

Michael: *And I would just like to say that for many persons who are dying, and particularly for those who have been marginalized by our culture through the ascription of "spoiled identities", that this time can provide them with an opportunity to become more active in, or to have a more major say in, the authorship of their own lives - perhaps to take over the authorship of their own lives - and to discover, in the process, that they are persons to be treasured. This time also can provide an opportunity for these persons to have the experience of a particular sense of presence in a community of persons, and perhaps even a community of "spirits" - of a unique sense of place in the world and of a unique sense of connectedness.*

REFERENCE

White, M. 1988:

Saying hullo again: The reincorporation of the lost relationship in the resolution of grief. *Dulwich Centre Newsletter*, Spring, pp.7-11. (Reprinted in White, M. 1989, *Selected Papers*. Adelaide; Dulwich Centre Publications.)

CHAPTER III

TEMPER TANTRUM PARTIES:

Saving face, losing face, or going off your face!¹

David Epston

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Temper Tantrum Parties is an original method of therapeutic intervention for 'out of control' behaviours involving uncontrolled anger. This approach can be utilized with children from the age of eight or nine, adolescents, and adults, and has been extensively applied to presentations of 'out of control' behaviours in children and adolescents. Hitherto, many of these young people were either institutionalized or placed in residential care where such behaviours were contained and controlled by others. Thus, control-by-others had often been substituted for self-control in the lives of these children and adolescents. The approach is simple, economical, and frequently very amusing for all concerned, and I do not believe that it is, in any way, coercive or degrading.

MAKING THE DISCOVERY²

The supervisor of another agency had called me several times to detail the urgency of the Moore family's crisis.³ Mr Brown had abandoned the family when his de-facto wife of three years was in the advanced stages of an unplanned pregnancy, one that he had insisted go to term. Mrs Moore had then given birth and, after much agonizing about adoption, had decided to keep the baby. In addition, her 15 year old daughter, Noelene, had recently had an abortion and Mrs Moore took the blame for "setting a bad example". Mrs Moore was currently under tremendous pressure, holding down a full-time job, caring for a colicky, night-waking infant up to 8 times per night, and coping with Noelene's rebelliousness.

Mrs Moore complained that she could not get any co-operation from Noelene and her son, Wayne, aged 13 years. Typically she would make a request of her children; this would be rejected and then she would attempt to punish them for not complying with the request by resentfully doing the task herself. It infuriated her but this went unnoticed by both Noelene and Wayne. Also, Mrs Moore explicitly expected Noelene to provide her with friendship and company; but Noelene preferred her boyfriend.

We worked together in the first session to reorganize some of the household tasks. Noelene was absent for the second session. Mrs Moore reported that family matters had improved markedly although relations between herself and Noelene had remained strained. By my calculations, Mrs Moore was working between 16-20 hours per day in her salaried job,

in the provision of child care, in domestic work, and in the servicing of Noelene's demands. In addition, to make ends meet, she was now considering a part-time cleaning job. Mrs Moore believed that this additional employment had become necessary because Noelene refused to take into account the family's financial straits. Earlier on the day of our second meeting, Mrs Moore had failed to fit her house key into the lock on the first try and fell to the ground crying. There she had remained for some time until discovered by Wayne.

I warned against the idea of additional work as I regarded her to be on the verge of physical collapse. Mrs Moore then told me that she could no longer face Noelene's tantrumming. Apparently, Noelene would tantrum if Mrs Moore did not immediately satisfy her demands to clean, wash, and iron for her. In addition, Mrs Moore was required to prepare meals for Noelene's boyfriend and his friends almost every night, and to wash up after them.

I immediately arranged another meeting and requested that Noelene attend. I had no clear idea of what I might do, but I knew that it was urgent that something be done to relieve Mrs Moore of this pressure. Noelene prepared herself for the interview by having her boyfriend, Peter, join us. I welcomed him, and some time later asked if he had ever seen Noelene's tantrums. He laughed, saying that it was inconceivable that she would do that in his presence. I suspect that Noelene was very embarrassed by the discussion as I found it impossible to engage her. I purposefully misheard the few responses that she gave to my questions. I often do this with mumbling, shy, or unwilling adolescents:

Noelene: (Mumbling inaudibly in response to DE's question.)

DE: (Incredulously) *You want to buy a pumpkin?*

Noelene: (Looking at me in amazement.) *What do you mean pumpkin?*

DE: *I thought you said you wanted to buy a pumpkin.*

Noelene: (Laughing, but now perfectly audible and responsive.) *No ... what I said was ...*

Throughout the interview I persistently regained her attention to further references to pumpkins or by queries about pumpkin pies. The following account of our discussion illustrates this technique:

"Have you ever tried pumpkin pie? You know, I was born in Canada and pumpkin pies are more or less the national dish. They are very delicious!"

Noelene informed me that she had never eaten pumpkin pie and had only

eaten it as a boiled or roasted vegetable. I commiserated with her: "That's too bad. You ought to try pumpkin pie some time. It's the Canadian national dish." Further non-sequiturs were around variations on pumpkin pies: "Have you ever tried pumpkin pie with whipped cream on it? It's even better than just pumpkin pie on its own." Bemused, Noelene would reply: "Well, no, how could I? I've only ever eaten pumpkin as a veggie." My response was: "This is very sad, Noelene. You're really missing out on something." Some time later, I enquired: "Have you ever had pumpkin pie with whipped cream on it and num in it?" Again, her attention was rivetted, and she became very involved with our discussion, as did Peter.

I finally connected pumpkin pie eating and the variable geography of her tantrumming into an intervention which Noelene agreed to. This intervention made it possible for the problem-free context (her social space shared with Peter and other age-mates) to intrude upon the problem-context (her social space shared with her mother and sibling). The following is my written summary of this intervention.

Dear Friends,

I know that temper tantrums can be embarrassing for all concerned. For this reason I agreed to draw up a temper tantrum programme that will help matters. In return, Noelene, you agreed to make a tape with me and your family, if you go a month without a tantrum.

1. *It is a good thing for mothers and daughters to have a good argument every so often. How else can you sort things out?*
2. *Temper tantrums are juvenile. A temper tantrum equals 'if you don't let me do what I want' or 'if you don't do what I want, I'll have a temper tantrum'.*
3. *Both Noelene and her mother assured me that you would prefer arguments to temper tantrums.*
4. *Here's how you do it:*

TEMPER TANTRUM CONTROL PROGRAMME

A. Mother is to make large cards with:

1. *I think you've got a temper tantrum coming on.*
2. *Pre-recording Warning No.1*
3. *Pre-recording Warning No.2*
4. *Final Pre-recording Warning*

Have them ready at all times.

B. *As soon as a good argument degenerates, hold up Card No.1. If Noelene exercises self-control, thank her. Then have time out (say ten minutes) before you resume the argument or leave it if feelings are running too high. If she continues, hold up warnings at one minute intervals. This means that she will have three minutes to tantrum. After Final Pre-recording Warning, start recording her temper tantrum on a cassette recorder. Saying nothing; just keep out of the way and record.*

C. *Have Noelene sign, in advance, copies of this sample letter:*

Dear Lewis/Carl/David,

I would like to invite you and Peter to my house on ... (include time and date), to have a piece of pumpkin pie and whipped cream and listen to a recording. I will be disappointed if you can't come.

Love, Noelene.

D. *Ask Peter to deliver these letters if necessary and to make the arrangements.*

E. *Noelene, if there is a dispute in which you and your mother cannot negotiate a compromise and you think a referee would help, ring me.*

Good luck for a temper-tantrum-free month! Please ring me and let me know the result.

Yours sincerely, DE.

