



# Avoiding Power Struggles

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# What is power?

- ▶ The ability to influence or direct the behavior of others or the course of events
- ▶ “Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren’t.” Margaret Thatcher

# What is a power struggle?

- ▶ When two or more people compete to influence or direct the behavior of others or the course of events
- ▶ Those who feel powerless, lack felt sense of safety, lack control or agency in a situation may engage in power struggles to communicate their powerlessness

# Let's think about:

- ▶ With whom do you find yourself engaging in power struggles? Your child, your sibling, your parent, an individual you support, a boss, a coworker, a friend, a partner?
- ▶ When you have engaged in a power struggle, how does it impact your day? Do you find yourself angry or frustrated after the power struggle?
- ▶ Do you find yourself dwelling on the event?

# Types of power struggles?

- ▶ Defending one's authority or credibility
- ▶ Personal button pushing
- ▶ Bringing up past history or irrelevant issues
- ▶ Empty threats and ultimatums

# Defending one's authority or credibility

- ▶ Who are you to tell me what to do?
- ▶ Who are you to tell me how to parent my child?
- ▶ I don't want to deal with you, I want to talk to the boss?
- ▶ You can't make me?
- ▶ You are not the boss of me?
- ▶ How does it feel to have our credibility or authority questioned?

# Personal button pushing

- ▶ When people know us well, they know what gets under our skin. The person will continue going until they get the reaction, hoping you feel bad for the reaction and back down.
- ▶ These can be comments about your appearance, about how you do your job, racial slurs, threats about people you care about, challenging your values or beliefs...
- ▶ Take a moment to think about what pushes your buttons and why

# Bringing up past history or irrelevant issues

- ▶ Comes about from grudge holding or a “scorecard”
- ▶ Statements such as “you tried that last week, how did it work out for you”
- ▶ Making comparison such as “my other staff didn’t do it this way”
- ▶ Taking you off topic with multiple questions hoping that the original issue or request is forgotten



# Empty threats and ultimatums

- ▶ These occur when we forget to give choices
- ▶ “Do this because I said so”
- ▶ “Don’t do this or else”
- ▶ “If you don’t give me what I want, I will have a behavior”
- ▶ These types of power struggles can result in a breakdown of trust resulting in the person not feeling safe with us.

# What does a power struggle look like?

- ▶ 7-38-55 Rule - Only 7% of all communication is done through verbal communications, the other 93% is done through non verbal communication, such as tone(38%) and body language (55%).
- ▶ When we are in a power struggle, others can hear it in our tone of voice and see it in our body language
  - ▶ Crossed arms, rolling eyes, hands on hips, darting eye contact, no eye contact, clenched fists, clenched jaw, yelling, sarcasm, emotionally charged tones of voice, etc.

# Avoiding power struggles:

- ▶ Power struggles occur when we feel powerless, when we lack felt sense of safety, when we lack agency in our day to day life
- ▶ Hand Brain - understanding our current behavior is impacted by our past traumatic experiences

# Avoiding power struggles:

- ▶ Do not pick up the rope!
  - ▶ Recognize...this may be a power struggle - listen to your internal signals (racing heart, fast breathing, facing turning red, dry mouth, arm's crossed, etc)
  - ▶ Regulate our own emotions, thoughts, feelings and behaviors - This mirrors the behavior we want to see in the other person
  - ▶ Model calm in your body language and tone of voice - use head nods, touch your chin, lean your head to the side to let the other person know you are thinking about what they are saying, lean toward the person to let them know you are listening, uncross your arms and legs, calm neutral tone of voice
  - ▶ Be present - turn off the phone, put down the papers, give the person your full attention
  - ▶ Empathize - put yourself into the other person's shoes
  - ▶ Listening more than you talk

# More ideas

- ▶ Reflect, Honor and Connect
- ▶ The 3 P's
- ▶ Safety Scripts
- ▶ Having expectations and understanding these expectations
- ▶ Avoid the no, don't stop - Yes, when...., 2 types of no's
- ▶ First ..., then....
- ▶ There are 2 Good choices...
- ▶ Setting limits - clear, simple, reasonable and enforceable
- ▶ Problem solving
- ▶ Compromise

# More ideas:

- ▶ Recognize any attempts the person makes to engage in the requested behavior
- ▶ Visual supports - remember when a person is demonstrating off line thinking they respond better to visuals than spoken word. Use gestures or pictures to give directions. Role model calming techniques
- ▶ Walk away - if the person's safety is not in jeopardy, let the person know you are going to take a break to get your emotions together and will revisit later

# When a power struggle goes to far...

- ▶ No one wins in a power struggle; people do lose felt sense of safety and trust with others when power struggles escalate

# Putting it all together...

- ▶ Teenager writes on desk with marker
- ▶ Support staff is frustrated with a person she is supporting and doesn't feel anyone is listening to her
- ▶ 9 year old has “cheated” in game of Trouble
- ▶ Parent is frustrated with the suggestions for addressing their child's toileting issues



# Resources

- ▶ CPI: <https://www.crisisprevention.com/>
- ▶ Mary Viccario: <https://www.findinghopeconsulting.com/>
  - ▶ Check out Youtube video on Hand Brain
- ▶ Sarah Buffie: <https://www.soulbirdconsulting>
  - ▶ Youtube videos Hand brain, Reflect, Honor and Connect; Safety Scripts and 3 P's
- ▶ <https://mha.ohio.gov/get-help/prevention-services/building-resiliency>