

CARE and TCI resource

Practice tool. Power struggles and dropping the rope

LIFE
WITHOUT
BARRIERS

CARE principles



Relationship Based



Developmentally Focused



Trauma Informed



Family Involved



Competency Centred



Ecologically Oriented

No one wins a power struggle

A power struggle usually starts when an adult asks a child to comply with a request that the child is unwilling or unable to do.

The longer a child says no and the caregiver says yes, the more tension builds – like a ‘tug of war’, pulling a rope at both ends.

No one wins and the relationship may be impacted.

- The child feels a loss of control.
- A stress response is triggered and behaviour escalates.
- The adult becomes frustrated and can no longer role model self-regulation.
- The child is forced to do something and feels anger and resentment.
- The opportunity to teach kids how to negotiate and compromise is also lost.

It can be best to drop the rope

- **Use active listening** and validate the child’s feelings using statements like – ‘I understand you’re feeling...’
- **Manage the environment** – remove additional stimulation including other people who might be fueling the situation.
- **Offer choices and time to decide** – ‘how about you jump on the trampoline for a bit and then let me know if you want to wash or dry the dishes.’
- **Change the expectation** – if there is no immediate danger, it may make sense to adjust or drop the expectation and revisit it together when everyone is calm.

Activity



Dropping the rope

Think about a power struggle with a child you know.

- What was the outcome?
- How do you think the child was feeling before, during and after?
- What impact did the power struggle have on your emotions?
- Did you notice any negative self-talk? e.g. 'They have no respect for me.'
- Looking back, were there ways you could have 'dropped the rope'?
- How could avoiding power struggles improve your relationship with a child?

Practice tip



'People can relate to being caught in a power struggle with a child and the idea of this being like a 'tug of war'. I find it is useful to talk with teams about ways they can avoid getting caught up in disagreements over rules or issues of compliance. We talk about how 'dropping the rope' is a way we can model self-regulation and teach kids negotiation skills.' (Eddie Mendez, CARE and TCI Practitioner, National Practice Team)

References

Holden M.J et al. (2020) Therapeutic Crisis Intervention 7th Edition, Residential Childcare Project, Cornell University