One month later Noelene informed me that she could now make her temper-tantrum-free tape. The following excerpts are from the transcript of the audio-tape.

DE: *Well, we met a month ago and Noelene, you and I made a deal that if you had a temper-tantrum-free month you and I and your family would make a tape. I'd like to know about your temper tantrums because you told me you had a pretty serious sort of problem. You described your problem as out of your control.*

Noelene: *I can control it now. I don't get so mad. I don't shout any more or scream at Mum.*

DE: *Do you miss her screaming?*

Mrs.M: *It's lovely and peaceful.*

Wayne: *She's still got a loud voice though.*

Mrs.M: *But who hasn't? Everyone has at certain times. (To DE) It's much better.*

DE: *How much difference has it made to you as a family?*

Mrs.M: *We're all getting on better. We're not living in fear that if we say*

anything wrong she will flare up and slam the doors and scream and shout.

DE: *Were you afraid of her before?*

Mrs.M: *Not afraid; it upset me. I don't know ... just the thought there could be a ...*

DE: *Tantrum?*

Mrs.M: *So I would just be more careful what I said.*

DE: *Then you're watching what you're saying, so there's tension all the time?*

Wayne: *She hasn't had a tempter tantrum in ages.*

DE: *Are you a bit sad about that? Are you missing them? You know - some people like them.*

Wayne: *No!*

DE: *Okay, how did you do it? How did you come to control them? Of all the things in the Temper Tantrum Control Programme, what do you think were the things that helped you control them?*

Wayne: *I know what: I know what it was. Me and Peter stirred her up about it. We said that you'll have to have your friends around here ...*

Mrs.M: *To listen to that dreadful noise.*

Noelene: *(Guffawing)*

Wayne: *Whenever we thought she was going to get mad we stirred her up ... (general laughter)*

Mrs.M: *We'd say 'temper tantrum' and that was enough.*

DE: *Really!*

Noelene: *Yeah! (followed by general laughter)*

DE: *And what would you do then? Instead of having your temper tantrum?*

Noelene: *I'd go off into my bedroom and do something. I'd cool off and come on out.*

DE: *That seems like a pretty reasonable solution. There's nothing wrong with being angry.*

Mrs.M: *Yeah ... It clears the air.*

Noelene: *We get on better ... we discuss things instead of getting into big arguments which cause more trouble.*

DE: *Have you got any advice to give to expressive young women like yourself who have temper tantrum problems? If someone came up to you and said: "I heard through the grapevine that you didn't use to have control over your temper and a month later you did. Would you teach me how to do it?" How would you teach her?*

Noelene: *By getting a tape recording of it and playing it back to their friends.*

And then when you feel like getting mad, go for a walk or something and cool off and come back.

DE: *That's a reasonable idea!*

Mrs.M: *If you've got no-one to listen to you, it's not worth having one.*

DE: *Yes. There is a rule of temper tantrums. The rule of temper tantrums is: Temper Tantrums need an audience.*

Mrs.M: *I found once I ignored her ... it helped! She didn't want to carry on. She couldn't be bothered walking after me around the house (general laughter) ... "Stay here Mum!" she'd say ... "Stay here!" Isn't that right?*

Noelene: *Yeah! (general laughter)*

BACKGROUND

In order to make this approach clinically relevant to practitioners, I will focus on a step-by-step detailed description of both the variable and consistent elements.⁴ Although the intervention is discussed in terms of its pragmatics, it is not a 'programme' in the behaviour modification sense of that word. I strive never to allow the common experiences of the tantrummers and their families to obscure the uniqueness of the problem context and the particulars of the experiences of the individuals concerned. The mode of description will be a 'typification' rather than a blanket prescription.

However, some elements of the intervention are, in fact, regularly used, and these will be identified in the text. Although I have set out the steps of the intervention in an orderly fashion, in practice, these steps are not so ordered. They are introduced, re-introduced, and braided together into an assemblage, the purpose of which becomes clear in the later composition of the Letters of Invitation. In judging the suitability of such an approach, it is of vital importance that the therapist scrupulously distinguish families tyrannized by tantrumming from those families in which a young person's outbursts of anger represent a legitimate rebellion against sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. In the second case, to quell such anger would be a gross misapplication of the approach.

Throughout the article, I use the term temper tantrums to describe 'out-of-control' behaviours in general. These behaviours range from 'paddies' to armed assault.⁵ I do so for two reasons: firstly as a matter of

convenience and, secondly, this relabels the behaviours as age-inappropriate transgressions.⁶

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

Shared Victimhood

This approach examines the problem in the context of family interaction, and draws a parallel between the temper's tyrannical relationship to the young person **and** the temper's tyrannical relationship to other family members. All are construed as victims of temper with each person suffering in his/her own particular way. Direct or indirect questions⁷ are asked about the effect of the temper on them and their relationships. Contrary to what is commonly expected, these questions usually establish that the temper tantrummer is the person who is most victimized, preyed upon, or duped. Other family members come a close second, often living under a reign of terror in homes that have become occupied by the tyranny of temper. All family members, including the temper tantrummer, are joined in an easy and unexpected alliance on the basis of their shared predicament. This alliance rapidly undermines the customary adversarial relationship between the tantrummer and family.

Commonly, parents seek therapy with the hope that it could contribute to their efforts to oppose the young person and his/her tantrumming. Referral often takes place when the 'out-of-control' behaviour is escalated by one perceptible step, such as from tantrumming to violence against property, from violence against property to violence against person(s), or from violence against persons to armed assault. The parents have often reached the conclusion that 'it's either him/her or us' and are considering a solution that requires either the tantrummer's exile from the family or self-exile. More often it is mothers who consider self-exile. These mothers have been so affected by mother-blaming⁸ or the tantrummers' 'gas-lighting'⁹ that they have come to regard themselves as failures as persons, and some consider suicide or admission into a psychiatric hospital for repair as the only way out. Usually, the tantrummer is convinced that if his/her parents or siblings didn't make any demands, then there would be no trouble.

When a construction of shared victimhood is established, a new

'conversation' is developed, one that is at variance with the habitual conversation through which the tantrummer and his/her family have made sense of their circumstances. The therapist initiates questions that invite family members to participate in this new conversation. The tantrummer frequently defers his/her response to these questions until s/he feels joined by the therapist. Eventually the tantrummer, family, and therapist are arrayed in a conceptual space alongside each other with the temper as their adversary. A preliminary summary at the end of the first or second session might appear something like this:

Jack,

It seems to me that you are being driven into a life of irresponsibility by your temper. It has gotten the better of you and is making you appear silly and immature to others. Tantrumming is to be expected of a much younger person, say aged 3 or 4. I think it is quite unfair and mean that you have become enslaved by your feelings and put under their domination. Would you like to have more influence over yourself and, by doing so, weaken the hold it has had on you for so long now? Do you know that if you strengthen yourself you would weaken your temper by doing so?

Mr & Mrs R,

It saddens me to see such giving people being taken in by tantrumming. Your home has become an occupied zone with all of you living in terror, not knowing what is going to happen next. His temper's tyranny cannot endure for very much longer. Right now, you are very likely plotting its downfall behind closed doors, even though Jack must guess you are talking about him. If you overthrow the temper's tyranny, you will once again be free people and Jack will repossess himself. Do you consider you are entitled to lives free of fear? Do you think Jack deserves to be captured by his feelings?

