



## How to avoid teen power struggles

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Power struggles occur when both children and parents attempt to control the, same situation. Power struggles occur between parents and their children as early as the child reaches age two and when the child begins to experiment with (their own) independence. Power struggles generally last from this early developmental stage through adolescence.

1. **Anticipate power struggles before they occur.** Knowing your child's triggers will help you avoid power struggle traps (i.e. Child has had little sleep, is hungry, child generally feels anxious/upset at certain times of the day, etc.)
2. **Think before you react.** Think about the issue presented and what you see! is the best decision for your child.
3. **Establish your non-negotiable limits in advance and state them clearly to your children.** Ensure that you and your spouse/partner are in agreement with the rules. Also, they are clear on what rules will be strictly enforced. It is appropriate to hold onto your parenting controls when the outcomes affect things such as safety, health or family values.
4. **Re-evaluate your rules on a regular basis to reflect the gains the child has made in relation to their developmental stage.** For example, your child may have had the rule that they needed to cross the street holding an adult's hand at four years old and as he matured and acted responsibly, this rule changed that he could cross the street with a parent watching, then unattended, etc.
5. **Pick your battles.** Sometimes it is helpful to negotiate compromise or offer choices to your child. Make sure that the choices are reasonable and limited to one or two.
6. **Ask yourself the question, "is this a decision that my child could make for herself?"** If the answer is "yes" offering choices will empower your child to make decisions for their own lives within your established limits.
7. **Point out the choices and control that your child does have rather than focusing on the things that they are not allowed to do.**
8. **Watch your child's body language.** Children often show their emotions wearing thin when they begin to whine, raise their voice, become increasingly agitated, etc.



9. **Remain as calm as possible and take breaks as needed.** If you feel that you are losing control leave the room and determine a time that would be better to talk. Ignore and redirect your child if they become whiney or argumentative.
10. **Recognize your child when they have been cooperative and provide genuine praise.**

**When dealing with power struggles, it may be helpful to recognize the following:**

1. Children often think on impulse
2. Children thrive on structure and routine
3. Children are trying to determine their placement in the family, relationship, etc.
4. Children and adolescents are always in search of attention.
5. Children need to make some decisions. When children are allowed some control over the smaller decisions (Le. what to wear, when to brush their hair, etc.) they may be more accepting of the non-negotiable big decisions such as safety, health and family values.
6. Children are able to cooperate when they are developmentally able to do so. Children who are one year old may only be able to follow one simple direction whereas an older child may be able to follow directions that include more than one step.
7. Preschoolers are developmentally at the stage of exploring their sense of power and control. Preschoolers attempt to determine how much control they have, how things work, how things get accomplished, what their impact is in their environment and how they can make things happen.
8. Adolescents are at a developmental stage where they want to explore their independence and assert their perception of their world. Adolescents will challenge family values as a natural process to learning and defining who they are and what they believe