

FOUNDATION 4: POWER OVER VS. POWER WITH

The real goal of parenting is not to control our children but to lend our support and guidance as they learn to control themselves.

There is an important power dynamic in the parent-child relationship. If we establish our authority in the boundaries stage, then we hold the power. If we do not, then our children likely do. When our children have the power, we usually find ourselves putting out fires and resorting to impulse parenting. When parents have the power, then we have a choice: use our power over our children or use it with our children.

We need to thoughtfully consider the idea of wielding power over versus with our children because this concept will deeply affect our children and our relationship with them. Power over relies on control to get our kids to obey us. Power with relies on empowerment to get our kids to problem-solve and take responsibility for their actions. Power over is commonly seen in authoritarian parenting, while power with is found commonly in the authoritative style.

When we have the power-over mindset, we tend to give orders and directives and expect obedience without question. This way of thinking is most often seen in the authoritarian style of parenting. However, using power over our children takes away their autonomy and stifles their confidence. In many cases, it often breeds resentment as children grow older and seek independence.

Authority in parenting does not mean that we control our kids. While we work with our kids to equip them to solve

problems and make wise decisions, we still have the final word in decision-making. Rather than just telling our kids what to do and how to act, we teach them and empower them to take personal responsibility. While we are establishing our authority in the boundaries stage, we should work with our toddlers to show them the boundaries and help them understand that the authority rests with us.

As our kids head into the teaching stage, the difference between power over and power with becomes more recognizable. We are teachers, guides, and protectors of our children, not dictators. Power with means we lend them our wisdom, guide them to make good choices and help them through the consequences of their bad choices.

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USING POWER OVER CHILDREN

Using power over children can take many forms, all of which can have negative effects on our children's emotional well-being and development. One form is punishing a child without any explanation or discussion. Using both physical and emotional punishment without helping our children understand why they are being punished is more likely to instill doubt and fear than to help them correct their behaviors. This approach can leave children feeling bewildered and apprehensive without any real learning taking place.

Another form involves creating rules without seeking input from our child, which can make them feel disempowered and undervalued, potentially leading to rebellious behavior. In the same way, ignoring our children's feelings and opinions when making decisions can also make them feel insignificant and unheard. When our children feel as if they are unseen and unheard it can often lead to attention-seeking and sometimes rebellious behaviors.

Using physical force or threats to control a child's behavior can instill fear and cause long-term emotional and psychological harm. When we make threats or use force to control our children, it creates a hostile environment that undermines their emotional well-being. Beyond the immediate impact, it can inflict lasting emotional scars.

These approaches ultimately compromise the parent-child relationship and impede the child's growth. Let's aim for a more nurturing and empathetic approach that fosters mutual respect and understanding.

USING POWER WITH CHILDREN

Using power with children involves fostering open communication and collaboration. This means having conversations with children to explain the reasoning behind rules and boundaries, allowing them to understand and participate in decision-making processes. Empowering children to have a say in decisions that affect them, such as activities or food choices, helps build their confidence and self-esteem.

It's also important to listen to their feelings and validate them, even if we don't always agree. Collaborating with children to find solutions to problems strengthens their problem-solving skills and helps them feel valued and heard. While we ultimately have the final say, the emphasis should be on teaching and empowering our children to grow into independent and responsible adults within a supportive and nurturing environment.

Real authority in parenting doesn't mean that we simply have control over our children. It involves collaborative efforts with our children to equip them with problem-solving skills and the ability to make responsible decisions. Once we have established our authority in the boundaries stage, we should begin to take on the roles of teachers, guides, and protectors, creating an environment where our children can thrive, learn, and grow into responsible and independent individuals.

As you read these descriptions, you likely found that you can relate to both on some level. There are so many factors that influence our parenting that we don't often fit neatly into any box. However, as with impulse and impact parenting, you likely related to one of these descriptions more than the other. If you relate more to power with, you will probably agree with most of what you read in this book and will find insights into using the relationship you've built as your kids transition into young adults. If you relate more to power over, then don't worry—you are not alone! I tended toward, and

still do from time to time, power over parenting. I have gradually learned to move away from this, and I am excited to share that with you!

We are all in this together and we can all learn from each other!

SELF-REFLECTION

Consider your current power dynamics in your parent-child relationship. Do you feel that you have more power over your child's decisions and actions, or are you working collaboratively with your child to empower them? Are there specific areas in which you'd like to shift from power over to power with?

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