Externalizing the Problem

The perceived locus of any problem, whether this be situated internally or externally, is culturally arbitrary.¹⁰ For particular problems such loci can vary across cultures and over time within a culture. Recent practices in Western psychologies require a professional to administer treatment to a problem understood to be located within a person. Michael White (1984, 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1988/89; Epston & White 1989a, 1989b) has developed a counter-cultural approach which externalizes problems,

resulting in a radically different stance by all concerned. The 'sufferer' becomes active in assuming control over his/her problem and its effects on their life and relationships with others (Tomm 1989). An externalized construction of the problem reduces the likelihood of debilitating guilt and self-blame for the 'defect' in the person, and invites agency on the part of the problem-affected person and family.

What is entailed is a rigorous and careful 'conceptual dissection' of the problem, "cutting it away" from the person's sense of self as a person. That is, there is a systematic separation of problematic attributes, ideas, assumptions, beliefs, habits, attitudes, and lifestyles from the patient's dominant identity. (Tomm 1989)

In the case of tantrumming, the problem is conceptually relocated beyond the person. In fact, the temper is radically split away from the self and it is no longer viewed as a constituent part of the person, but an 'occupier', 'possessor', 'capturer', 'invader', etc. And the temper's invasion of the person is considered as unjust and unfair. This motivates the person and family to reclaim themselves from the hold that the problem may have had over them. Such metaphors permit the tantrummer and his/her family to consider that the problem has acted against each and every one of them in ways that they had not previously suspected. A behavioural description or psychological construct - depending on the family's language use - is materialized into an object, thus reifying the problem. A further element of externalizing the problem is that the metaphorical object is personified and provided with the attributes of one or more of the following personae; a ruthless despot, a malicious trickster, a rogue having a joke at the young person's expense, a bully appropriating the young person's dignity for its own selfish ends. Which personae I employ depends very much on the circumstances.

- *Do you think your temper is tricking you or treating you? Do you think you're being treated when it looks like you are being tricked out of your family? Do your parents believe they are treating you into your family while, at the same time, your temper is tricking you out of it?*
- *Why do you think your tantrumming would want you to appear younger than your true age? What advantage would it get over you? Do you think it is right that your temper should steal your maturity behind your back?*
- *How much can you speak your own mind with your tantrumming taking it over and turning you into its lackey? Do you think it's time to win yourself*

back? Who will get the last laugh: you or your tantrumming?

Gradually a contest emerges between the victimized tantrummer and his/her tyrannizing temper. The outcome will be decided in a contest in which the young person either reclaims his/her anger/feelings, or further permits their temper "to have its way with you, keeping in mind what you now know". Other family members are questioned as to their willingness to take their child's side against their common enemy - the tyranny they are all living under. This is what White refers to as ... *pitting the family against the symptom* (1984, pp.153-154), and is unlike the structure of many psychodynamic interventions that pit the child (with the therapist's assistance) against his/her parents, or those behavioural interventions that pit the parents (with the assistance of the therapist) against their child.¹¹

In a family with a precocious tantrummer - Keri Moyle, aged 9 years, who was threatening violence - the interviewer¹² only had the opportunity in the first interview to get as far as the introduction of the split between the person and the problem through its externalization. At the second session, two weeks later, Mr and Mrs Moyle reported a dramatic reduction in Keri's tantrumming. They accounted for their success in the following way.

Linden: *It was nice to have the language to use. It's taken the threat away from Keri and put it on her temper. I was getting at the temper and not at my daughter and felt good about it. It was the fact that there was a third entity - the fact that there was something outside of her I could get at. I took control of the temper and not Keri. Before, I saw myself getting at the temper through Keri. Now, Keri was on my side getting rid of the temper. I was able to say to her, 'you or I will take control of it, but our family won't be controlled! As sure as eggs this temper isn't going to be the boss of our family'. She was given the choice of participating or not, but we can now cut her off from it and deal with her temper. The difference was the divorcing of her and her temper.*

Richard: *I think the principle had an appeal for Keri ... she could understand it.*

The Severity of the Problem

The severity of the problem is established by a careful reckoning of its history in the life of the family and its current influence on the

tantrummer's and family members' lives. I acquire rather specific information as to how much time is being taken up by the problem:
How much time do you figure your mother/father/siblings spend(s) a day being afraid of your temper? How much time do you figure s/he is being dominated by his/her temper per day?

The influence of the problem over social relationships can be established by closeness/distance questioning:
As his/her tempers get more violent, do you think his/her mother/father/siblings are getting closer to him/her or further away? As your tempers get more violent, do you think your mother/etc. is getting more afraid or less fearful of you?

The history of the problem is examined with the purpose of identifying any beliefs that might block the discovery of new solutions. If the tantrumming hasn't been going on for as long as a family can remember, it is useful to enquire as to its commencement and as to the family's understanding of this. Often the tantrumming is accounted for and 'blamed on' an event in the young person's life, e.g. parents' separation, childhood illness, moving school, etc. This may have produced a theory of psychological disability, one that exempts the young person from the expectation of self-control. A careful incident analysis can undermine such ideas. This incident analysis usually identifies the fact that tantrums are sequentially related to the parents' request for co-operation, their denial of a demand made by the young person, or to the parents' desire to state their own opinion:

Are you allergic to the word 'no'? Do you think all your problems would go away if your parents took all the blame for them? ... If your parents retired from acting as your parents? ... If your parents pretended not to be your parents?

Persistently labelling the young person's behaviour as 'temper-tantrum/tantrumming' also ties the behaviours to notions of age-inappropriateness rather than psychological distress or 'frustration'. Even if the problem appeared to start as a fairly obvious situational reaction, I have found it extremely useful to bring the tantrumming under the young person's and family control before discussing these origins at any length. This interrupts the escalating anger-fear cycle, and dramatically initiates a trend towards the perception and construction of a new solution and the repair of relationships. It is also helpful to have family members predict

the direction they expect their lives, and that of the young person, to take as or if 's/he comes more under the influence of his/her temper?' If their forecast presumes a growing out of it 'by nature' or that 'it's so bad it can't get any worse', I firmly challenge this on the basis of my experience with the life cycle of tantrumming:

How much do you weigh? Eight stone? He's only having an eight stone tantrum. With practice s/he will increase his/her capacity for it and tolerance to it. This may be just a preview of what's to come. What do you think the main feature will be like?

I also inform myself of the sequence of events surrounding the problem by scrupulously tracking an episode of tantrumming that is fresh in the family's mind. Rather than selecting out extraordinary incidences, I check to see that those related are typical. If this appears to be so contentious that a further imbroglio threatens, then it is unwise to proceed with this discussion.

Simplicity of the Solution

It is then pertinent to draw a dramatic distinction between the problem and its severity on the one hand, and the solution in its simplicity on the other. The solution is imputed to be simple, in fact, surprisingly so: *Look, I've met 36 temper tantrummers before today, and you know, everyone of them, except two, turned their back on a temper tantrumming lifestyle.*

I might describe what happened with these two exceptions and propose that the successful solution on these occasions was undone by some restraint. This I would do if I had a hunch that a similar restraint was operating in the family I was currently interviewing:
It worked for five months with one young person but then she decided to ring up her father every time she didn't get her own way. Her parents had been separated for some time but her mother mistakenly believed that the separation was her fault even though he ran off with another woman. How crazy can you get? Guilt once again overtook the mother and the temper took over her daughter.

I then ask: *Do you believe me?*

Following this, I invite family members into a discussion about how those families that were successful achieved what they did. Following this, I ask: *How long do you think it took them?*

Such a question evolves a temporal context for the events to come, and lends a different complexion to considerations about the properties of persons and the explanations for temper tantrumming. Family members usually respond by guessing anywhere between two months and one year, or with the more indefinite 'ages'. In the face of these predictions, family members usually find my response quite startling:

One session - matter of fact, they walked out the door there (pointing) and their temper never got the better of them again. They tell me something happened just about the second step down on their way out. A number have marked the spot with an x. Would you be interested in seeing their marks? I can't make any sense of it - they say something about feeling vibrations.

