

Preparing the Millennial Child

*Your Personal Parenting Class
& Relationship Guide*

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Preparing Children With Personal Power: Learning The Dance Of Cooperation

“To yield is to be victorious, Grasshoppa.”

~~From the television show, Kung Fu

The Power Struggle Two Step It Takes Two to Tangle.

I believe that the most telling characteristic of a Millennial Child is the amazing strength of his or her will. There have always been strong-willed children but whether you call it stubbornness or determination, during the years we have taught the parenting classes the challenges with strong-willed children have disproportionately increased. During this session we will discuss Kind and Firm discipline methods parents can utilize when they find themselves in a power-struggle with their children.

As parent education instructors, we are continually challenged by parents who are looking for ways to break their children’s strong will. What a disservice we do to our children when we refuse to acknowledge their amazing strengths and are unsympathetic to their determination and great purpose. As it is, many parents insist that their children conform to their will and purpose regardless of what each child’s agenda is.

It is perfectly understandable why we as parents would be sorely tempted to break our children’s will. There are few parenting moments that are as unpleasant as those when we are battling our children for control. Parents fight with their children over mealtime, bedtime, bath time, clothing, school, curfew, friends, chores, hair, toys, homework; the list is endless. There is an increasingly sharp division between what parents believe is important and right for their children and what their children think is important and right for themselves.

The second level of discouragement and victimhood that children (and their exhausted parents) fall into is that of power struggles. If the child is ignored or overpowered while trying to get attention, or feel love, she will move to the next level of discouragement or the subsequent mistaken belief about how to meet her emotional needs. *(During our classes, this is the level when most parents sit up and start paying very close attention.)*

As I have mentioned previously, exercising control over another person is a fear-based behavior. This level of discouragement for your child is based on the fear that if she cannot gain your attention and love by being cute or by being a pest, she will force you to pay attention to her by ignoring you or by confronting you until you have lost your temper. Your child's need to feel that she belongs uniquely and is loved and appreciated gives way to the need to feel that she is in control of her situation and that is how she is going to remain safe from being hurt again. This means that she believes that she needs to control members of her family, thereby moving her from role of victim to role of victimizer. Her belief is that she has the right to demand compliance to her rights without reference or respect for anyone else's rights – that her rights are the most important of all. Many families are being held hostage by one or more of their children who insist, often by frightening means, that things are done their way and in their timeframe. No wonder parents are seeking ways to break their children's strong wills!

How do we know if our children have given up on feeling loved and have moved to the belief that they need to control us? Let us go back to our exercise for diagnosing our child's motive by understanding our own feelings. Once again the instructor plays the part of the child. You be the parent who would like the child/ instructor to pick up the toy left on the floor. As you ask the child/instructor repeatedly to pick up the toy, she defiantly repeats "NO," at each request using the power of her intention to let you know that you are not her boss and that you cannot and will not make her comply with your wishes.

Allow yourself to feel that familiar feeling of being in a power struggle with your child and plug into the feelings that the struggle brings up in you. Are you feeling provoked, challenged and angry at having your authority challenged? Does your child's extremely strong will make you nervous and worried that you cannot control what is happening or that you have no influence at all with your child? Or are you determined to outlast your child's play for power and in the end win the challenge? Do you become so angry with your child that you are tempted to overpower and even hurt her? Do you sometimes give into that temptation and feel justified in your actions or do you feel remorseful that you did lose your temper and hurt your child?

The power struggles that parents and children get into – sometimes on a daily basis – bring up some powerful and unpleasant emotions and the resulting behaviors have disagreeable consequences no matter what they are. These are the signal emotions that tell you that your child's motive is to gain power over you.

What follows are some interesting dynamics of power struggles that are worth examining more closely. You be the child as we go through the next scenario. Begin by seeing yourself standing with your back against a wall.

You are a nine-year-old who has been playing outside and it is time for bed. Your parent/instructor calls to you, "It's time to come in and go to bed!" You, as the child, raise your hands to chest height and, placing one hand in front of the other, palms out, answer, "I don't want to and you can't make me!" At that moment, the parent/instructor pushes against your hands and the parent and child engage in a mock battle.

