



MONTHLY PARENTING TIP FROM THE ACFC

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Is it time to give “time out” a time out?

Everybody wants a silver bullet: the one-size-fits-all cure for the common anything. For years the silver bullet in parenting was a good old-fashioned spanking. As parents began to realize that spankings and other forms of autocratic discipline often made power struggles between parents and spirited children worse, not better, they began looking for less bombastic methods of influence. Enter time out. Never mind that parents have been employing the command, “Go to your room,” for almost as long as they’ve been doling out spankings and trips to the woodshed. With time outs, parents felt that they had stumbled on a new and gentler silver bullet. The problem with spankings, time outs, and other silver bullet solutions is that children soon build up an immunity. A modern flu virus could take lessons from a power-seeking five-year-old who wants what he wants when he wants it. “Go ahead and put me in time out; I don’t care!” he yells. The more we push him into time out, the more he digs in his heels in protest of our authority. The kicker is when the parent has to stand in the hallway holding the door shut while an unrepentant offspring engages in a tug-of-war from the other side. Far from being the vision of quiet reflection that the term “time out” evokes for hopeful parents, the scene has degenerated into a cartoon strip mocking parental authority! Effectively handling power struggles requires more strategy than any single silver bullet can provide. The following six tips will give you an idea where to start:

- 1. Neither fight nor give in.** When you fight with a power-driven child by trying to put her in time out or by using any other discipline skill that proclaims your authority over her, you set yourself up as the enemy to be resisted. This makes such children want to fight you all the harder.
- 2. Give choices, not orders.** Contrary to popular belief, kids do not necessarily want what you don’t want them to have. Often they just want the power to decide for themselves. Many a power struggle has been avoided or ended by simply giving the child a choice instead of an order. The key is to give choices that you — the parent and leader of the family — can live with.
- 3. Motivate your child with when-then scenarios.** When your child refuses or is likely to refuse to do what you’ve asked of her, find something that she likes doing on a regular basis and connect the two activities. For example: “When you’ve had your bath, then I’ll read you that story.” By choosing an activity that your child enjoys doing on a regular basis, by the way, you can avoid turning this into a bribe or reward, which is a slippery slope best left alone.
- 4. Choose a consequence that fits the misbehavior.** Successful people learn that what happens in life usually results from choices they make. Parents can teach this concept of “responsibility” by using discipline that logically connects a child’s choice to misbehave with the consequence that follows. Wise parents develop a repertoire of such consequences to use when called for. For example, “If you break the window, you help pay for it;” “either put away your toys or I’ll put them away for a day.”
- 5. Stay firm and friendly.** The easiest thing for a parent to do when confronted with a resistant child is to get angry. As one mother put it, “I didn’t even know that I **could** get angry until I had Alex!” However, the moment you do, you have lost that round in the power struggle. Maintain a firm tone of voice that says “I’m in charge here,” yet one that also says, “I’m not your enemy; I’m your friend.” Look for a solution together that might make both you and your child happy, but one that lies within the limits of the situation.
- 6. Strengthen the overall relationship.** When power struggles persist between parent and child, the overall relationship deteriorates. This makes it increasingly hard to discipline your child when necessary. To counteract this negative cycle, it is imperative that you spend time building the relationship by doing such things as: having fun together, teaching your child skills, reading together, encouraging your child, helping him solve problems, showing concern for his feelings, treating her respectfully, and other relationship-building activities.

Learn more about avoiding power struggles and other ways to develop courage, responsibility and character in your children by joining an Active Parenting Online Group. This six-week, video-based interactive class is being offered free to CWA represented employees in DE, MD, PA, NJ, VA, WV, Washington, DC, or can be purchased at a discounted rate for non-CWA represented employees.

Visit ACFCcares.com for more information and to register for the next available group.