

The following alternatives are 17 ways to avoid power struggles. These are wonderful ways to use authentic power in your relationships with your children and it promotes positive self-concepts and cooperation. Use any or all of these suggestions and see what a difference it makes!

1. Use friendly action. Oftentimes we nag and nag our children about what they should be doing. Or we talk so much that our children become "parent deaf." Use friendly action instead. For example, you ask your child to pick up his toy from the living room floor. He says, "In just a minute." A minute goes by and the toy still isn't picked up. Put a friendly smile on your face, bring your child over to the toy on the floor and walk away. If he says, "What?" just continue smiling and walk away. The minute you start answering questions or talking, you leave the door open to engage in a verbal struggle.

2. Use one word suggestions. We make over 2,000 compliance requests daily to our children, "pick up your toys," "brush your teeth," "eat your cereal," etc. That kind of communication gets old and children just begin to tune it out. Instead, use one word, like "toys" or "teeth" or "cereal." Make sure it is in a friendly voice and with a smile. Tell your children ahead of time that you are going to stop nagging so much and that you will be using just one word from now on to say what needs to be done.

3. No is a complete sentence. Children are programmed from birth to push and resist against rules. Saying no is just a boundary and if you feel guilty or bad for saying no, you are training your children to have the belief that life should go their way and if it doesn't, it's your fault as their parent! Say no, just once, and if she throws a tantrum, walk out of the room and let her anger be her problem.

4. Teach your children to say no to you in a respectful way. How many of us were allowed to say no growing up? If we weren't allowed to, we did say no in a number of other ways. Like rebelling, or doing a job half-way. Teach your children to say respectfully, "No, I'm not willing to do the dishes, but I will sweep the floors and clear the table." This creates an atmosphere of cooperation and support. Let your children know how valuable they are to you.

5. Give your child choices. We all like to feel powerful and influential and our children are no different. Let them make as many choices as they can that will give them control over what happens to them. For instance, "Do you want to wear your red pajamas or your blue ones?" or "Do you want to take your bath before I read you a story or after?"

6. Let your children know how valuable they are to you. The more they feel valuable to us, the less likely they are to misbehave. Ask their advice on buying clothes, or how to decorate your home. Have them teach you a game or a fun activity.

7. Use win-win negotiation to resolve conflict. Most of us were not taught the concept of win-win negotiation. We most likely experienced situations that were win-lose or lose-lose. In a power struggle the most effective negotiations are when both sides win and are happy with the end results. It can be challenging since you must listen intently to what the other person wants while staying committed to what you want. Ask your child, "I see how you can win and that's great, because I want you to win. How can I win, too?" When children see that you are just as interested in seeing them win as yourself, they are more than willing to help figure out ways that you both can win.

8. Brainstorm solutions to the struggle. The idea is to get wild and crazy and to never discount someone else's idea. Write all the suggestions down and then hand the list to your child first. She will go through them and cross off the ones that she doesn't like. Then you get the paper and the opportunity to cross off the ones you don't like. Usually there will be two or three suggestions left that the two of you can come to an agreement about. This is a wonderful problem-solving method and with enough practice, it can be done without writing anything down.

9. Give your child appropriate ways to be powerful. We all want to feel powerful and if we don't have opportunities to do it appropriately, we will create ways to feel powerful that are inappropriate--like power struggles or picking on siblings. In the middle of a battle with your child, stop and ask yourself,

"How can I give my child more power in this particular situation?" It might be as simple as asking him for his help or giving him a particular job to do that he is totally in charge of.

10. Use signals. Sometimes when a parent and child are working on resolving recurring power struggles, it is helpful to have a signal that alerts both of them to this pattern of behavior. Use signals that you both have agreed upon and feel comfortable using. Remember the more power and control you give your child, the more likely he will be to cooperate. Signals that are funny are also a light way of reminding each other about your patterns.

