

Stepping Out Of Power Struggles

What Is Power Struggle And What Causes It?

A power struggle is when two, or more, people fight for control. This often occurs when there is a desire to maintain or enhance one's control over others or self.

What Is Temperament?

Temperament describes the way children approach and react to the world. Temperament is biologically based (yes, your kiddo is born with it!) and relatively stable over time and situations (no, you can't change it!). There are 3 common temperamental styles (*Circle the one that describes your child. Star the one that describes you!*):

Easy/Flexible – these children tend to be happy, adaptable to change, calm, predictable in their behavior, and not easily upset.

Slow-to-warm/Cautious- these children are often less active and more reserved, tend to be fussy, and take more time to try new things.

Active/Feisty – these children are often fussy, react strongly to new situations/changes/people, are easily upset by noise and stimulation, and are intense in their reactions.

What Does Temperament Have To Do With Power Struggles?

While you can't change temperamental style, you as a caregiver manage a great deal about the environment in which that style exists.

$$\text{Temperament} + \text{Environment} = \text{Behavior}$$

If your child is Easy/Flexible: low power struggle risk.

The environment can be variable and your child will likely be fine!

If your child is Slow-to-warm/Cautious: moderate power struggle risk

A routine environment is important - prepare children when there are going to be changes
Keep inchstones small and understand that progress may be slow
Travel with toileting supplies (eg, portable potty seat, familiar wipes).

Often times cautious children may appear defiant when they are feeling anxious or when expectation exceed their abilities and/or comfort. If you note resistance/refusal around toileting, consider exploring the resistance to better understand what may be leading to this.

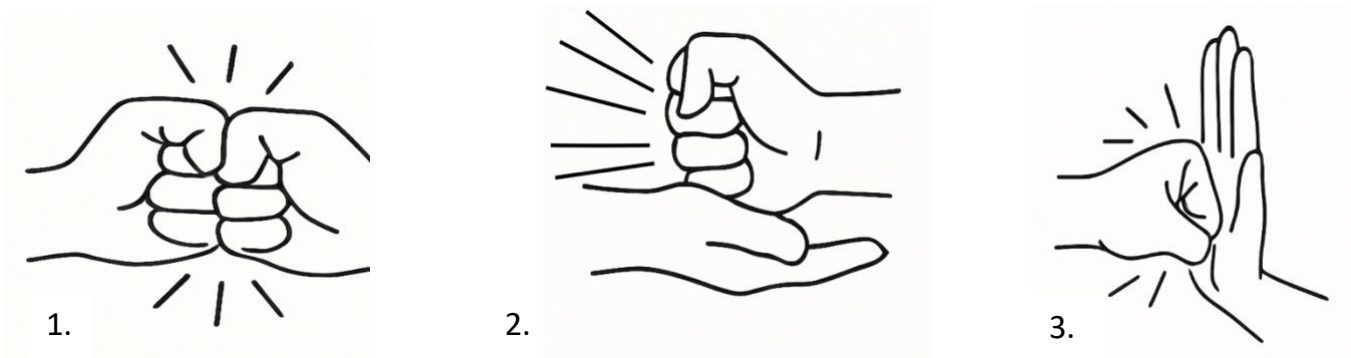
If your child is Active/Feisty: high power struggle risk

- The environment needs to ensure ample time for toilet learning and readiness
- Make sure that your child is an enthusiastically willing participant in the training process
- Stay calm!
- Be clear around non-negotiable expectations while still allowing some choice
- Consider use of extrinsic rewards if you are not able to wait (eg, sticker chart)

Often times feisty children become defiant when they feel a lack of control. If you note resistance/refusal around toileting, consider where you may allow your child a greater sense of control.

What Do I Do To Avoid A Power Struggle (Or Get Out Of The One I'm In)?

- When your child is pushing for control, do not simply push back! This is a power struggle! (see image 1)
- When your child is pushing for control, do not simply allow them to take over! (see image 2)
- When your child is pushing for control, meet them with calm, clear and consistent expectations and consequences and hold steady! (see image 3)



- Remember your distress tolerance skills and ensure you are using them! Avoiding power struggles requires patience, communication, and planning.
- Offer empathy (recognize your child's thoughts and feelings and let them know you understand how they are thinking/feeling) and validation (let your child know that their thoughts and feelings are understandable even if you don't agree with them) to your child early on. Just like you are having strong feelings and using skills to manage those, so are they!
- Review the readiness checklist and ensure you aren't jumping ahead of your child. If you are asking your child to do something they can't, or won't, do you are walking into a power struggle.
- Review the DOR handout – remember what your child's/your/other person's responsibilities are and make sure you are staying in your lane! Don't forget to pick your battles while you're at it. There are things you aren't going to worry about "right now".
- Offer one or two choices to provide a sense of control for your child while also ensuring options are acceptable to you.
- Allow for natural consequences, positive and negative.