In twenty years of parenting classes and doing this exercise, the result has been exactly the same. After a few moments of engaging in the mock battle, the "parent" and "child" will disengage and everyone in the class will notice the huge grin of triumph on the "child's" face! The truth about power struggles is that they are really a lot of fun for children. Children love power struggles.

We will ask the parent/child where she felt the power during the mock battle. Usually the answer is that the power is felt in the arms and across the chest and that feeling of power is what is so enjoyable. It is terribly exciting to feel powerful enough to make a parent lose his temper, even if that goal results in undesirable consequences for the child. This encounter can actually be very exciting for parents as well. We have met parents who will purposely provoke power struggles within their families because they enjoy the competitiveness.

As a society, we have been programmed to seek out the fierceness of competitions of all kinds. Millions of dollars and countless hours are spent in watching athletes struggle against each other in various sports and contestants in games. But it is important to ask ourselves as adults and as the architects of our own families if struggling against each other and competing for the upper hand is really the atmosphere that we want to foster in our homes? If peace and serenity are preferable to chaos and contention, we must find safe ways to disengage from power struggles.

As the parent, the most important thing we can do is to remain in control of our own emotions so we don't lose our composure. Let's return to the exercise of the child playing outdoors. This time, as the parent gives the instruction that it is time to come in and go to bed, I once again place my hands on the child's, but just as the child begins to push, I simply step back out of the engagement and say "Okay." Now the prevailing expression on the child's face is one of disappointment! I, the parent, point out that I have just given up and told the child that she has won, and ask why she looks disappointed? At this point in the exercise, class members realize how much children enjoy the power struggle. But I, playing the part of the parent, have remained in control of my emotions and the situation.

The first redirecting measure a parent needs to take in resolving a power struggle is to step out of the struggle. One of the most important rules I set for myself as a parent is that I will never fight or argue with my child. (The only exception to this rule is when both the parent and child agree that they will engage in a mock argument or battle for fun.) Rather than argue or battle with my child, I will say, "Okay" or "Oh" or simply turn and walk away. This does not mean I will allow my child to get away with unacceptable behavior or with

not taking care of their part of maintaining order in the home. What this does mean is that I will neither give in to my child's demanding, inappropriate behavior, nor fight with him in a bid for power. My Kind and Firm goal as the parent at this point is to maintain order and still respect my child's right to be safe so that he doesn't feel the need to control me or victimize me in a bid for safety. It takes two to battle and if one of the participants refuses to engage in the struggle, there is no battle.

Learning New Steps in the Power-Struggle Dance

*"We stand at the crossroads, each minute, each hour, each day,
making choices."*

~~Benjamin Franklin

Remember the example of pounding the nail into the wall with your forehead? If you and your child are into an all too familiar pattern of power struggles, it is up to you, the parent, to change that pattern. The best way to change a pattern is to do something completely different and unpredictable that captures your child's attention and causes her to rethink her behavior.

As the parent, my alternative to fighting with my child or giving into his demands is to find Kind and Firm methods that will allow us both to feel empowered and victorious. My job as his parent is also to teach my child that his goal of gaining power over others is a useless venture and that gaining self-control or self-discipline and cooperating with others is a much more desirable pursuit. After stepping out of the power struggle with my child, I have several options.

The first one is to simply allow her to suffer the consequences of her choices. Going back to the example of saying "Okay" when your child refuses to come in and go to bed, one of the options I may seriously consider is to walk back into the house leaving my child to think about what just happened. Many times the child will give some consideration to her own options and voluntarily come in and begin to get ready for bed, or she may attempt to engage her parent in another fun power struggle.

Another option is to bring an element of surprise by adding a statement of permission to the "Okay." This would sound something like, *"Okay, I guess you've chosen to sleep outside tonight. I'll be interested in what happens outside of our house at night so would you give me a report in the morning?"* Or, *"Okay. I'm going to lock up in a few minutes so let me know if you need anything from the house before I do."*

All of the above statements are basically doing the same thing. They are giving your child the opportunity to make his own decision. Probably the most straightforward way to give your child a feeling of empowerment is to give him a choice. Using a friendly tone and eye contact say something like, *"Okay, you can come inside in five minutes or ten minutes."*

Your decision; what will it be?" Here is another good option: "Okay, it looks as if you aren't ready to come in now. I understand that, so your choices are to come in now or to do a few yard chores before you come in. You are certainly welcome to pick up the toys on the lawn and make sure the gate is shut and check the lawn for any dog messes. What is it going to be for you tonight?"

