

EIGHTEEN WAYS TO AVOID POWER STRUGGLES

By Jane Nelsen, "Positive Discipline"

Power struggles create distance and hostility instead of closeness and trust. Distance and hostility create resentment, resistance, rebellion (or compliance with lowered self-confidence). Closeness and trust create a safe learning environment. You have a positive influence only in an atmosphere of closeness and trust where there is no fear of blame, shame or pain.

IT TAKES TWO TO CREATE A POWER STRUGGLE. I have seldom seen a power drunk child without a power drunk adult real close by. Adults need to remove themselves from the power struggles without winning or giving in. **HOW?**

The following suggestions teach children important life skills including self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation and problem-solving skills – instead of “approval junkie” compliance or rebellion. They create a win/win environment.

1. Make sure the message of love gets through. “I love you and the answer is no.” “I love you and we’ll talk when we can both be respectful.” “I love you. I’m upset right now. I need some time out until I feel better and can be respectful.” (What a great model.)
2. Get children involved in the creation of routines (morning, chores, and bedtime). Take pictures of the child doing each task to create a routine chart, which then becomes “the boss.”
3. Make a “Wheel of Choice” together. Draw a big circle and divide into wedges. Brainstorm lots of solutions to problems. Let children draw or cut out pictures for each solution. Invite children to pick something from the wheel that would solve their problem.
4. Ask child to put the problem on the family meeting agenda and brainstorm together for solutions. Kids are more likely to cooperate when they are involved in the solutions.
5. Positive Time Out: Create a “nurturing” (not punitive) time-out area with your children. Then ask, “Would it help you to go to our time-out area?” If they say, “no,” ask, “Would you like me to go with you?” If they still refuse, model the value by saying, “Then I think I’ll go.” Follow-up (not always required) by helping children explore consequences through using the following “curiosity” questions.
6. Ask what and how questions: What happened? How do you feel about what happened? What ideas do you have to solve the problem? (This does not work at the time of conflict, nor does it work unless you are truly curious about what your child has to say.)

7. Validate feelings: Stop talking and listen. Use reflective listening. Reflect back what you heard to see if you are getting it. Use active listening. Try to understand not only what your child is saying, but what she means. If you are right, the child will feel understood and will feel relief.
8. Decide what you will do. I will read a story after teeth are brushed. I will drive only when seat belts are buckled. (I will pull over to the side of the road when children are fighting.)
9. Follow Through: The key to this one and all other is **KINDNESS AND FIRMNESS AT THE SAME TIME**. Example: Pull over to the side of the road without saying a word. Children learn more from kind and firm actions than from words.
10. Distraction for Young Children and Lots of Supervision: Punishment decreases brain development. Children are often punished for doing what they are developmentally programmed to do – explore.
11. Use ten words or less. One is best: Toys, Towels, Homework
12. Use pantomime, charades or notes. Try a hug to create closeness and trust – then do something else.
13. Non-verbal Signals: These should be planned in advance with the child. Example: a sheet over the television as a reminder that homework needs to be done first or that things need to be picked up.
14. Limited Choices: Do you want to do your homework before dinner or after dinner? Do you want to set the table or clean up after dinner?
15. Create a Game: Beat the clock or sing songs while getting chores done.
16. Do it with them. You may even want to go to the positive time out area with them.
17. Use your sense of humor to get your point across. Example: Dust is going to turn you hair gray.
18. **HUGS! HUGS! HUGS!** A hug is often enough to change the behavior – theirs and yours.