After the interview, on the way out, I often take young tantrummers (aged 8-12 years) aside and show them the marks and ask them to stand on the most recent one. Many of them report that they can feel something, and I then endeavour to get precise details:
Did the vibrations stop at your ankle or go right up to your knee? Were they ticklish? Do you feel stronger or weaker now?

For young people, this offers a magical explanation and empowerment for the contest ahead. It also locates a solution in some action taken by the young person.

For adolescents and their parents, I provide all concerned with the opportunity for either (1) having post-treatment letters from parents or ex-temper tantrummers read aloud to them, or (2) calling up veterans against temper tantrumming who have willingly agreed to remain on phone duty to offer support and reassurances about the simplicity of the solution, or (3) listening to or watching audio or audio-video tapes of ex-temper tantrummers and their families telling of their victories over the influence of tantrums in their lives. The following is an example of a post-treatment letter from parents to other parents. I also have a collection from ex-tantrummers themselves and can usually find an age-appropriate one for all new referrals.

CASE VIGNETTE

Chloe (aged 13 years) was extremely advanced for her age. She had been tantrumming for the past four years and this was on the increase. Her parents had become quite frightened by the lengths to which she would go

in these tantrums.

The family was sent a reasonable facsimile of the letter referred to when discussing the Moore family. Chloe's letter read:

I would like to invite you to my house on (time and date) for a Temper Tantrum and Pumpkin Pie Party. Pumpkin pie and whipped cream will be provided by my friend, David. He has agreed to do this because he has failed to help me. I will play you a recording of my tantrumming so you can help me change. I will be deeply hurt if you don't come to my party.

If necessary, this letter was to be delivered by her younger brother to her three best friends. In addition, I included a confidential letter to Chloe:
Dear Chloe,

I may be wrong in expecting you to grow up before your time. After all, you are between being a young girl and a young woman. If you decide to grow up I want to warn you that you will have to leave the fun and games of childhood behind - Enid Blyton books, hopscotch, building sand castles, and so many other things kids like to do. It's a big decision. If you decide not to grow up I will still respect you and find another way to help. DE

The following was also appended to the 'temper tantrum control programme' letter:

It struck all of us that Chloe has a lot of concerns for a girl her age. For some reason or other, she has been under the impression that her worries will overwhelm her parents. It was agreed that her father would provide her with a daily scheduled 'worry time' of 15 minutes duration - no more, no less. She may find this difficult so, for the scheduled time, you can do some enjoyed and shared activity. She may need time to trust you with her worries. Reassure her merely by allocating that time and attention. Don't be tempted into solving her problems - just share them for the time being. Help her only to describe them. Find out her feelings and thoughts regarding her school placement.

The tantrumming spontaneously remitted. After three months, I invited Chloe's parents to write about their experiences:

Dear David,

When we came to see you last year, we were all at our wits' end because of Chloe's dreadful temper tantrums and violent reactions. Prior to seeing you, we truly believed we had a severely disturbed thirteen-year-old on our terrified hands. In a relatively short time she had changed from a spirited, happy child, to what seemed to us an uncontrollable delinquent.

Our session with you has caused a complete change. The day in your office

about three months ago was traumatic to all of us. We were all scared of the 'unknown' I guess. Chloe was sullen and completely silent most of the time. We could see that she had chosen to be as unco-operative as possible and were embarrassed as no parent wants one's child to be presented to a stranger at her worst. However, even though the interview opened a new can of worms and brought out a few hidden worries, we, the untrained parents, really could not see that one session with you could possibly bring about any real results. How wrong we were!

Chloe has not thrown a tantrum since then. Sure, she gets angry and frustrated at times: we all do. However, she now keeps her anger under control and disappears into her bedroom to 'let off steam'. She was very embarrassed at her trip to the Leslie Centre and to you and for being shown for the immature and childish person she was. She, within hours of leaving you, started to act in a much more responsible manner and has gone from strength to strength ever since. If only Dr Jekyll had someone like you, Mr Hyde could have slept nights!

We never got a chance to try your Temper Tantrum Control Programme. Chloe has now started her new college (the one she was so worried about) and has made friends in her first few minutes there. She appears very happy with her main worry being if she will ever find a boyfriend.

The two things which amaze us most of all this are:

1. The speed with which Chloe snapped out of her problem - literally as she left your office. We expected it to take months and several sessions with you.
2. The maturity and dignity, not to mention responsibility, she has acquired in the time since we all saw you.

We realise, as we are in the early teenage years with Chloe, there is still a long way to go and the problems are by no means over, but at least we can now discuss things rationally which is 90% of most teenage problems.

With many thanks and best wishes, MM

PS: Chloe wants to be a cookery teacher - could it have anything to do with pumpkin pies???

DECONSTRUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

Scientific and therapeutic psychologies have infiltrated many 'folk' psychologies. This is especially the case with those 'folk' psychologies that

relate to childrearing. Some of the psychotherapies have singled out anger as inviolate and have confirmed the overt expression of anger as representative of psychological grace.

In the current vogue of 'self-expression' and 'ventilationism', it is virtually anger which receives central if not exclusive attention. Pent-up anger is said to poison the personality, and thus should be 'let out'. But we hear few such exhortations to honesty concerning the far more poisonous emotions of envy and resentment. (Solomon 1976)

Accordingly, temper tantrumming is often mistakenly regarded by family members, and by some therapies, as a cathartic purgation or at least as evidence of the volume of anger within the young person. Parents are often restrained from taking any effective action by their concern for not suppressing their children's feelings.

Anger can be conceptualised as an attribute of the person, a force within. Families presume different grounds for this: genetic, family dispositional, developmental, or characterological. If the problem is construed on the basis of genetic or temperamental 'theories', then one has little choice but to accommodate to the problem and make the best of a bad lot. If it is construed as developmental in nature, then one can only hope s/he grows out of it - the sooner the better. If it is construed as characterological, then s/he ought to be discouraged from repressing his/her anger for fear of psychological side-effects. All of these constructions can be very restraining in attempting to deal with the problems that relate to temper tantrums.

If the problem can be reconstructed through its externalization, presumably some of the existing pre-suppositions are indirectly undermined in the process. Also, many of these restraining beliefs can be directly deconstructed by the introduction of a distinction around anger and tantrumming. Anger can be legitimated and validated at the same time as the therapist can contend that a person must learn how, when, and where, it might be appropriately expressed. Temper tantrumming is evaluated as inappropriate to this task and instead regarded as leading to control over others and, at the same time, to losing control over one's relationship with oneself. Another way of putting this is for the therapist to express admiration for the young person's sensitivity to their own desires and wishes, but to state a concern for the insensitivity of the young person to their parents' desires and wishes.¹³

Parents are reassured that the 'programme' is not intended to turn people into 'feelingless zombies', but rather to lead them into a more satisfactory and satisfying form of emotional expression. Temper tantrummers are promised that they will feel relieved when released from the terrible yoke of their tantrums. Parents are also reassured that the deterioration in their relationship with their son or daughter can be repaired, and that they can expect to experience more 'closeness' in this relationship in the future.

To challenge the notion that anger is inherent in the person rather than something that is expressed in interpersonal context, I sometimes quote from Aristotle:

Anyone can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy.

