

Guarding Against Temper Tantrums

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We all know toddlers have temper tantrums which are often triggered by said toddler feeling something overwhelming such as hungry, tired, cold, frustrated, or overstimulated. Nobody wants to admit that adults have temper tantrums too. Well, maybe we like to admit that other adults have tantrums, but nobody wants to admit that they have tantrums. Temper tantrums are an unintentional response to emotions.

To be intentional about our emotions means that we are in charge of them. We acknowledge the emotions we are feeling and how they are affecting us. We consider the potential outcomes of our reactions, whether we choose to act or not. And we are ready to take responsibility for the consequences of our actions or inactions.

Being intentional with our emotions is often as simple as parenting a toddler. Mind you, I said simple not easy. A foundational strategy for avoiding toddler tantrums is maintaining a checklist for the toddler's needs. We might ask ourselves if the toddler is hungry, tired, frustrated, sad, lonely, bored, and so on, and then take action to address or prevent the issue before it turns into a full-blown tantrum. The same approach can be applied to adults with similar results. By regularly checking in with ourselves and our emotions, we can identify any needs or triggers that could lead to a tantrum and take proactive steps to manage them.

There is more and more scientific research to support what parents of toddlers have been observing since the beginning of time: our emotions and physical states are intricately connected. To limit the impact one has on the other, we must put forth intentional effort. Attending to our physical needs is therefore the most critical aspect of being intentional with our emotions. Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, DBT, is a research-backed approach that equips us with tools to manage our emotions effectively (Alexander). One such skillset is PLEASE Master(y), which helps us reduce our vulnerability to intense emotions. This skillset is beneficial for keeping the emotional toddler inside all of us under control.

Applying PLEASE MASTERY

The **P** and **L** go together. I know it's rough to still call this an acronym when we are combining two letters; just go with it. They stand for treat **Physical** illness. If you are sick, take care of yourself. If you need a doctor, go see a doctor. If you have a headache, take some medication. If you are not convinced this will help you be intentional about your emotions, remember the last time you snapped at someone because you were in physical pain. Everyone around will thank you for treating **Physical** illness.

E stands for **Exercise**. The scientific research is bursting with evidence to support the physical, cognitive, and emotional benefits of exercise. In a 2021 article titled "How Exercise Affects the Brain" by Grace McGregor with the Brigham Young University College of Life Sciences, exercise decreases "the impact of stressful experiences in the brain". This frees up bandwidth in the body and the mind that can now be used to be more intentional with emotions. Put this to the test. Next time you are frustrated or angry, do something to get your heart rate up (as long as your body is in the physical condition to safely do so) and notice the impact it has on your thoughts and emotions.

A stands for **A**void mind altering medications.# While this can refer to recreational use of drugs and alcohol, it also means being aware of how over the counter or prescription medications are impacting you.# The choice to recreationally use drugs and alcohol is an individual decision, but for the purposes of reducing your vulnerability to intense emotions, be aware of how they impact you.# If they tend to agitate your emotions, avoid them when you are at risk of being overwhelmed.# In addition to recreational drugs and alcohol, the A also means we are aware of how both prescription and over the counter medications affect our emotions.# If you are taking prescription medication that makes managing your emotions difficult, talk to your doctor about it.# If you notice that over the counter medications are impacting your ability to manage emotions, avoid them.

S stands for balanced **S**leep.# It is important for you to know how many hours of sleep your body needs.# Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep for optimal functioning.# When you are experiencing emotionally intense events and/or circumstances, prioritize sleep.# You will feel better and you will be able to respond to your stress much more effectively than if you are sleep deprived.# If you have trouble sleeping, prioritize finding ways to improve it.

E stands for balanced **E**ating.# To be clear, this does not mean you avoid the things that taste good.# This simply means that you are listening to your body and eating when your body requires nourishment, stopping when you are full, and making sure you eat a diet that provides sustainable nutrition. Professor Jean Yang once tweeted, "Two Important lessons I learned in my twenties: - If you think everyone hates you, you probably need to sleep. - If you think you hate everyone, you probably need to eat."# These are solid life lessons that everyone will benefit from.

Master(y) refers to making sure we do something every day to either work towards accomplishing a goal or that we feel accomplished at.# If you are a pianist, play for a few minutes every day.# If you have a goal to learn a new language, spend some time working towards this every day.# Even just a few minutes spent towards Master(y) can make a difference in how we feel. It sends a powerful, generally subconscious, message to our brain of "I've got this".# That message then transfers to other parts of our life and makes handling stressful situations manageable.

To be intentional about our emotions, we must take responsibility for all stages of our emotions. One effective way to keep our emotions in check is to practice PLEASE Master(y). When we are overwhelmed, intentionally practicing these skills can help us avoid reacting

impulsively. Making it a habit can reduce the likelihood of our emotions becoming too overwhelming to manage effectively.