

Dear Counselling Corner:

This is difficult for me to write. I recently was with my child shopping. My child was tired and cranky, and I see now that it was a mistake to have taken them. Anyway, they wanted a toy that I didn't want to purchase. When I said 'no' this erupted into a tantrum. People were staring and it was super embarrassing. My face went bright red, and I was at a loss as to what to do and so ended up buying the toy. It seemed to 'do' the trick and they stopped crying immediately. The problem is, the toy was expensive and once home, they didn't even seem to want it anyway. I felt foolish and my spouse was irritated. A few days later, almost the exact same thing happened, however, it was candy this time, which I also ended up buying and giving to them. I am feeling powerless and upset with myself. I know that I should not have given in, but in the moment, I was so uncomfortable with the audience or strangers all gawking and waiting to see how I was going to handle my kid. I am upset with myself and am not sure how to handle this. I need some guidance. I am dreading the next shopping outing. Thanks.

Embarrassed parent

Dear Parent:

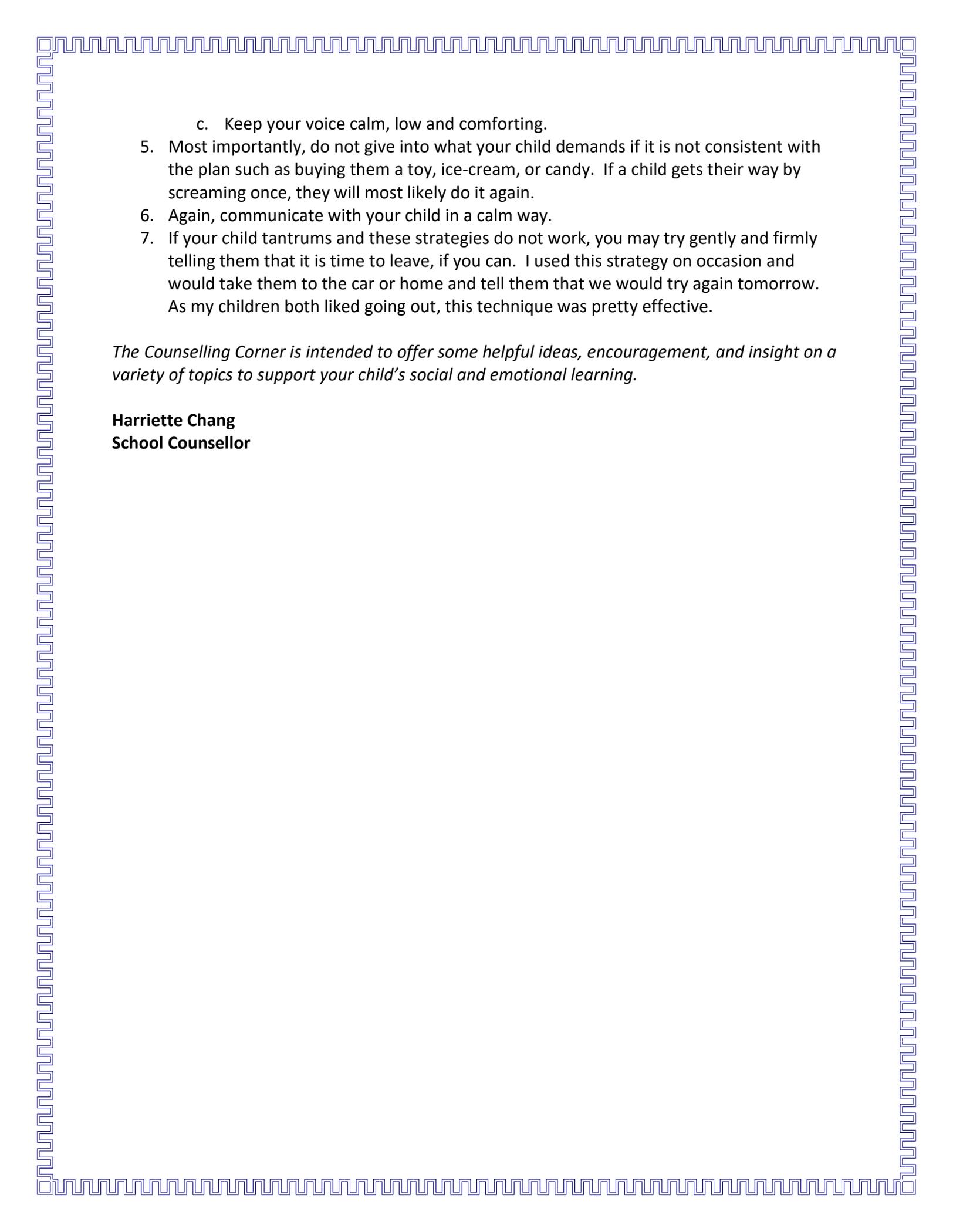
First of all, please stop being so hard on yourself. Parenting is one of the toughest jobs and I applaud you for reaching out for support. It can be very difficult to be in public when our children misbehave. Eyes are on us as spectators stare in curiosity wondering how we are going to handle this situation and what is going to happen next. I would recommend that next time, you pretend that nobody is watching or that you are at home.

I also believe that these tantrums can be prevented from happening in the first place with a bit of preparation. I came across a fabulous article written by Cate Scolnik called How to Deal with Tantrums in Public without Feeling Like a Fool. Check out her website at:

<https://afineparent.com/positive-parenting-faq/how-to-deal-with-tantrums.html>

Some of the highlights which she recommends are below:

1. Tell your child what is going to happen in advance and explain that toys or things that they see on their outing are not for keeping. Communicate clearly before the outing and before future ones.
2. Be prepared in case something goes wrong. Have snacks and simple entertainment in case they are hungry or bored. Drawing paper and felts may work well if your child likes to draw. Packing snacks such as granola bars may also be helpful.
3. Before the trip, set clear expectations for behaviour.
4. Be prepared for changes in the plan, such as an extended shopping trip. If this happens and your child's behaviour escalates, you may wish to try these strategies:
 - a. Give them some extra attention and acknowledge that they want to go home. Try to add a fun component which they will enjoy by letting them know that you will stop at the park or do something which they enjoy once they are home.
 - b. You may also wish to get them involved helping you with what you are doing.

- 
- c. Keep your voice calm, low and comforting.
 5. Most importantly, do not give into what your child demands if it is not consistent with the plan such as buying them a toy, ice-cream, or candy. If a child gets their way by screaming once, they will most likely do it again.
 6. Again, communicate with your child in a calm way.
 7. If your child tantrums and these strategies do not work, you may try gently and firmly telling them that it is time to leave, if you can. I used this strategy on occasion and would take them to the car or home and tell them that we would try again tomorrow. As my children both liked going out, this technique was pretty effective.

The Counselling Corner is intended to offer some helpful ideas, encouragement, and insight on a variety of topics to support your child's social and emotional learning.

Harriette Chang
School Counsellor