Or:

It is clear that anger is neither 'good' nor a 'bad' emotion, neither 'positive' nor 'negative', but depends, in any particular case, upon the circumstances and the individual, the nature of the 'offence' and its background. (Solomon 1976)

In deconstructing the problem, it is also extremely useful to bring forth what I call 'cross-contextual contradictions'. Questions such as: "Why do you think your temper doesn't make a fool of you at school? How is it that his/her temper has no hold over him/her when on the sports field/in the gym, etc? Are you as curious as I am that you prevail over your temper when you are in the company of people your own age?" can be asked sympathetically and with genuine curiosity. In addition to providing information about problem-free contexts, these questions undermine those beliefs that cannot account for conduct varying over time and context, and provide evidence that, in many contexts, anger can be controlled and the young person is not invariably its victim.

Such deconstruction plays the role of the 'countervoice' advocated by La Perriere:

It is interesting that now we go the reverse path, and that which has been defined as incapacity or illness benefits by being defined as bad, naughty or resistive. Perhaps this suggests that therapy is a polymorphous societal invention. It becomes the countervoice to whatever is in excess in mainstream culture. (1982, p.91)

RAISING THE DILEMMA: In control or under control?

A dilemma is raised around the stark and dramatic opposition of personal agency and passivity (self in control versus self under control). Such contrasting descriptions of the young person's relationship to the problem bring the question of responsibility into view. The tantrummer and other family members are then invited to consider his/her involvement with tantrums as a matter of choice rather than of necessity. Metaphors of being in control and under control are set in opposition to each other, and frame questions that are posed to the tantrummers and others.

The following provide some examples of such metaphors and questions:¹⁴

- *Are you going to get (back) into the driver's seat of your life, or are you going to permit your temper to drive you where it will?*
- *Are you going to be boss over your temper, or will it boss you around and finally push you into a corner?*
- *Are you going to be your temper's robot, or are you going to take your feelings into your own hands?*
- *Are you going to be intoxicated by tantrumming, or are you going to break away from the habit?*
- *Are you going to be duped by your temper, or are you going to give it a taste of its own medicine?*
- *Are you going to defeat and weaken your temper, or is it going to keep up its winning streak and further weaken you?*
- *Are you going to surrender more of yourself to it, or are you going to get your own back at its expense?*
- *Are you going to be ruled by your temper, or are you going to recapture yourself from its hold over you?*
- *Is your temper going to predominate over you, or will you put it in its place in your life?*

These are challenging questions and usually provoke agentic responses. These questions can be revised for other family members as well:

- *Are you going to surrender further to his/her temper's tyranny, or are you going to regain some ground, ground that is historically yours?*
- *Do you think she should get into the driver's seat in her life, or should she*

abandon herself totally into her temper's grasp?

THE USUAL ELEMENTS OF THE INTERVENTION

To sustain the intensity and interest required to present the regular elements of the intervention, intrigue is introduced. This arouses curiosity and reduces the possibility of an outbreak of tantruming in the session. It is often helpful to ask timely questions that will appear irrelevant or, at best, tangential until the intervention is fully unveiled.

From the outset of crafting the intervention, I always attempt to secure the temper tantrummer's co-operation. I will often forecast success and form a partnership with the tantrummer on that basis:

DE: *Are you any good at writing?*

Mark: (aged 13 years) *Not bad ...*

DE: *Well, look. I'm writing a chapter on temper tantrums and a lot of the other younger people who have done it really couldn't figure out how they did it. Would you mind keeping a good record of how you do it and, after your tantrum-free month, I'd be willing to pay you to come back and make a videotape with me, telling other young people who haven't yet learned how to control their temper, how you did it. You'll be a consultant here. How much do you charge for your services? But you know, your writing doesn't have to have all the commas and things in place. I can help you with that. We'll do it together.*

Mark: *Is that alright, Mum? Can I do it?*

Here, co-operation is predicted on the existence of an imminent solution that the young person may both enact and discover. By the careful use of verbal tense, the therapist can consign the problem to the past. A new relationship between the young person and the problem can then be implied.

At an appropriate time after the problem has been both reconstructed and deconstructed, and after the tantrummer and his/her family are committed, at least in principle, to the 'simplicity of the solution', I put our engagement to the test:

DE: *Look, I think I can give you a money-back guarantee on the programme. If you've failed, you would be the third out of ... (current number of families) I've worked with. I don't see any reason why you'd want to fail but, if you do, I'm on the side of your success. You could lead*

a solution lifestyle rather than a problem lifestyle. But you're going to need to trust me and, within reason, I would be willing to submit myself to your testing my trustworthiness. Do you want to test me?

A willingness on the therapist's behalf to undergo testing by others seems sufficient as a test of engagement. As yet, no-one has taken this opportunity to submit me to a trustworthiness test. However, in the event of a 'yes', I would not proceed further until this matter was settled to the satisfaction of family members. Such a trustworthiness test would include family members calling up ex-clients, ex-tantrummers, colleagues, etc. in order for them to assess my competence. When family members say 'no' to the offer of putting me to the test, I involve them in some ritual of engagement - usually a solemn handshake during which the young person invites my participation in assisting them with their problem, during which I assume responsibility for the 'temper tantrum control programme', on the condition that "once begun, you must go through with it". The family can also be canvassed for support of the therapist's involvement and, if wholehearted agreement is secured, this can be sealed with handshaking all round. I will query anyone's commitment in relation to handshakes that are not firm. If the young person refuses to shake hands, I question his/her readiness to tackle the problem, but not their ability to do so - "I know you're able, but are you ready?" I then would return to a more detailed discussion of the consequences for them and their family if the problem's influence over them were to increase and family relationships were to deteriorate further. I would then schedule another meeting to review their readiness for the intervention.

The Temper Tantrum Party requires a name and guest list. The potential guests are drawn from the problem-free context which have been ascertained well in advance. Because of the social influence adolescents have over their peers, I most commonly use 'your three best friends'. Guest lists have included the Olympic coach and three Olympians in the sport of a tantruming Olympic hopeful, team mates, Boy Scout troupe, colleagues, boy/girl friends, etc. I also enquire if these partygoers are known to the family. This is almost always the case; if not, I would ask for their addresses. The party is named according to the tantrummer's food preference:

DE: (to Mark, aged 13) *Tell me something ... what would you prefer at a party - sweet or savoury things? What would be your first choice?*

Mark: (confused) *Savoury ... don't like sweets much. Ah ... a little bit.*
 DE: *Gee, a 13-year-old who doesn't have a sweet tooth.* (referring question to his mother) *This is pretty unusual!*
 Mother: *No, that's right. He doesn't eat much sweets.*
 DE: *Well, look ... if you went to a party and could only have one thing, what would it be?*
 Mark: *A sweet.*
 DE: *What kind of sweet?*
 Mark: (ponders) *A chocolate log.*
 DE: *Can your mother bake a chocolate log?*
 Mark: *Yeah ... she's good at baking.*
 DE: *Chocolate log it is!*

Parents are then provided with instructions regarding the 'cards' which are reiterated by letter.¹⁵ This is followed at once by the 'letters of invitation'. I compose a sample letter in everyone's presence and this stands as the *denouement* of the intervention. The temper tantrummer is often shocked into silence, whereas the family is quicker to appreciate the joke. The tantrummer often regains his/her equilibrium by expostulating: "I'll just stop!" It is now that the joke is shared all around. I rapidly reassure all concerned that "there's never been a party yet and, if there is, I'll come along and bring a banana cake".

The following is a 'letter of invitation' composed for Mark, aged 13 years, who, prior to the intervention, had been tantrumming between 10 and 20 times per day:

*Dear Malcolm/Steven/Graham,*¹⁶

I would like to invite you to a Chocolate Log and Temper Tantrum Party at my house on ... (date) at ... (time). My mother and I believe that only you can help me overcome a serious problem I've got in not being able to control my anger. I know that temper tantrums are babyish. When I am with you, I act my age. I think you will be able to help me by listening to or looking at my tantrums. I will be disappointed if you can't come. Your friend, Mark.

