

Recognizing Parent-Child Power Struggles

Tip – The first step in resolving a power struggle with your child is to realize that it's different from ordinary discipline issues.

If you are prone to power struggles with your children, you know something is wrong. You can list various daily battles – from what to wear to school, to bicycle boundaries, to when to do homework – but you may not be able to put your finger on what exactly is causing all the trouble.

You might think you just have one of those "hard-to-manage" kids in your family, or you might begin to seriously doubt your competence as a parent. The problem might be deeper than a difference of opinion over what is appropriate to wear to school; it might be a struggle for power and control in the child's life.

"Power struggles are emotional battles between parents and children over who is in control," says Jan Faull, author of *Unplugging Power Struggles: Resolving Emotional Battles with Your Kids*. Faull points out that a natural tension exists in the parent-child relationship: parents teach, train and influence; children are inclined toward independence and wish to supervise themselves. The tension between these two positions can result in an emotional battle of wills we call a power struggle.

What does a power struggle look like? It's usually a recurring battle where a parent feels she knows what is best, but a child pushes relentlessly for her own way, regardless of the parent's position: the toddler who absolutely refuses to eat his vegetables; the preschooler who persists in wetting her pants despite the parents' earnest efforts to potty train; the school-age child who insists on wearing his hair in an "odd" style.



Tools – Use this checklist to decide if you are having a power struggle with your child. If three or more points are true, you are most likely embroiled in a power struggle with your child.

- Your child does not accept your discipline.
- The conflict, or subject, comes up again and again.
- Emotions run high.
- The parent-child relationship slowly deteriorates.
- The issue is never resolved.

If you decide this is a power struggle, then ordinary discipline measures like consequences probably won't help. Resolving a power struggle takes a different kind of thinking. You'll find practical tips you can use right now in *Unplugging Power Struggles: Resolving Emotional Battles with Your Kids*, available in many libraries.