

Week 4

Defuse Power Struggles with The Method of Choice

I was visiting some friends who were in a mighty power struggle trying to get their five-year-old son to put on his coat so we could go out to dinner. After about fifteen minutes of pleading, whining, and threatening (and this was from the parents, not the child!) I called the father aside and asked him if his son had another coat. Fortunately he did, and I suggested that the father give his son a choice between the two coats. The father, who was willing to try anything short of child abuse at this point, gave his son the choice. The son, of course, chose the other coat, and we were out the door in thirty seconds.

Now, a lot of parents might be thinking, "Yeah, I'd give him a choice: a choice between putting on the coat or getting my hand across his behind!" And that would work, too. At least for a while, and then the child's resentment would build up and he is likely to resist you again about something else. The beauty of the Method of Choice is that it gives the child some legitimate power without him having to say "no" to get it!

Think about it: when you give your child an order instead of a choice, if he wants power then his only option is to refuse. By giving him an "either/or" choice (*Would you rather have orange juice or cranapple? Would you rather set your homework time before dinner or after?*) you give him power without him having to refuse you. It's a deceptively effective technique that not only sidesteps a lot of power struggles, but also prepares your child to make decisions. For older kids you can give more open-ended choices. (*What kind of juice would you like this morning? When would you like to schedule your homework time this semester?*) But for young kids, keep it simple with "either/or" choices.

Activity

Experimenting with Choices

Spend some time this week noticing when you give your child orders instead of choices. Then look for opportunities to provide choices that are within limits that are acceptable to you. For example, do not give your child the choice of eating his peas or leaving the table, and then when he chooses to leave the table, slap the table and yell, "Sit back down and eat those peas!" Only give choices that you can live with! And one other caveat, don't make *everything* a choice. Kids sometimes want and need clear directions from their parents. For example, as your four-year-old races for the street, it's not a good time to practice giving choices. It's a good time to yell, "Stop!!!" then run and grab him.

Being the creative parent you are, I'm sure you'll find plenty of safe and appropriate choices to experiment with. Jot down your results here.

Choice 1. _____

Result _____

Choice 2. _____

Result _____

Choice 3. _____

Result _____
