

What's Behind Power Struggles and How Can I Stop Them? [video transcript]

Voiceover: Welcome to Connected Families' "Discipline that Connects" videocast series. For more information, you can visit us at ConnectedFamilies.org.

Lynne Jackson: Hi, I'm Lynne Jackson, and this is Chad Hayenga, one of our Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists at Connected Families, and today we're here to talk about a common parenting challenge of power struggles.

What's going on in a power struggle?

Lynne: So Chad -- how do you know when you've gotten yourself into a power struggle with your child?

Chad Hayenga: There are a couple key indicators, but the primary one is that as parents we feel really angry about our child's behavior. And we talked in one of our other videocasts about attention, where it's really this sense of "You're driving me crazy, child!" and we're feeling annoyed about that. But when we're talking about power, it's more this sense of "You're going to do what I say!" And we're trying to control that behavior.

Lynne: Yeah, I can remember some thoughts about that. It's like I've got a goal, but it gets blocked by my child's opposing goal, so we both end up feeling angry because anger is about a blocked goal. Got it. That makes sense. So what can we do about that, practically?

Healthy vs. hurtful power

Chad: Well I think there's a recognition that we all as adults and kids need to have some sense of power and control in our lives. And as parents, we recognize that there's healthy control and that there's hurtful control, or hurtful power. And what we wanna do is to help our kids get set up to be in that healthy kind of power.

Lynne: Sure, because if they have no sense of personal power in their life, they're more subject to bullying and other intimidation by people and just being controlled in an unhealthy way. So giving our child a healthy sense of power is really a significant gift to them as well. So, some practical examples of that?

Tots & Teens

Chad: Well, we had a practical example with our two-year-old. Our youngest, when she was two, would never want to go to bed, and my wife and I would have these kind of looks at each other at bedtime like "It's YOUR turn!" We don't wanna do this. Out of some exasperation my wife said to my two-year-old at the time, "Sweetheart, it's time to go to bed. Do you want to ride on my back, should I carry you, or do you want to walk?" And she kind of took a step back and thought, "No, no,

no, NO, none of that!" She said, "No, I don't want to go to bed." And my wife said, "Do you want to ride on my back, do you want me to carry you, or do you want me to walk?"

Lynne: Ah, so it took a little gentle persistence it sounds like.

Chad: Yes. "Here are your options, bedtime isn't one of them, but how you go to bed is within your control." And she said, "I wanna ride on your back!" and it was the beginning of really the end of that big struggle that we had day in and day out.

Lynne: Wow, that's kind of cool. So how does this apply to a teen?

Chad: Good question. Last night --

Lynne: [laughs] Fresh example!

Chad: Yep, pretty fresh here. We were going to go shoe shopping for track shoes, and we've gotta have the shoes, and the school was saying "Go to this place and they'll fit you and do all this stuff" and I knew because I'd been there before, \$140! And I said, "Sweetheart, we have X number of dollars to spend, and if you would like to go to this shoe store I would be happy to do that, but I'm only paying so much, and here's the dollar amount. So it's up to you. If you want to go there, and you pay out of your own money for the remainder of the cost, then fantastic. If you want to go to this less expensive store where I know they have great shoes, and we've bought lots of shoes there before, I'd be happy to pay up to this dollar amount. I know we can get something good for that." And after just a thought about that -- no big power struggle in terms of "No! Yes! No! Yes!" but just this choice option, "Here are your options, here's what I would be willing to do as a parent, now you get to decide how you want to work through that" -- she decided we were going to go to the less expensive shoe store and was very happy with the shoes that she found.

Lynne: So you actually helped her to think through her decision, weigh the different options, and make a wise choice. So it's not only about avoiding power struggles, but it sounds like it's about building wisdom in your child as well.

Chad: Yes, and giving them some sense of control while as parents we get to set the expectation or our limits and then offer the choices to our child.

Lynne: So as parents we can feel good about helping our child sort through their options, think carefully about that, and make a wise choice within the boundaries that we set. And this really does remind us of God the Father who doesn't allow certain things to happen, but within his permissive will he allows us to make choices and then guides us through that.

Have a great day and thanks for joining us!