One of the best ways for parents to avoid a power struggle is to pre-empt any battle by giving the child a warning with a choice. *"It will be time for you to come in the house in fifteen minutes. Do you want me to give you a five-minute or two-minute reminder before it's time to come in? I want you to have plenty of time to finish your game and say good-night to your friends."* Now she has the opportunity to choose to cooperate rather than battle with you.

Parents who routinely give their children fair warning of upcoming changes avoid a lot of power struggles. I have a little grandson who is very sensitive to change. His mother tells him that it will be time to go and he quickly negotiates two more minutes. She agrees and sets the oven timer to two minutes. When the timer goes off she will say, "The timer says it's time to go, (to bed, for pajamas, to brush teeth, etc)." He then is ready to do what he agreed to do unless he tries to renegotiate! If that happens his mother will gently and cheerfully remind him of the agreement and let him know that his argument is not with her but with the impersonal timer!

Choreographing a New Dance Called "Choices"

Life is all about the choices we make each day.

Honoring a child's agency by allowing her to make relevant choices in her life is probably the best way to avoid and/or disengage from ensuing power struggles. But let us be clear about what agency is.

Agency has been described as the capacity for decisive, independent action. It is often called "moral agency". Agency does not mean we have the right to do whatever we want whenever we want to. What it does mean is that we have the right to make decisions for ourselves based upon a moral code of conduct designed to protect the rights of ourselves and others.

As you begin to give your child the opportunity to make his own choices, keep in mind that he needs parameters, or boundaries to choose within. While a child is small, the boundaries should be narrow and relevant to his capacity for reasoning. As your child grows and learns to follow the guidelines of set parameters he will also learn how to set his own boundaries for responsible decisions. As his parent, you should allow the boundaries of available choices to expand to meet his growing need for self-reliance.

In our classes, we draw a large circle on the board and label the circle as the boundaries that keep a child feeling safe. Within the circle, however, is the space in which she has the

opportunity to make many choices for herself, thus giving her the sense of individual responsibility and freedom.

The choices you give your child as he is growing, will give him the confidence to be decisive as well as an understanding of the principles of self-responsibility, self-control and accountability for the consequences of his choices.

Giving choices may not be something that you are familiar or comfortable with, but it is a delightfully effective way to help a child feel empowered in making decisions that affect his life. In addition, giving your child choices that help him feel he has some personal power which will help stem any perceived need to control others.

Giving children choices will become easier as you watch for opportunities to do so. In fact, you will find as you practice and become more aware of your options, the opportunities to give choices will be endless. You can start giving children choices as young as eight to ten months: *“Do you want to crawl to Mommy or Daddy?”*

You may discover that your children respond quickly and with enthusiasm to the lessening of demands and commands on your part. Or, they may be a little confused about what you are trying and may even increase in their attempts to gain control. However, if you persist in your goal to remain calm and unruffled by their attempts to engage you in power struggles and instead give them ways to exercise self-control, you will effectively teach them that self-control and making wise choices is a much more peaceful way to get what they desire. Here are the rules for giving choices with Kind and Firm authority:

1. **Be sure you are willing to accept either choice you give your child.** *Do you want to get ready for bed now or in five minutes? Do you want to leave your books in your room or on the study desk when you get home from school?*
2. **If your first choice is not acted upon, give another choice where you can take action.** *Do you want to get ready by yourself or do you want me to help you? Do you want to leave your books on the desk or do you want me to pick them up off of the counter and hand them to you?*
3. **If you give a choice and the child chooses not to choose, then assume she doesn't want to choose and decide for her.** *Since you can't decide, why don't you go ahead and get ready for bed now and then there will be time for more stories. Since you can't decide where it would be more convenient for you to leave your books, why don't we agree that they will be left in your room? If they are anywhere else, either I will hand them to you or I will leave them outside your bedroom door on the floor.*
4. **Make sure that the choices you give are NOT punishments in disguise.** *Either get ready for bed now or no stories for you! Take care of your books or they will go in the garbage!*
5. **If one of the choices will infringe on your rights, be clear as to what you will do if the child makes that choice.** *If you want me to help you, I can help you in ten minutes but that will mean one less story for you tonight. Is that okay with you? If you*

forget where you should leave your books and I have to take care of them for you, you will need to accept where I put them without complaints.¹