11. Make learning fun and enjoyable. Many of us approach disciplining our children with a serious, no-fun-allowed attitude. But think about how much more you learn when you are enjoying yourself. For example, try singing "no" instead of speaking in your usual admonishing tone of voice. Or use a gibberish language to ask your child to pick up his socks from the living room floor. That's a lot better than getting tense and angry and having the power struggles escalate. Some people believe they don't have time to think of unique ways to teach their children or that they aren't creative enough to come up with ideas. Those are just self-limiting thoughts and you would be better served throwing them out of your brain. What is the real cost of handling the struggles in negative ways and what is the lesson that you are really teaching your children? A great skill for them to have as adults is to think of fun ways to handle difficult situations. You might be able to immediately win a power struggle by forcing your child to do something, but in the long run, you both lose.

12. GEMS. In a University of Iowa study, it was found that the average child gets 432 negative comments per day versus 32 positive comments. This is why it is so important to offer your child Genuine Encounter Moments (GEMS) to help them feel important, cared for and valuable. The more supported your child feels, the less she will want to engage you in power struggles to get a sense of importance. The investment of giving your full attention and curiosity to your child for a few minutes several times a day will pay big dividends by making your child feel special, unique and loved.

13. Use self-quieting. This is a method you or your child can do instead of reacting negatively to a situation. Take a break to get into a peaceful state of mind, to work through your emotions and find alternative solutions to the problem. It is a way to get calm instead of reacting in an angry or hurtful way. Try counting to ten or go to a special space you have created for yourself that is peaceful. Ask yourself the following questions: (1) What is the problem? (2) What is my part in the problem? (3) What is one thing I can do to improve the situation?

14. Understand that misbehavior is a form of communication. If we hold the belief that misbehaving children are "bad," then we get drawn into trying to fix the bad child and make them "good." That type of thinking sets up the power struggle system. Instead, understand that your misbehaving child is trying to communicate something to you and it is your job to "hear" that message. A more positive way to communicate to your child about their misbehavior is to ask them if their behavior is effective, are they getting the results they wanted. That way the judgment is taken out of the situation. You could say, "That doesn't look like it worked because it made you really mad. What else could you do?" or show curiosity about their behavior, "Honey, I'm curious, why did you do that?" You will probably get an honest answer and have a better understanding about what is going on with your child.

15. Don't major in the minors. The average American child receives approximately 13 minutes a day in actual communication with his parents. The parents spend 9 minutes of that time correcting, criticizing or arguing with their child. That only leaves 4 minutes with anything positive happening. So, carefully choose the major issues to work on with your child, don't hassle them with a lot of minor problems. Working on too many issues at once can be overwhelming.

16. Detach. Sometimes we create patterns of reactive behavior with our children. They do something we don't like, we react to it, they do something else, we react to that, and pretty soon, we are reacting to each other. The problems escalate and we begin to control or force our children to do things they don't want. We aren't solving the problem and our reactions are hurting our child and ourselves. The

first step in detaching is to understand that reaction and control will not work. The next step is to self-quiet, get peaceful and balanced. Out of that peaceful calm, a solution or an intuitive thought will emerge that will effectively resolve the problem.

17. Take care of yourself. Have you ever noticed that when you are tired, overworked and overscheduled that you become irritable and controlling of your children? Probably the most important thing you can do for your children is to take care of yourself. To be effective and loving parents we need a lot of energy and encouragement. Make time for you whether it is a bubble bath, a workout at the gym, or meditation. Knowing your early warning signs of burnout is also helpful. It might be feeling overwhelmed, or your shoulders getting tight, or just a sense of being grumpy. These are symptoms of not taking enough time for you and if you don't take that time, you'll begin resenting the time others demand from you.

Everyone wants to feel powerful. Our children are not exempt from these feelings so the more we can do to give them appropriate ways to feel powerful, the less power STRUGGLES we will have with them. If a child feels valued, loved and respected, he will still create power struggles because he is human. But if parents consistently keep in mind why their child does this, the struggles can be effectively handled and many times avoided altogether.

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