

## **Beware: Power Suckers**

Last time we discussed “5 steps to taking your power back” as parents. In step 4, I discussed watching out for “power suckers” – those sneaky things kids do that ultimately take away our power and authority as parents. It’s important to recognize these each and every time so that you’re not giving away your power in bits and pieces.

### **Common power suckers:**

- 1) **Pushing parent’s buttons:** A kid keeps escalating his bad behavior and ignoring you until you lose your cool and yell and scream. This can be a life changing revelation for parents – when you yell and scream at your child, you’re giving away your power. Kids get a sense of empowerment from pushing your buttons like that and want to do it again and again and again...
- 2) **Negotiations:** Your child negotiating – really pay attention this week to how many times you make a request of your child and they come back with a negotiation.  
Parent: “Go put up your homework 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. Example would be you ask your child to feed the pets and he remembers to go over and refill the cat’s bowl but he doesn’t 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 (what to have for breakfast, what pants to wear). 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 hear kids say a lot, “Well I’m not going back to that place.” And the parents say, “Okay sweetie, if you don’t want to go, we’re not going to make you.” Yes it’s okay MAKE your child to things. And yes, you can even carry your 10 year old to the car if you have to.

### **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) 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. 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, i.e., 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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