



**COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES**  
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**EVOKED RESPONSE AROUSAL PLUS SENSITIZATION**

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Definition: A way to eliminate chronically ritualistic, violent child tantrums that are self-injurious or dangerous to others. Staff ask an admired peer/s to watch the tantrums from unpredictable times after their start. When the tantrum ends, staff ask the child who had the tantrum to say sorry to the observing peer/s.

Elements: Staff pre-select at least 3 children whom the aggressive child admires - looks for, is aware of their presence, imitates their gestures, postures, speech or other behaviours, and is never violent in their presence. When the child has a tantrum, staff remove surrounding objects as if s/he has a major fit and wait for it to pass while placing an admired peer at a safe distance away but still within clear sight. After the outburst ends, staff ask the violent child to look at and say sorry to the admired peer. The violent child may well refuse and looks uncomfortable on seeing the admired peer, and even more so if more admired peers are added as observers at later times. The violent child then tends to postpone and interrupt the tantrum ritual, which then attenuates and stops.

Related procedures: Differential reinforcement of incompatible or low-rate behaviours; avoidance conditioning; sensory extinction; *shame aversion*, *covert sensitisation*.

Application: For children individually (not in groups) who can stand around others and mingle, and are age 6 or older; in schools, residential and group-transition homes, psychiatric institutions, and correctional youth centers.

1st Use? As a concept, Asmus et al (1999)

References:

1. Asmus JM, Wacker DP, Harding J, Berg WK, Derby KM, Kocis E (1999) Evaluation of antecedent stimulus parameters for the treatment of escape-maintained aberrant behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, *32*, 495-513
2. Ruben DH (1999) Why traditional behavior modification fails with urban children. In NR Macciomei & DH Ruben (Eds.) *Behavior Management in the Public Schools: An Urban Approach*, p19-27. Wesport, CT: Praeger Press
3. Ruben DH (2003) Aggressive tantrum elimination using evoked response arousal plus sensitization in preschool developmentally disabled. *Behavioral Systems Monograph*, *2*, 1-6.

Case Illustration (Ruben, unpublished)

Becky, a girl of 9 with autism, attended a special education classroom for developmentally disabled children. With no or minimal warning, she exploded several times a day in a cascade of behaviors harming herself and others. She beat her chest, hit her face, fell on the floor, might knock down nearby furniture, and struck peers who were in her way. Staff pre-selected 3 peers she admired, around whom she never showed tantrums. During Becky's first tantrum of the day, staff asked a pre-selected peer to stand several feet away and watch the tantrum from where Becky could see her. When the aggressive burst ended, the teacher asked Becky to say 'I'm sorry' to the

observing peer. Becky refused, got upset and ran to another part of the room. At a different interval after the start of Becky's next tantrum that day, the same peer watched her again until the tantrum ended. When it ended, the teacher again asked Becky to say sorry to the observing peer. Becky refused. A second admired peer was recruited as a tantrum-observer and the teacher asked Becky to apologize to both peers after her outburst ended. Again Becky refused. By the 3rd or 4th consecutive day of tantrums with the admired peers coming in unpredictably to watch Becky, Becky did something different. Before she started her first tantrum of the day, Becky began to look around the room 2-3 times to see if admired peers were present. If they were not, she started her tantrum and after 30-60 seconds stopped abruptly and again looked around for admired peers. If they remained absent she resumed her tantrum for up to a minute, and again looked round. By days 5 or 6, Becky delayed starting her tantrums until later in the day. They become briefer and less self-injurious, and she stopped mild outbursts within 30 seconds. Within 2 weeks her ritual violent tantrums stopped entirely, and she only made occasional angry or obscene verbal remarks in a low voice over the next 3 months.