Millennial Children who are strong-willed and power hungry love to have responsibility given to them. They also love having the opportunity to make their own decisions. If they hesitate to take advantage of a choice given them and you make it for them, they will only let you make choices for them once or twice and then never again. Powerful people who are learning self-control rather than other-control are fun to live with. They make decisions easily and quickly. They readily take more responsibility for their decisions and agreements.

We have a granddaughter who, when she was five years old, became frustrated when her mother wouldn't let her take some of her own toys to a play date with a friend. Frustrated with the ensuing battle for power, her mom turned the situation over to her father, my son. Understanding all too well the dilemmas of someone who likes to make their own decisions, he told her that she could choose to take five toys – one for each year she was old – but that they were going to be her responsibility. If she left them, lost them or if they were broken, she had to agree that she would not blame anyone else for what had happened to them. She agreed to the arrangement and found a backpack to carry her choice of five toys. She used her determination and strong will to make sure she was in complete control of those five toys. She loved the responsibility of being in charge of her possessions, learned the lessons of ownership, and there was never another battle over what she felt she needed to have with her.

We all feel imposed upon when people make demands on us and give us no room to use our personal power. This is especially true for strong-willed children. Empowering a child will help her stay out of victimhood and learn to use her agency with wisdom. Children who have a lot of options given to them as they grow up learn how to make decisions. One of the most disturbing behaviors of college freshmen is that often, when they are finally on their own the options are overwhelming and since they have had little experience in making decisions they end up making poor choices with their time, money and relationships.

Parents who are highly invested in teaching their children to be obedient usually have the most difficulty with the concept of giving children a lot of choices. What is interesting to note is that children who do have options and make their own decisions and agreements with their parents are willing to take responsibility if the agreements are not kept or if they make a poor choice. Broken rules or mistakes made out of poor judgment become points of learning for the child, who realizes that they were his choices rather than his parents' choices forced on him.

Children soon learn on their own, through the natural consequences of their own choices, that obedience and self-control are keys that will lead to more freedom to make even more pertinent choices for themselves. True obedience is a faith-based principle that is learned through experience and gentle guidance. Parents can bully a child to be unquestionably compliant to their wishes and demands with punishment rather than with

the principles of true obedience. Often the consequence of compliant behavior for the sake of avoiding punishment is that when the child is no longer under the parent's control, obedience not based in faith quickly dissolves and behavior becomes unruly and natural rather than self-disciplined and principled.

Thinking through all the options and consequences as part of the decision making process is another lesson learned by having children make choices early and often, and then allowing them to live with the consequences of their choices. They learn that making thoughtful, informed decisions involves more than just reacting to outside influences such as peer pressure and ads on TV. If you want to help your child withstand the influence of peers and situations outside of your jurisdictions, allow them plenty of opportunity from the time they are small to make as many choices as often as possible as they are growing up. Always give choices that reflect and respect your child's ability to reason and practice agency.

Some children who have gentler, accepting souls or who lack self-confidence are at times reluctant to make decisions. They would be happy to abdicate control over all decisions to their parents, siblings or friends. Although there is a lot less drama with children who don't like making their own choices, the avoidance of making decisions is not a good pattern to foster. The ramifications of carrying forward fear of making decisions into adulthood could mean a difficult life for that person and anyone with whom he or she has relationships.

When my son was small, he struggled with feeling capable of making his own decisions and would often leave deciding for him up to me. One day I showed him the options of candy available for purchase with his allowance as he had completed his agreement about how he would behave in the store. He thought about it for a minute and then announced what his choice was. We had a little "choice party" right there in the store! We clapped our hands and shouted "YEAH" and jumped for joy. He felt a lot more comfortable about making decisions after that.