Sample letters such as the above are furnished with the following instructions:

Mrs H,

You are to see to it that the letters are to be written in advance and signed.

I argue that if the young person refuses to do so, parents should write them on their behalf. However, I contend that it would be very convincing

evidence of the temper tantrummer's maturity or growing up if s/he did it unaided. I have found on reviewing cases that the struggle to procure the letters appears to have been a turning point in a minority of cases:

Mrs H,

You are to hold these addressed letters in a safe place and see to it that they are delivered when and if the time comes.

Some consideration should be given to the person selected to undertake this putative task. I often choose younger siblings or girl/boy friends.

CONSULTING YOUR CONSULTANT¹⁷

I customarily use a tantrum-free month as my criterion for success, although I have reduced it on occasions for particularly volatile and explosive young people. Roles are reversed in every way possible, but most significantly in regard to the matter of fees. Since s/he now holds the 'solution', payment is offered by the agency to the young person. It has always been declined, either by the young person or by their family. The session is videotaped or, failing that, audiotaped. The tantrummer is awarded the new status of 'veteran of the problem' and 'consultant to other young people regarding the solution to the problem'. Every opportunity is taken to contribute to the endurance of change and to excavate with the young person and their family his/her and their new knowledge. In other words, one of the avowed intentions is to discover their discoveries. New audiences are found so that the changes observed can be marked and ratified in a context wider than the therapist-family system. By risking the loss of face, the tantrummers not only save face but, in addition, find themselves regraded (Epston 1984). They are also more than willing to contribute written documents in the form of letters of advice to other young people, or to offer telephone consultations.

In those cases where the tantrumming is merely substantially reduced, the same procedure is followed with the additional purpose of expanding and elaborating the young person's knowledge. *You've now gone 60% of the way. Knowing what you now know will very likely take you over the finish line.* I have found that the mopping-up operation is usually not too difficult as the 'reign of terror' is now over and all parties to the problem can participate with it differently.

The following are excerpts from a 'consulting your consultant' session, seven weeks after the first meeting. Simon, aged 12 years, had tantrummed on the average of seven times per week and had assaulted his twin 15 year old sisters. His single parent mother had been reluctant to leave their home for fear that there would be violence between Simon and his sisters. Simon had retreated into his own room, whereas the other family members moved fearfully around the house.

I take pains to honour this young man in particular and the other family members in general. I also attend to the individual family members' responses to his victory against temper and their defeat of fear. If, as in this family, there have been many changes in many parts of the family system - for example, Simon's new claim to honesty, his mother's willingness to insist on his equal participation in the household and its daily activities, the commencement of the repair of the sibling relationships, and Simon's newfound co-operation - then I raise the question with the family whether they wish to meet again "over anything". In a minority of cases, the family and I have embarked upon new initiatives on further matters of their concern.

The Preamble

DE: *Simon, it seemed to me that you had been driven into a life of irresponsibility by your temper. It had gotten the better of you and was making you look immature and silly. Then you decided, along with your mother and your sisters, that you didn't want to be victims of this any longer. And you were, in fact, its biggest victim, although they too were being victimized by your temper taking you over and taking them over. It seemed to me that you were feeling that everyone else was quite close together and you were being pushed away.*

The Review

DE: *Well, what happened to the temper tantrumming Nicola?*

Nicola: *He's been given the first card and then he just kinda stopped. He's been really good though.*

DE: *Have you been finding that you are having a better brother and sister relationship?*

Nicola: *Yes.*

Mother: *I've been amazed! I can show him the first card. Admittedly, you sat there once and tore it into pieces. Then you got the second card. I think he might have actually got to the final warning. That was only once that happened ... it was near the beginning. But generally since then, occasionally the card gets waved and that's all he needs.*

Discovering their Discoveries

DE: *Could you explain to me how you did this work on yourself? How you did this work on your temper? What did you do?*

Simon: *I didn't want to be embarrassed by Mum handing out those things to my friends.*

DE: *Yeah, I know you wouldn't. A lot of people wouldn't want to be embarrassed by something like that, but they don't do anything about it ... they really can't do anything about their problem ... you did. How did you do that bit?*

Simon: *Well ... I just ... I was getting further away from my family ... so, whenever I was shown a card I tried to fight it.*

DE: *Did that thought give you strength to get the better of your temper?*

Simon: *Yeah.*

DE: *Really ... I guess your family gives you a lot of strength? And you give them a lot of strength?*

Simon: *Yeah.*

DE: *That's what families are for - to strengthen one another. Do you think that your sisters have stopped being afraid of you, or are they taking a little while to get their courage back?*

Simon: *They are better.*

DE: *How are they better? How are they improved?*

Simon: *They do things for me ... like I asked my sister to make breakfast for me and she did.*

DE: *And before, what would have happened?*

Simon: *She would have usually said "no" or "get it yourself".*

DE: *Why do you think she is more giving to you now?*

Simon: *Because I am more pleasant.*

DE: *(to mother) Have you noticed him being more pleasant?*

Mother: *Yes ... yes!*

DE: *What's it like?*

Mother: (laughing) *Quite nice.*

DE: *Can I ask: Remember how things used to be when he was having 7 tantrums a week? What percentage improvement has there been in your family life since temper tantrums have been kicked out of your family?*

Mother: *Well, I'd say about 80%. There are times he still explodes on the spot but he seems to cool off quickly. The girls aren't pussy-footing around him any more. They ask him for something and he co-operates.*

DE: *I don't think this programme really stops people being angry at all. It just teaches them to get control over themselves and their feelings. Because once they start running away with you, you get put into the grip of your temper. And once you are in the grip of your temper, it's like being in the grip of intoxicating liquor. You get drunk on it and don't know what you are doing. So the girls aren't pussy-footing around him any more? What about yourself?*

Mother: *Well, I find I ask him to do things and eventually he does them - sometimes straight off. I'm not avoiding asking him any more because of a temper tantrum. I'll nag now until he does it.*

DE: *Well, he's inviting your nagging.*

.....

DE: *Are you surprised how strong and big you were when you really started going against your temper? And how you could make such short work of it?*

Simon: *Yeah.*

DE: *How long did you think it would take you before you would control your temper?*

Simon: *Ages!*

DE: *How long did you think it would take? Did you think he would be about 30 before he ever would?*

Nicola: *I thought it would take quite a while.*

DE: *How many years, months, weeks, or days?*

Nicola: *About six months.*

Mother: *About twelve months.*

DE: *That's what most people say. You must be pretty surprised. He's a real hero to get the better of it so quickly.*

Mother: *I was quite surprised ... It's made him take control of himself without me having to do very much. He had to stop and think. And just*

generally it's made a difference in him. He's nicer to have around.

DE: *He's a victor; he's nicer to have around. Any other ways you've noticed him being a bigger and better person?*

Mother: *Well, he went through a stage of taking money out of my bag. He actually said to me: "Do you realise I haven't done it for ages and I'm not going to do it any more!"*

DE: *He's also got control over his dishonesty.*

Mother: *Yes.*

DE: *Any other signs that he's done a leap in his growing up?*

Mother: *Generally he's doing things ... he's more co-operative around the place.*

.....

DE: *Are you ready for a bigger dose of responsibility? You're only 12 and a half. Can you take the pressure of it? Can you take it?*

Simon: *Yeah!*

DE: *If your mother started giving you more responsibility, could you stand up to it or would you crack?*

Simon: *I could bear to stand up to it.*

DE: *If you could stand up to your tantrums, I figure you could stand up to more responsibility.*

.....

