

Beware: Power Suckers

After you've familiarized yourself with "5 steps to taking your power back," it's time to get serious about zapping power suckers. Power suckers are those pesky, and often sneaky, things that kids do that deplete parents' power over time.

Common power suckers:

- 1) **Pushing parent's buttons:** Your child keeps escalating his bad behavior and ignoring you until you lose your cool and yell and scream. Here is a life changing revelation for many parents: when you yell and scream at your child, you're giving away your power. Think about how few things kids get to influence and control. Kids get a sense of empowerment from pushing your buttons like that and want to do it again and again and again...
- 2) **Negotiations:** Many parents have no idea how often they are sucked into negotiations with their child or teen. Really pay attention this week to how many times you make a request of your child and they come back with a negotiation. Examples:

Parent: "Turn off your game and wash your hands for dinner."

Kid: "First I have to get to the save point on this game, then I'll go."

Parent: "In 10 minutes we're going to need to clean up and get ready."

Kid: "No 15. I want to finish this show."

- 3) **Partial-compliance:** This means your child does some of what you ask or makes a start to comply, but then doesn't fully comply. An example is: You ask your child to feed the pets and he goes to refill the cat's bowl, neglecting to feed the dogs or fill up the water bowl.
- 4) **Questioning:** Parents often spend a lot of time explaining and rationalizing and pleading with a child to make them understand why they should do what the parents have asked. Although it's certainly healthy for children to have a sense of curiosity and to develop communication skills, when it comes to compliance and obedience, the rule of thumb is less talking and more action. Parents don't have to give a dissertation on why their child has to brush her teeth EVERY night, it's enough to say, "It's healthy and you have to do it."
- 5) **Decision making:** Again, it's good for kids to make some decisions (i.e., Cornflakes or oatmeal? Jeans or shorts?). But when a child expects to be able to make decisions about going to

school, church, baseball practice or any other commitment that the parents believe is important, that's unhealthy. I often hear kids say, "Well I'm not going back!" And the parents say, "Okay sweetie, if you don't want to go, we're not going to make you." Yes it's okay to MAKE your child go places. And yes, you can even carry your 10 year old to the car if you have to. (Guarantee: It will only take one time of carrying your child into an event to ensure they will comply and go from that point forward. In most cases, they will have agreed to go long before you walk in the door carrying them like a baby.)

How to combat power suckers:

- 1) Keep your cool! No matter how good your child is at pushing your buttons, stay calm. If you have to remove yourself from the room to take a few deep breaths and give yourself a pep talk, do so. You should imagine a shield of calm surrounding you.
- 2) Aim for less talking and negotiating, more action. If a child is questioning you or arguing, give your final statement and remove yourself. If the child is being disrespectful, punish that ("You can't talk to me that way, if you continue, you'll lose your computer privileges today").
- 3) Don't accept less than the best! Don't accept a job "half-done" just because you're exhausted and frustrated. If you set this precedent, your child will know he can give less than his best and this trend may spill over into other areas of his life (e.g., school and work). If you see your daughter has only done some of what was asked, point out what is needed to finish the job and make sure it is done in a timely manner.
- 4) Remind yourself, your child will often use questions and discussions to avoid doing what you've asked them (in other words, keeping a bit of power for themselves.) It's okay to say, "We'll discuss this later but for now, go ahead and do what I've asked").
- 5) Specifically tell your child which things are up for discussion and which are "non-negotiable." Example: "Mom and Dad want you to go to church each week and Boy Scouts. We'll let you choose which sport you want to do in the spring." If your child tries to say what he or she will or won't do, remind them which things are non-negotiable.

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