

Stop Power Struggles Before They Start



Power struggles are much easier to prevent than to end. Power struggles are like a tug-of-war. The moment you pull, the child pulls back harder. Use these simple strategies to stop power struggles before they start.

Strategy 1: Keep Your Tone Calm and Firm

When your voice goes up, their defenses go up. When you stay calm, you help their brains stay calm. Remember: the louder they get, the lower you get. Your calm is contagious.

Strategy 2: Don't Take the Bait

Power struggles can become like a tug-of-war. Instead, don't argue or defend yourself. Arguing escalates a power struggle. Instead, take some deep breaths, and stay calm. Emotions are contagious. Have children "catch your calm, instead of your anger."

Strategy 3: Give Controlled Choices

Power struggles are avoided when the strong-willed children feel they have some control.

Give two acceptable options:

For younger children: "You can use the red crayon or the blue crayon. Which do you want?"

For older children: "You can play video games for ONE hour starting at 7 pm or starting at 8.

Which will work better for you?"

Choices satisfy their need for power while keeping you in charge of the boundaries.

Strategy 4: Establish Predictable Routines

Strong-willed children feel safer when they know what's coming next. Consistent routines help them relax because the world feels predictable.

When there will be a change in routine, let them know ahead.

Strategy 5: Don't Ask Questions that Invite a "No" Response

Avoid questions like, "Do you want to clean up now," when there really is no choice. Instead give children warnings of a task that they may not want to do. "In 10 minutes, it will be time to clean up." "In five minutes, it will be time to clean up." "The clock says it is clean up time. Would you like to do it quietly or listen to music while you clean up?"

Strategy 6: Use "Do" Commands Instead of "Don't" Commands.

When you tell the child, "don't," they hear it as a challenge.

Instead, tell them the behavior you do want.

Instead of, "Don't run," say, "Walk slowly."

Strategy 7: Connect Before You Direct.

Kids cooperate more when they feel seen and understood. A quick moment of connection can prevent a power struggle. Be near child and make eye contact. Acknowledge their feelings.

"I know you really want to keep playing. It's hard to stop."