DE: *Do you think he's nicer to you?*

Nicola: *Yeah.*

DE: *In what way do you see him being nicer?*

Nicola: *I don't know. Just before he wouldn't talk to you at all. He'd go into his bedroom and stay there.*

DE: *Wow! He was getting a long way away from his family, wasn't he?*

Nicola: *Yeah.*

DE: *Is he coming out of his room more?*

Nicola: *Yeah, but sometimes he goes into his room to kinda calm down a bit.*

DE: *Oh, what a good idea! Did you figure that out?*

Simon: *I don't know.*

DE: *That's a pretty good idea. Well, you don't frighten people when you are in your room.*

Nicola: *Sometimes he goes into his room and sits down for a while and pats the dog. And then comes out ...*

DE: *What an excellent idea! Hold on ... Maybe this is what you've been doing instead of going off your face and looking silly. You go into your room where you are on your own and no-one can see you and get angry and pat the dog and get over it. Talk to the dog and tell it how mean your mother is and your sisters are terrible. And I bet that dog understands you and you feel a bit better. Did you invent this idea of going into your room and patting the dog, or did you get some advice on it?*

Simon: *No ... I just go in and pat the dog.*

DE: *You made it up? This is quite a good invention ... A good discovery. Did you know that you had discovered this?*

Simon: *No.*

DE: *Are you making a discovery that you have made a discovery?*

Simon: *No.*

DE: *So, right now, you've making a discovery that you have made a discovery?*

Simon: *No.*

DE: *Well, am I getting through to you what a good idea this is? What a good discovery?*

Simon: *Yes.*

DE: *Am I getting through to you?*

Simon: *Yes.*

DE: *Do you think I've got it through to you?*

Simon: *Yes.*

DE: *Well, when you came here today, you didn't even know you had made this invention?*

Simon: *No.*

DE: *But you noticed he had been going into his room and cooling down instead of going off his head?*

Nicola: *Mmh.*

DE: *That's very good. Would you recommend that to other young men or women?*

Simon: *Yeah!*

DE: *It's a good ideal*

Simon: *It'd be a bit bad if they didn't have a dog.*

DE: *A cat, teddy bear, or even a punching bag. How did you come to that discovery?*

Simon: *I don't know.*

DE: *What made you do it - go in there, cool down, pat the dog, be a bit grumpy and then come out and be a nice person? What made you do it?*

Simon: *I didn't want to get a card ... because no-one can usually see me.*

DE: *(to mother) Did you know he was doing this?*

Mother: *Well, now that Nicola brought it up, I did. I show him a card and quite often he takes himself off to his room.*

DE: *He's getting in control.*

Mother: *Yes, he did.*

DE: *Did you decide to go to your room and wrestle with your temper? Is that why you went there to win over it without anyone looking?*

Simon: *Yeah.*

DE: *When no-one was looking, did that help you win over it?*

Simon: *Yeah.*

DE: *Did you think you would have a better chance to win with people looking or being on your own?*

Simon: *A bit of both really!*

DE: *How's that?*

Simon: *Well, sometimes I do it when they're all around and sometimes I go into my room.*

DE: *So you've got two ways of beating it.*

Simon: *Yeah.*

DE: *Sometimes out in the open, and sometimes behind closed doors.*

Simon: *Yeah!*

SURVEY OF OUTCOMES

Family therapy practitioners have often been criticized for their unwillingness to evaluate their outcomes (see Humphreys 1980; Cross 1982). There has never been a strong adherence to the rigorous application of controlled group studies for both epistemological and practical reasons. Despite the more obvious utility of single case methodologies, such research designs have not come into favour (see Cross 1984). On the other hand, there has been a call for outcome studies undertaken by practitioners, unburdened by the requirements of methodological 'robustness'. The evidence is then 'soft' but the argument is carried on the basis of large samples with statistically significant results. This survey is well placed within this tradition although, admittedly, rough-and-ready.

The following questionnaire was forwarded to as many family therapists as I knew who had used at least some of the constant elements of the 'temper tantrum party' approach to out-of-control behaviours.

Temper Tantrum Party Questionnaire

1. How many times do you estimate you have used some of the constant elements of the Temper Tantrum Party approach to anger control problems?
2. What were the ages of the temper tantrummers? Or, what do you estimate was the average age of your population of temper tantrummers?
3. The temper tantrumming itself:
never occurred again;
dramatically diminished;
substantially diminished;
diminished;
no change;
increased.
4. Did you use a prescribed period of time for follow-up? If so, specify in weeks, months, or years what that time was.
5. How many meetings were required to get the result noted in Question 3? In each case, or on the average, if you have a large sample.
6. Please detail your reasons for either failure of the 'programme' or its withdrawal.
7. Please detail the most violent or assaultive young person you have successfully dealt with through the constant elements of the temper tantrum party approach.
8. Under what circumstances would you not apply such an approach?
9. Any other comments you would like to make about the temper tantrum party approach to anger control problems?
10. Do you have any objections to your name, profession, or work place being cited?

I received fourteen written replies and one verbal report. I have included my own results to make the number up to sixteen. The respondents worked in a wide variety of settings (child psychiatry, residential programmes, community mental health centres, and private practices), although they all were child and family-centred. The outcomes

reported then are trans-Tasman, cross-therapist, and cross-agency.

The number of individuals affected by the intervention was 131, with a mean of 8.19 per respondent (range 1-36). I had been required to replace 'families' or 'cases' with individuals as there were several cases with more than one tantrumming family member. The maximum was five family members within one family. Almost all the information was derived from six-month follow-ups, with a reasonable number of one-year follow-ups. Almost all reported an average of 2-3 sessions, with a range of 1-5.

The following is a range of comment to questions 6-8:

The poor results were all in situations where, for one reason or another, I did not manage to get the parents hooked on the idea and committed to an active approach, e.g. in one case, the parents were planning their separation and this became their main preoccupation. In another case, the parents did not think there was a problem, although the school did. (Kerry Callaghan, Genesis Centre, Whangarei, NZ)

I would not use such an approach with children who have an uncertain place in their family or with families in which the parents used powerful forms of punishment, e.g. parents were tyrannical rather than the child. (Gay Bayfield, Leslie Centre, Auckland, NZ)

I suspect there are situations in which I wouldn't use it. I've found it most useful in cases of identifiable or episodic outbursts, rather than in cases of more generalised, more constant behaviour problems. In some ways, the more violent the kid, the better it works - so I wouldn't waste it on a kid whose violence was not convincing enough. I have had a number of parents who initially balked at it and are concerned that it is unfair, blackmail, or will damage Johnny's self-esteem. This is a useful reflection of their belief systems. I usually manage to overcome this minor hurdle with a laugh and a comment about damaging his self-esteem versus continuing to have their heads damaged, but it could fluster some therapists. (Michael Durrant, Eastwood Family Therapy Centre, Sydney, Australia)

Others pointed out the failure to gain the co-operation of the tantrummer. Kerry Callaghan and Laurie Hinchcliff (Glenburn Centre, Auckland, NZ) cautioned against its use with rigid families or in families where there is profound marital discord.

