



PREVIEW ONLY



the peaceful sleeper

TODDLER
POWER
STRUGGLES

TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

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Toddler Power Struggles

Along with those developing personalities, toddlers are starting to test limits and push boundaries. Don't be disheartened. This is a WONDERFUL thing. (Excuse me? Is this chick serious?) Yes, this is actually a really cool stage, and the more you stay present to that fact, the easier it will be to navigate.

You see, the thing is, toddlers are starting to realize they are independent agents. They have an independent will and they're starting to figure out what they want and how to get it. Toddlerhood marks an awesome milestone of empowerment. They are realizing how strong they are and they love it! Our job, as parents, is to mold and foster empowerment so it's directed appropriately and used wisely. We need to help them understand their strength and work WITH us instead of working against us. Ultimately, we all want the same things.

Unfortunately, it's really easy to get caught up in the power struggle and try to stomp out that assumed sense of power. We know what's best for our kids and we know why we're implementing what we are, so we just want them to shape up and follow suit. Not so much in words, but in actions, we tell our kids over and over, "YOU do not have power. I have power. I'm the boss. I make the rules and you follow them!" This ends up backfiring because the strong-willed kids gear up for the challenge, and it goes against what we actually want for our children, long term.

I'm a pretty stubborn person, so it's no surprise that I have strong-willed children. I often have to remind myself what a privilege it is to shape strong women. Truly, if we can stay focused on the beauty of emerging independence, hopes and desires, we can transcend the red-faced, kicking, screaming tantrums. They still happen, but you don't get caught up in them.

Connect then Redirect

In my clinical work, I always find that understanding motives behind behaviors can help you be empathetic and validating, AND THEN change the behavior. As Dan Siegel says, "Connect, then redirect." It works for our kids, too. If I can recognize that I "want what I want, when I want it", I also have to honor that they feel the same way. Does this mean I give them the things that they want, because they want them? No. Not usually. But it DOES mean that I try really hard to validate them before I redirect them or give them the reason for the rule.



So, take an extra minute to figure out what the fuss is about and then validate the feelings but redirect the behavior. For example, Peanut is melting down, kicking and screaming that she can't have candy for dinner. My default might be originally be "No! You can't have candy for dinner. It's not growing food, and I need you to eat growing food first. (Still screaming.) Stop acting like that. This is not how we behave. (Kicking AND screaming now.) Alright, that's it, no candy at all. (Still losing her mind.) Stop crying or you're going to time out!" (You haul her off to time-out to calm down, while she's got her back arched and she's kicking the air, still screaming).

Instead, if I connect first before I redirect, it looks like this: Peanut is melting down, kicking and screaming that she can't have candy for dinner. She's laying on the floor, so I bend down to her level and I say frantically (matching the urgency in her tone without mocking) "I know! Candy is so yummy and you want it RIGHT NOW! YOU WANT CANDY! (She slows her crying and quizzically looks at me like "Okay... I'm listening") Now that I have her attention a little more I continue softer, "I know sweet pea. You really want candy right now. But can I tell you something? (She quiets and whimpers "ya"). I know you want candy, so let's make a deal. I need you to eat growing food first, but if you have a good dinner and you don't throw a fit then you can have some candy after. Okay? We don't throw fits. If you want something you ask in your big girl voice and you say calmly 'mommy, can I please have candy?'" Now she's calm, she's validated, and the power struggle is over. We're working together instead of me vs. her. It's so, so hard sometimes. But so worth it!

The more you divert power struggles in other aspects of parenting, the more leverage you'll have with the power struggle of sleep. They protest that one harder and more consistently than other power struggles, so you'll want to feel skilled in diffusing the power struggle as you jump into toddler sleep regressions.

Power Struggles and Sleep

When it comes to power struggles regarding sleep, figure out a way that you can bend to their will appropriately and also hold firm boundaries for the things that are really important to you. For example, my second is my strongest-willed child. If she had it her way, I would rock her to sleep every single night. She loves cuddling, and our bedtime routine is one of the sweetest moments we share during the day. However, at 8pm I don't always have the time or the patience to rock her to sleep. Every night she pleads, "Still snuggle!" as she sloth-clings to me when I set her in her crib. She still protests for a few minutes when I turn to leave.

