

“You can’t make me!” The Push-and-Pull of Power Struggles

Posted September 28, 2015

You need to leave the house early so you can drop the kids off at school and make it to work on time. Just as you’re about to head out the door, your daughter decides that attending class is not in her cards today.

“I’m not going, and you can’t make me.”

Makes you cringe, doesn’t it?

This is just one example of how power struggles start. Your need (getting the kids to school and making it to work on time) rubs up against your daughter’s need (staying home from school). The situation turns into a push-and-pull, where your needs compete for attention.

Any time your child uses defiance to push back against your requests or rules, you’re in a power struggle.

Your daughter might have a good reason why she doesn’t want to go to school, but she’s not able or willing to talk about it. This causes tension, since both of you have places to be and not much time to get there.

In these moments, it can feel like you’re stuck between a rock and a hard place. I understand how challenging it is. Parents are busy people — the last thing you need is another obstacle to overcome!

The good news is, there are effective ways to manage power struggles without going to war with your child. **The first step is awareness: knowing when you’re being drawn into an argument.**

It might seem obvious, but sometimes we’re so caught up in patterns of fighting or arguing, we miss the fact that we were invited into a power struggle. Don’t worry, this is normal! To learn more about identifying power struggles and how to overcome them, check out [Avoiding Power Struggles with Defiant Children: Declaring Victory is Easier Than You Think](#).

Power struggles take time and practice to handle constructively. Remember that you’re not alone — we’re here to help support and guide you!

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Darlene Beaulieu is a parent to two teenage daughters, ages 13 and 16. She has been an Empowering Parents Coach since 2009 and has helped thousands of families in that time. She earned her Master’s Degree in Counseling and has worked in school and community settings helping children and families with academic, social, and behavioral issues.