The following is a sample of responses to Question 7:

1. *A fourteen year old Maori young man who used to attack his mother with a carving knife. She believed him to be taken over by one of his ancestors.*

The suggestion of time out and a Temper Tantrum Party involving his tribal elders resulted in his mother taking charge of him. The young man subsequently decided to join a Maori culture group so that he could learn traditional Maori challenges. His temper tantrums were dramatically reduced and his family now manages him better and feel safe to walk off and ignore him if he looks like he is going to get into one of his rages. (Kerry Callaghan)

2. A twelve year old boy described in the first interview as "violent, frequently hurts two younger brothers, hits mother. Throws things, makes threats including running away and killing himself. Relations can't stand him. Throws tantrums if annoyed and can't fight without becoming hysterical. Describes himself as out of control." (Gay Bayfield)
3. A young man, aged 16-17, spoke incessantly of murdering his mother and had taken a gun to school and shot holes in the roof. Both the therapists and family were concerned that he would kill his mother. On follow-up, they were all very happy and he had left school and obtained a job. (Simon Kennedy, Melbourne)

The results are extremely impressive:

		%age
Never occurred again:		
Dramatically diminished:	60	45
Substantially diminished:	56	42
Diminished:	10	8
No change:	2	2
Increased:	2	2
	1	1
Total:	131	100

The high percentage of clustering in the 'never occurred again' and 'dramatically reduced' categories (116 = 87%) is a convincing argument for the effectiveness of the intervention. The 'never occurred again' category might even have been higher if the parents had been asked to discriminate carefully between 'tantrumming' and 'anger' and its appropriate expression. I have known some parents to report tantrumming for any expression of anger, even that occurring within the time limits of the intervention. A more careful discussion can lead to the young person appreciating their

self-interventions and their parents acknowledging them for it. The average of 2-3 sessions argues for its economy as, previously, many of these young people would have been admitted to long-term residential programmes or psychiatric treatment - much of which must be considered as custodial or containment. Such services are notoriously expensive and hard to run.

I believe that the intervention preserves the dignity of these young people and the integrity of their families. Many other families with whom I have utilized this intervention were on the point of exiling the tantrummer, or another of the family members - usually the mother - was considering self-exile. Either way, many of these families, on referral, were escalating towards breakdown. Also, I have found that many such families, once they have decided to take action, are willing to accept nothing short of a dramatic reduction in tantrumming before they will consider any intervention a success. Often, reports of diminished or substantially diminished incidents are regarded by these families as insufficient; they are so terrorised as to deem such improvements as merely a reprieve and nothing more. For these reasons, results must be extraordinarily dramatic if they are to go over the tantrummer's and family's threshold for 'news of difference' that relationships are and can be different. Many parents report similar remarks to John Boylan:

I think we're still in shock over it ... it's all been too easy. When we talk about it now, it makes it sound as if it wasn't so bad. But I've never met anyone like it (referring to 9-year-old daughter).

The fact that the intervention is almost always experienced by all concerned as a joke is extremely helpful. On review, all the families I have worked with had begun repairing their deteriorated relationships and the parents had rapidly re-assumed their parenting entitlement. All the ex-tantrummers have reported a great relief, feeling more in control of their feelings and the course of their lives, and a good deal of satisfaction with their family reunion. I have also used variations of this intervention, employing different contexts of ideas, with men who are violent to their partners and children. Although the number is very small by comparison, the results are as favourable.¹⁸

I have used this intervention 36 times over a 9 year period and, with practice, the proportion of 'never occurred again' to 'dramatically reduced' is increasing to the extent that I now offer 'double your money back' guarantees to families. I have no hesitation in recommending this

intervention.

Several young people have commented: *What makes you think you are good at your job? I could have figured that out myself!* I agree wholeheartedly with them. It is interesting to speculate why such interventions haven't emerged before 1979.¹⁹ I am encouraged by the arrival of the constructivist approach to emotion, an approach that is both language-based and contextual. This work holds considerable promise in making sense of such clinical practices as outlined above (see Averill 1980; Sabini & Silver 1982; and Harre 1986).

NOTES

1. "Going off your face" is an Australian colloquialism for temper tantrumming.
2. This occurred in 1979. Versions of this paper have been presented at the New Zealand Family Therapy Conference (1983) and the Australian Family Therapy Conference (1986).
3. All names are fictitious.
4. A theoretical discussion will be available in a forthcoming paper. Any such discussion would start from Goffman's work on facework and embarrassment (Goffman 1956, 1959, 1963 & 1967). The most recent summary would be Silver, Sabini and Parrott, 1988.
5. 40 (30%) of the 131 interventions reported in the outcome study were undertaken in two Sydney residential care programmes (Burnside and Care Force - Michael Durrant, Eastwood Family Therapy Centre, consulted to both these programmes.) All involved adolescents who were either in residential care, or whose parents had approached those agencies for residential care. The violence of these adolescents were described as "assaultive of parents, family and neighbours, smashing property, 2-4 hour long tantrums, biting, and making 'animal' noises".
6. This article should be read alongside White's "Ritual of Inclusion" (1986). I prefer to reserve the 'ritual of inclusion' for those young people who have not experienced any sustained sense of 'belonging', and for those adults in their lives who have not been able to 'belong' them.
7. See White (1988) for examples of direct and indirect questions. Compare: "How did you manage to take this step?" as an example of a direct question, to: "What do you think this achievement, as a signpost, tells me about the nature of your new direction?" as an example of an indirect question.
8. See Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale (1985a, 1985b) for a critique of mother-blaming in the major clinical journals relating to children and family problems.
9. 'Gaslighting' is used as a metaphor - drawn from the classic film "Gaslight" in which a husband (played by Charles Boyer) attempts to drive his wife (played by Ingrid Bergman) mad by systematically altering the grounds of her reality - by Gass & Nichols (1988), to describe how unfaithful husbands try to convince their suspicious wives they are imagining things. Some of the more able young people reported in this paper have also been 'gaslighting' their parents in a similar fashion. They often convince their parents that they have merely imagined making requests and that, in fact, they haven't.
10. It was noted above that, while it is objectively possible to draw a distinction between the body and the world, such a distinction is much more blurred and problematic in a behavioural environment. Thus any conceptual system must embody such a distinction, even though where that distinction will be drawn is not given a priori. That is, a fundamental dimension in any conceptual system - and hence in the domain of control - is between those things that are held to be intrinsic to the conceiver, and those things that are intrinsic (Lock 1981, p.28-29).
11. Eileen Swann, Family Therapist, Leslie Centre.
12. White 1983 (May), workshop held at the Leslie Centre, Auckland, New Zealand.
13. This frame of reference has been applied with success to temper tantrumming and extreme non-compliance in pre-schoolers in a project undertaken with Donna Hourigan-Johnson and Jan Rodwell at Leslie Centre (1988). Parents are invited to consider, via complementary questioning, balancing their children's self-sensitivity and other (parent)-insensitivity and their sensitivity to others (children) and their insensitivity to self, especially in the case of mothers. This will be the subject of a forthcoming publication.
14. The following questions are merely slight modifications of some well known dilemma questions invented by Michael White and presented in workshops in New Zealand and Australia in the period 1982-6. See also Epston, D. & White, M. "Consulting Your Consultants' Consultants", 1985.
15. Refer to the Temper Tantrum Control Programme, A & B, in this article.
16. Mark's three best friends.
17. See Epston & White 1989a.
18. This approach with modifications has been used by Kennedy (1987) for persistent sibling disputes, and by Esler (1988) for a young woman diagnosed as manic-depressive.

19. Reading the literature, I did locate some clinical reports, similar to my own, made some time ago in a residential community for delinquent and violent youth:

"One of the greatest surprises during the many baffling experiences at Pioneer House was the discovery that, after a certain amount of total ego improvement, even the most severe and obviously extremely pathological temper tantrums of a specific child could be avoided by a well-timed attempt at ... kidding the youngster out of it ... The reason why a skilled approach by the technique of ... tension decontamination ... would work and the conditions under which the effect is secured are still a puzzle to us." (Redl & Wineman 1957, p.415)

Despite several intrapsychic speculations, nothing could satisfactorily fit these chance discoveries and they were lost.

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CHAPTER IV

FAMILY THERAPY TRAINING AND SUPERVISION IN A WORLD OF EXPERIENCE AND NARRATIVE

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