May I Please Be Your Escort?

Mom's Rule Number Four: I will never argue or fight with my child!

What about the kinds of power struggles that don't warrant giving a choice? I understand that question very well. We want our children to be responsive to their agreements or assignments and giving too many choices at times just plays into their bid for power by allowing them to delay taking care of responsibilities.

Children who ignore their parents are also engaging them in a power struggle. What do you do when your child ignores you? Many parents resort to counting to a certain number with the understanding that when they reach that 'magic' number something unpleasant

may occur to the child. Counting, constantly reminding or nagging, arguing or other pressure tactics only fosters “selective hearing” and teaches him to procrastinate. If you find yourself becoming frustrated at your child’s lack of action to your kind request, there is an enjoyable way to redirect him with a Kind and Firm action of your own. It’s called escorting.² The first time I learned about escorting it sounded like so much fun that I couldn’t wait to go home and try it.

It involves politely asking your child to take care of something; it could be a personal possession or an agreed upon chore. If the child ignores you or even argues with you or reacts with other disrespectful behavior, you wait for a few minutes and then with a genuinely friendly smile on your face, but without saying another word, go to your child, wrap your arm around her and gently nudge her until she gets up and moves towards her responsibility. If she continues to resist or fights with you, break off the action only to repeat it five or ten minutes later. Resist the urge to say anything to your child. For this to be truly effective, the parent should allow only his action to do the talking and the action should always be done with a friendly smile and a Kind and Firm touch. Eventually your child will get the picture and move to take care of her responsibility.

The first time I used escorting with one of my daughters, sure enough she resisted and tried to wriggle away. I broke it off and a few minutes later approached her with another smile. She saw me coming and jumped up from the couch saying, “I’m going, I’m going!” before I even reached her she raced to complete her assignment.

After I learned the escorting technique it didn’t take long for my children to recognize that when I was coming towards them with a silly grin on my face that I was planning to escort them. Usually they would jump up and take care of their task before I reached their side. My children soon learned to complete their assignments the first time they were told or reminded. Escorting was a wonderful tool to have in my parenting tool bag. In Session Ten there will be a whole section of suggestions about Kind and Firm ways to teach children to take care of their assigned chores.

Remember the few simple rules to successful escorting:

1. ***Make sure the child knows exactly why he is being escorted.*** That means that at some point, clear instructions and agreements about what the child is to do have already been given. This could mean a chore that is to be completed on a regular basis or an assignment that has been given previously that day. I call it the “what by when.” Your child has accepted an assignment and has agreed that he will complete a chore or assignment within a certain timeframe.
2. ***Escorting is a great tool for the parent to use when the timeframe has passed.*** Preferably the escorting is performed within half an hour after the agreed upon timeframe.
3. ***The most effective escorting is done with absolutely no talking by the parent, just with a friendly smile or silly grin.*** Take for granted that your child knows

exactly what you are doing and why. If there is obvious confusion about to where or why she is being escorted, use a one-word reminder: "Trash." "Toys." "Room."

4. ***Never force your child to move.*** Gentle nudging with your arm across his back should be sufficient.
5. ***Never fight with your child.*** If he refuses to move, break your contact with him and come back a few minutes later. If he still refuses to move, assume that this isn't about a power struggle and look for another mistaken belief and another redirecting method that will be more effective for that child's level of discouragement.
6. ***Stay with your child until you are satisfied that the agreed upon chore is being done.*** Remain calm, pleasant and positive through the whole process.
7. ***Expressing appreciation when the chore has been completed to specifications is appropriate and important.***

Sometimes giving children a choice or escorting are not conducive to the immediate situation. If there is a crisis or a time-crunch, children need to learn to be immediately responsive. However, I've found that children who feel they have a lot of control over their own lives are very responsive to the occasional directive and don't feel threatened by a direct order. Sometimes I've told my children, *"This is a telling, not an asking!"*



The Temper Tantrum Dance

You TWO can be sane!

