

NO!

# HEART-POWERED PARENTING

NO!

AN EMOTIONALLY-FOCUSED APPROACH TO PARENTING YOUR CHILD

## TIP #5: POWER STRUGGLES

*No one likes to be told what to do.*

The drive for independence is built into the human soul. It emerges at birth with loud cries – a protest of having been forced to leave the warmth and protection of the womb. It is fiercely energetic, defining the unique journey of every human being. *It also uniquely drives parents crazy.* This is especially true with young children whose defiant approach to independence plunges otherwise sane adults into unexpected and intense power struggles. Within minutes after a child plants his feet solidly on the ground and responds with a resounding “NO!” to a parental demand, the power struggle is already in full swing.

*Power struggles are lose-lose situations. No matter how the struggle is brought to conclusion, it is unlikely that either you or your child will feel good about the outcome or about each other.*

*The Usual Lose-Lose Scenario:*

Let’s take the following situation as an example: You have set your toddler’s bedtime as 6:30pm. You remind him at 6:15pm that bedtime is in 15 minutes. Even though he is very involved with his cars and trucks, he mumbles, “ok.” At 6:25pm, you again give him a friendly reminder, and he again mumbles, “ok.” So, at 6:30pm, when you say, “It’s bedtime. Let’s go upstairs,” you are surprised and annoyed when he says, in quite a loud voice: “NO!” You try to reason with him, reminding him of your 15 and five-minute warnings. You may tell him that “Mommy is the boss.” You even threaten him with no candy for a week, or that you will take away the very

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toys he is playing with and put them in a locked closet for a week. But his desire to keep playing and his inability to see your point of view, are like a brick wall. He will either continue responding “NO!” or just ignores you. The power struggle is now in full force. It’s a lose-lose situation.

### *An Alternative Win-Win Scenario:*

The goal is for you, as the parent, to remain in charge, avoid a power struggle, and support your child’s drive for independence. The approach

detailed below not only accomplishes these three goals, but also helps in building your child’s decision-making skills, self-confidence, and self-efficacy\*.

At 6:15pm, you calmly say to your toddler: *It’s almost bedtime.*” Then, you ask your child: *Do you want to go to bed now or in 10 minutes?* While your child may not know exactly what 10 minutes is, he certainly knows what “now” means. He will respond by saying: “In 10 minutes.” At that moment he is making a decision. You can even compliment him on making a good decision. Most importantly, any argument that happens at the 10-minute point will be an argument with himself about his decision, not with what you about your decision.

When the 10-minutes are up, you announce that it is cleanup time. You can join with him in the cleanup project. We are all happier sharing a chore with someone else. When everything is put away, you walk with him upstairs and continue his bedtime routine.

This is not to say that your child will not protest. This is not to say that you will not have to remind him about his decision. It is to say, however, that, if you use this approach and follow up with a consistent bedtime

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routine\*, you will bring an end to the bedtime power struggle in a relatively short period of time.

The two-choice win-win approach is one that can be applied broadly across many situations. Every opportunity you have to offer your child a choice – whether it is what she wants to eat for breakfast or which socks she is going to wear to preschool – the more you will build her decision-making skills, self-confidence and self efficacy, and the fewer times you will find yourself engaged in power struggles.

### *Challenges:*

The two most challenging aspects of implementing the Win-Win approach are: 1) Truly changing the way you think so that using choice language because your natural way of parenting, and 2) Using this technique with *near 100% consistency*.

Changing the way you parent takes work, but so does continuing to use approaches that don't work. Changing to a Win-Win approach will, in the long run will be far easier and less stressful than engaging in daily power struggles for the next 10-15 years. It will also ensure a more connected relationship with your child. So, what are you waiting for?

\*Having a *consistent* bedtime routine is a critical addendum to the Win-Win approach.

### *Some Additional Pointers*

- 1) All choices you offer to your child must be acceptable to you.
- 2) When talking to a young child, make sure to speak to him at his eye level. This will insure that you have his attention. Sometimes when parents are trying to finish another task before bedtime, they will yell instructions from a different room altogether, having no clue whether their child actually

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heard and processed their request - and this almost always sets the parent up for failure.

3) For young children who have no concept of time, it helps to use a visual timer. Kitchen timers and hourglass timers work well. Digital devices do not work if children do not have the ability to understand numbers. To help engage your child in the process further, you can ask him to set (or help you set) the timer. This increases his ownership of the process.

4) Another reason for using a time is that, when the timer rings and your child understands that it is now time to go to bed, if he is not happy about that - you can point to the timer and say: *"Sorry, the timer went off."* This directs the child's disappointment away from you and onto an inanimate object. You might hear him say something like: *"I hate the timer!"* - but that is far better than hearing him say: *"I hate you!"*

5) Introducing a new communication pattern takes time. *Expect pushback.* If you *consistently* use this approach for a week, your child should come around. (Note - this also means that, if even on one occasion you detour from this approach, you will have sabotaged all of the preceding days, and will make it even more difficult to implement this approach going forward.)

### **NEED MORE IDEAS FOR STRESS-FREE PARENTING?**

For a more comprehensive and personalized approach to the challenges you face with your child, feel contact our Heart-Powered Parenting staff to schedule an individual consultation:

EMAIL: [INFO@GARDINCOUNSELING.COM](mailto:INFO@GARDINCOUNSELING.COM)

PHONE: 1-424-248-8790