

# POWER STRUGGLES

Most parents get involved in power struggles with their children at one time or another. Unfortunately, most parents are familiar with the term "power struggle". The child says something like "No, I won't! You can't make me!" and the parent responds with "Oh yes, you will!" Both the parent and child feel frustrated and powerless – fighting to get a sense of personal power and control.

There are several things a parent can try to calm a power struggle situation:

- > The parent can decide not to fight and not to give in. She must remain cool and calm, because without her anger, the child will have no one to fight against. For example, a temper tantrum becomes ineffective if the parent states, "I can't talk about this when you are yelling," and withdraws to another room. Later, after a cooling-off period, the parent can talk calmly with the child about what is expected.
- > Offering the child a choice will give him or her a sense of personal power – "Would you like to unload the dishwasher or set the table?" Continuing power struggles can escalate later into more serious rebellion and revenge. It might help parents to look at their relationship with their child. Are there more angry times than loving and peaceful ones? If so, parents can make some changes by giving the child loving attention during calm periods, to encourage good behavior. The parent can "catch the child being good," and praise his or her efforts to cooperate.

It is important to remember that it takes two to argue. Here are some tips for helping your child realize that what you say is your "final answer".

- > Say it once – State your case, then be quiet. Ignore your child's argumentative comments, even walking away if necessary.
- > Let the child complain – As long as it is respectful, sometime let the child have the last word. He might mutter, "Why do I have to do it?" – A statement that does not require an answer. Most important – do not back down.
- > Set rules for debating – Some children really do enjoy debating an issue. If your child is one of them, set

ground rules for when and how debates can occur. For instance, no name-calling, quiet voices only, and quiet listening to each person's point of view. However, the child must understand that some things cannot be argued – that parents must decide. There should be a standard reply for this sort of issue, perhaps, "This is not open for discussion."

- > Offer choices – Once again, offering choices instead of issuing commands is effective. "My child talks back to me in a disrespectful way. What can I do?"

Back talk is a serious offense. The child may speak to the parent in a rude or sarcastic tone of voice or may raise his voice or use name-calling to get his point across. A child who is rude to a parent and gets away with it will continue the behavior and it may even get worse. Most children will try back talk at some point. When a parent responds calmly and with authority, the behavior will stop.

- > Tell the child what you expect – If the child is already in the habit of talking back, the parent must take action.
- > Have a meeting with the child to announce that back talk will not be tolerated. Decide on a series of consequences that will occur each time back talk occurs. The consequences may be the loss of a privilege, such as telephone use or time with a video game, or an additional chore is fine.
- > Announce the sequence in which the consequences will occur. "When you talk back in a respectful way you will not be permitted to watch television in the evening. If you talk back a second time, you will have to wash the dinner dishes. If you talk back again, you will have to stay in your room for the rest of the day." Then follow through calmly and firmly.
- > Do not react to talkback with anger – when a child talks back, immediately stop the conversation. If you are angry, walk away from the child until you are calm. Tell her firmly that you will not tolerate disrespect and then institute the consequences you have decided upon.
- > Try a system of "fines" – Tape your child's allowance, in quarters, to a piece of cardboard or put the