The rules for toddlers and power struggles are just a little different than for older children. We often hear about the “terrible twos” but many parents of toddlers will complain that their toddler got really busy about eighteen months and there are also many parents who will tell you that the age of three is also a difficult age for children and parents to navigate through.

Toddlers present a different set of challenges because they are generally going through so many changes and learning at such rapid rates that they have a very low tolerance level for anything that doesn’t make sense to them. Since they are primarily emotional beings, living with a toddler can be a volatile time. Parents of this age group love their toddler time but are often just waiting for the drama to end and for peace to return to the home. What follows are some suggestions about how to work with toddlers in helping them to cope with their frustration.

1. *Toddlers just want to have fun! They are all about playing and laughing.* To engage a toddler in a cooperative effort, make a game out of whatever you want him to do, such as picking up toys, washing hair, etc. Make sure the games that you play are not competitive in nature but rather are teaching cooperation: *“Let’s see how fast we can pick up all the toys together!”* Playing cooperation games is also a good time to give choices: *“Would you rather pick up all the blue toys or the red toys first?”*

2. *Since toddlers are all about having fun, inappropriate behavior can be stemmed by temporarily removing her from the fun until she is calm and ready to cooperate again.* Toddlers are the only age group that I ever put in a time-out situation. If my toddler became extremely and loudly emotional, I would carry her to her room as lovingly as possible, hand her favorite comfort toy or blanket to her and leave her with a kiss and an invitation to come and join me again when she had calmed herself down. This is all done with me remaining very calm and upbeat. My goal is to help her learn that she is in charge of her emotions; she is the one who is in charge of making herself happy.

You may need to do this several times in a row before he gets the idea. Never leave him in his room once he has settled down – unless he has fallen asleep! Even if he doesn’t come out on his own, go in and invite him to join you when he has finished his tantrum. Snuggle with him and let him know how happy you are he decided to calm down.

This is not about you controlling her; this is about her learning to control herself. However, she does need to know that you will not allow her to distress others because she is unhappy.

3. *Distraction is often the name of the game about small disagreements with toddlers.* If your toddler insists on putting the dressing on his own salad for the third time, this is a great time to introduce another food and distract him from the dressing until you

can move it out of his sight. Don't sweat the small stuff. Messes, spills and experimenting with life are the norm for toddlers and should be expected, encouraged and tolerated with grins. God made babies water-resistant on purpose. He knew how messy they would get.

4. Don't allow your toddler to hit you when she becomes angry or frustrated with you. If you see that her fist or arm is raised with the intention to strike out, catch her arm in your hand and firmly tell her that hitting you is not an option and that people are not for hitting. Invite her, instead, to use her words to express her feelings and remind her, again, that hitting people will not be tolerated. The same goes for any form of aggressive behavior towards you or anyone else. If she does make the mistake of hurting someone else, have her do an appropriate make-up to restore her good feelings about herself and to help her take responsibility for restoring the damage she may have caused. (We will be discussing "make-ups" later.)

5. As much as possible, avoid telling your child "no."

It is sad when the first word a child says is "no." That is what happens when "no" has become the word or message that a toddler hears the most. Children who are told "no" frequently feel perpetually frustrated. They may get the mistaken belief that they do not deserve what they want or ask for.

Rather than saying "no," distract the child from the forbidden item, remove it from his line of sight or gently remove him away from the object of desire with a brief but clear explanation about why he is not allowed to play with it. Do this as many times as is necessary for him to understand that it is off limits.

Another idea is to qualify the "no" with a conditional "yes." Often, what children want is okay for them to want, just not at the time of the asking. Instead of saying "no," give them a "yes" with a qualifying adjustment of the time frame. "Yes, you can have a cookie right after dinner." Or, "Yes, we will go to Grandma's next week."

6. Along with avoiding the frustrations of using "no" too often with your toddler, you need to be aware that toddlers usually don't hear the first two or three words of any sentence. Therefore if you tell your child, "Don't pull the kitty's tail!" or "Don't spill your milk!" most likely all she will hear is ". . . pull the kitty's tail!" or "...spill your milk!" Every command that begins with the word "don't" will most likely be counter-productive in your efforts to direct your child to acceptable behavior. Instead, keep your directives positive with what behavior you *do* want to see from your toddler rather than what you *don't* want her to do. "Pet the kitty softly. He doesn't like his tail pulled." "Hold your cup with both hands."

