience for your child and a teaching opportunity for you. If at all possible, both parents go, or one parent and a close, adult friend. Prompt a good response from your son by reminding him of the rules. If he has done well on previous outings, reinforce how well he did before and ask if he can do as well today. His response becomes a verbal contract and a reference point for you as the outing unfolds.

If the outing begins to go poorly, you could use the NHP to physically restrain your child, but I would advise against it. Your parenting would draw a crowd, no matter how good your intentions or technique.

Instead, with prompting and planning, simply hold your child firmly, advise him that his behavior is unacceptable, and then immediately leave, carrying your child with you. Let your spouse or friend continue the outing with the other children or alone to complete the shopping list. Despite whatever protest from your child, go the car and go home.

When children know that you are serious, often their acting out stops, they become penitent, and they plead to continue the outing. Be firm that the outing is over for your child. Consequent with empathy by telling him that you hope he makes wiser choices next time so his outing can continue, and then he can have the fun, toy, or surprise you had hoped to give him this time.

Having your spouse or friend complete the outing is equally important for two reasons. First, you want to accomplish your task. Second, you don't want to give your child the power to disrupt the whole family/errand process.

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Practice Before You Really Need the NHP.

Take a moment to talk about the NHP. How well do you think it could be implemented in your family? When was there a time in the past where this procedure could have come in handy? How do you think your child would have responded to it?

Practice the NHP with the cooperation of your child. Get feedback about how it feels both to control and to be controlled. Have your child test your physical restraining abilities by trying to get himself free.