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Instructor's Name

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The Art of Throwing a Fit

My middle daughter, Erica, is a precious eight year old. She has a sweet personality and a tender heart, but her greatest attribute is her contagious laugh, which always starts with a giggle and doesn't end until it reaches the tips of her toes. Although she is a delightful child, Erica, like many other children, can throw a spectacular temper tantrum. Most parents will automatically know how this works; it starts with begging, which in turn leads to whining. The whining then leads to pouting and anger, and then to finish up, Erica always offers a sincere apology.

Begging starts gradually and intensifies as Erica begins to realize that she is not going to get her way. It begins with a simple "please, Mommy," and quickly works its way up to "please, Mommy, I promise I'll clean my room if you'll let me," as if she wouldn't have to clean her room regardless.

When realization sets in and she sees that she isn't going to get her way, Erica begins to whine. This, of course, is not in place of the begging, but in addition to the begging. I'm not sure where she learned this part of the tantrum, but she has absolutely mastered it. Erica, without a doubt, is the best whiner in the universe. She begins by raising her voice an octave or two and continuously going back and forth between octaves while continuing to beg. "You never let me do anything," is her favorite phrase at this point. It's during this portion of the fit that she also adds tears. This is the factor that makes parents most vulnerable; those who are weak may give in. Sometimes it seems easiest to just hug her and let her have her way. Other times it would be

just as easy to spank her.

When the whining is finished, it is time for the anger and pouting. Erica stomps to her bedroom and lightly slams the door, knowing exactly how much she can get away with before I blow my top. Usually, she stays in her room and pouts for only a few minutes, although sometimes she will stay in her self-made cell for a couple of hours, but only if she accidentally falls asleep.

After Erica calms down, being the sweetheart that she is, she goes into the stage that most children do not: she becomes apologetic. As I said, Erica has a tender heart. She always tells me how sorry she is and usually with tears in her eyes. I think she knows this makes me feel terribly guilty for not giving into her in the first place.

These temper tantrums, of course, can be a nightmare, and Erica seems to know just when they will work the best. I am extremely thankful that Erica doesn't resort to these kinds of tactics often. Otherwise, I feel that I may fall prey to her beautiful little face and the crocodile tears she seems to produce at will. At this point, I plan to remain strong, but with the teenage years ahead, I'm still trying to prepare myself.