7. Don't allow your toddlers to be successful with getting their way by the use of temper tantrums. Toddlers and temper tantrums are a usual combination. Instead of giving into them, validate the feelings behind them, give him his wish in fantasy, (this is explained in Session Seven), and then walk away giving him the opportunity to finish his tantrum in peace.

Another creative technique effective for some children would be to make the tantrums inappropriate by enjoying them. (This is more effective for a child over the age of two.) What this would look like and sound like is this: "I know you want a cookie now, but I'm

going to tell you 'no' since we will be eating dinner soon. When I tell you 'no' I want you go give me one of your best temper tantrums. I want you to fall on the floor and kick and scream. Okay? Are you ready? 'No, no cookie!' Okay! Let's see that great temper tantrum! You can yell louder than that! I know you can kick your heels higher! Let me see your best tantrum!"

Be aware of your child's sensitivity. One child may feel mocked and disrespected with this technique while another will simply look at you and wonder how you caught on to her trick. If your child is already having a tantrum, you could take the opportunity to sit back and calmly watch the show while coaching her about how to make her performance more entertaining to you. She soon learns how ineffective her tantrums are for getting her way. Now how much fun is that going to be?

The Enjoyable Dance of Cooperation

Learning the Peaceful Steps of Give and Take

As you begin to exercise the appropriate measures for redirecting the mistaken goal of control, you may find that the misbehavior changes and may actually increase as your child searches for different ways to engage you in power struggles. This would be a normal reaction for anyone who feels threatened with the possibility of having her way of keeping herself safe taken away. The important thing to remember is for you to *remain in control of your own emotions* and to *continue to be persistent in your steps to redirect your child*. Eventually she will begin to believe that she can be safe in practicing self-control and that self-control and cooperation are easier and work better than other-control or fighting to obtain her real goal of feeling personal power.

The wonderful thing about teaching your children to practice self-control rather than other-control is the peace that results from effective give and take. Try this exercise:

Find a partner and touching your hand to your partner's, palm to palm, push his or her hand back as far as it will go and then yield to the pressure of your partner's hand as he or she pushes your hand back as far as it will go. Continue to do this pushing and releasing motion until it becomes like a dance between you. You will feel a sense of peace with the give and take cooperating motions between you.

This is the peace of yielding to someone and then receiving what you want in return. Children love to learn to give and take. One of the first games that babies play is "give and take." They will need to learn to compete out in the world. Let them learn to cooperate at home with give and take, yielding and receiving. Gaining respect for the rights and needs of others will be the natural result of teaching your children to give and take.

The message of repentance and rethinking a decision is another important lesson for children to learn. We all make mistakes in judgment and regret some of the decisions we make. As children learn to ask for help when needed, repair mistakes, or remake poor decisions, parents are required to exercise some patience and self-control of their own. Parents

who say very little or nothing at all about the consequences of poor decisions but simply allow children to go through the learning and rethinking process have greater peace as their children quickly and naturally learn important life lessons unencumbered by parental interference or opinions.

Later, during a friendly time and when the child is sure he can trust his parents to not dilute his lesson, the parent can take the opportunity to discuss with the child the results of the decision and the consequences. Later on we will be discussing at length some very effective ways to communicate with children in ways that enhance lessons learned while simultaneously building relationships.

Here is an enjoyable skill to practice with your children. One of the most common ways children engage their parents in power struggles is to question their parent's authority and decisions by asking, "Why?" Sometimes a young child will use "Why?" as a way to retain undue attention and, again, you will know what his motive is – whether to keep your attention or to engage you in a power struggle – by the feelings his question evokes in you.

More often than not, however, the question of "Why?" is about questioning the parent's authority. *Why can't I go to my friend's house? But why, why won't you just tell me? Why do you never let me do what I want? Why do you always get your way?* You know the routine well if this is what any of your children do.

