

18 Ways to Avoid Power Struggles



By Jane Nelsen

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 never seen a power drunk child without a power drunk adult real close by. Adults need to remove themselves from the power struggle 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. **Create routines.** Get children involved in the creation of routines (morning, chores, bedtime). Let them cut pictures from magazines (or take photos of them doing each task) to create a routine chart, which then becomes "the boss." ("What is next on our your routine chart.")
2. 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. During a conflict, invite children to pick something from the wheel that would solve their problem.
3. Put the problem on the **family meeting** agenda and let the kids brainstorm for a solution. Kids are more likely to cooperate when they are involved in the solutions.
4. **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 suggestion.
5. **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.)
6. **Listen:** 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.

Based on the Positive Discipline books and materials written by Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott

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7. **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.)
8. **Follow Through:** The key to this one and all of the following is KINDNESS AND FIRMNESS AT THE SAME TIME. (Pull over to the side of the road without saying a word. Children learn more from kind and firm actions than from words.)
9. **Supervision, Distraction, and Redirection** for Young Children. Children are often punished for doing what they are developmentally programmed to explore. Tell children what they can do instead of slapping hands for what they can't do.
10. **Use ten words or less.** One is best: Toys. Towels. Homework. (Sometimes these words need to be repeated several times.) Avoid lectures.
11. **Invite cooperation.** Say, "I can't make you, but I really need your help." (10 words)
12. **No words:** Use pantomime, charades, or notes. Take a child by the hand and gently take her where she needs to be. As Rudolf Dreikurs used to say, "Shut your mouth and **act.**"
13. **Non-verbal signals.** These should be planned in advance with the child. An empty plate turned over at the dinner table as a reminder of chores that need to be completed before dinner; a sheet over the television as a reminder that homework needs to be done first or that things need to be picked up in the common areas of the house.
14. **Limited choices:** Do you want to do your homework before dinner or after dinner. Do you want to hop like a bunny or slither like a snake while picking up your toys?
15. **Put them in the same boat.** When children fight, ask both to go to separate rooms or to the same room until they can find a solution. An alternative is to put the problem on the agenda. Don't try to figure out who started it, even if you think you know.
16. **Use your sense of humor:** Here comes the tickle monster to get little children who don't pick up their toys. This creates closeness and trust and can be followed by one of the above.
17. **Spend special time.** Schedule regular time with each child. In addition, while tucking children in bed, ask, "What was the saddest thing that happened today; and what was the happiest thing that happened today? After listening to each, share your saddest and happiest times of the day.
18. **BONUS: HUGS! HUGS! HUGS!** A hug is often enough to change the behavior—theirs and yours. Try a hug to create a **connection before correction**—then focus on solutions.

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