Eventually one of two things happens. Either you will lose your temper and become unsafe for your children to be around, or you will give in and allow the child to do what she wants which only encourages further misbehavior. This is the time when a lot of parents will very firmly state to their children, *"Because I said so, that's why!"* It is your right to make a decision that makes no sense to your child. However, while you do have that right, most Millennial Children will not accept this answer and will most likely lead you on another quest for the answer to "Why?"

I learned another option to this challenge from my friend Dr. Ron Dent before we took the parent education instructor course. He suggests that when a child attempts to engage you in a power struggle with the question, "Why?" you turn to the child and negotiate a deal. *"If I tell you why, will that be the end of it?"* Isn't that a great question to disengage from the power struggle?

If the child agrees that indeed an answer from you will end his asking, then you are free to be completely honest with him without fear of continuing to be questioned. *"Because I don't feel like driving you to your friend's house and then worrying about how to get you back home."* Or, *"I've had a long day and I don't feel like having company over right now."*

If your child attempts to engage you again in another round of why questions, simply hold up your hand and gently remind him about your agreement of your answer being the end of the discussion. If he continues to try to force you into a power struggle, step out of the situation by walking away or engaging in another activity.

If your child tells you "No," that it won't be the end of the discussion, tell him that you don't have an answer for him then and again step out of the power struggle with Kind and

Firm self-control. If he continues to try to get an answer from you, tell him that you will answer him only if he agrees to be satisfied and that your answer will end the discussion.

I loved using this negotiation method with my children. I really liked that I could be completely honest with them about the decision I had made, and that there would be no ensuing power struggle that came out of stating my decision.

The Big Finish

Wrapping up

Mistaken beliefs your child may have that he must control you include that he must be the one in control to feel powerful, that his rights are more important than everyone else's, and that he has to force you to give him attention by ignoring you or fighting and arguing with you.

To redirect, take these measures:

1. ***Step out of the power struggle; refuse to argue or fight with your child.***
Remember that it takes at least two people to have a disagreement. If you refuse to be the other person in the fight, there is no fight.
2. ***Remain calm; don't fight and don't give in. Instead, give appropriate choices that will give her useful ways to feel empowered.***
3. ***If choices will not be effective for the circumstance, escort the child to her assigned and agreed upon task with a friendly smile, a Kind and Firm touch and no words on your part.***
4. ***Negotiate an agreement about what would constitute the end of the argument with you.***

If you struggle with redirecting the mistaken goal of power with any of your children, one of three things could be happening. Consider first that you may be struggling with your own control issues and giving up control and power over your child is not easy for you. It may be difficult for you to recognize your own need to retain power over your children. The best thing you can do is to ask others if they see you as controlling. If you are open to learning and releasing your unhealthy patterns, you will make some amazing changes that will result in greater happiness for yourself in the form of improved relationships as well as a lot less stress in your life. If you feel resistant to discovering why you feel the need to control and give up the victim energy that is keeping you stuck in these unhealthy patterns,

it will be more difficult for you to really feel joyful and your relationships will continue to be strained.

The second possibility is that the child may resist giving up control over you and your family. People who are used to exerting power over others struggle with giving it up because it feels unsafe to do so. Power hungry people fight for their power and for their most important rights. Sometimes they will need to be finessed out of the mistaken belief that they have the right to control others. Gentle persistence with the redirecting methods along with plenty of reassurance of your unqualified love will eventually yield you your desired results.

The third possibility is that your child has already moved to another level of discouragement and you may need to experiment with other redirecting methods to help him meet his needs.

The redirecting methods suggested for ending power struggles will meet your child's unmet need of feeling that she is powerful and that her agency is respected and protected. She will then begin to lose her belief that she needs to control others around her to feel powerful. Make sure that, along with empowering your child, you are also meeting her needs of feeling loved and that she gains a firm understanding of her unique belonging.

EFT and energy therapy works well for helping people learn and change their mistaken belief about controlling others. Learn to use EFT to release unpleasant emotions such as helplessness, frustration and anger. Energy therapy will help you and your children to learn how to control emotions rather than using big feelings to try to force others to capitulate to demands. Parents who release their needs to be controlling give their children room to grow and become the people they were meant to be. Children who learn very early how to ask for and get what they want in useful ways are easy to be around and a pleasure to work with.