

CONNECTING!

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Parents Leadership Institute's E-Mail Newsletter
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PLI Events Calendar

Parenting Tip - Power Struggles Dissolve in Laughter

Success Story - My Son Has His Hair Washed

News - Article on Sleep, Training Leaders

Book Nook: Playful Parenting by Lawrence J. Cohen, PhD

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PLI Events Calendar (San Francisco Bay Area) can be found at
<http://www.parentleaders.org/Classes.html>

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POWER STRUGGLES DISSOLVE IN LAUGHTER

Power Struggles Aren't a Bad Sign!

Sooner or later in our lives as parents, we find ourselves locked in a power struggle with our child. It can happen over being fed with a spoon when a baby is just a year old. It can happen over getting dressed in the morning, over brushing teeth, and over going to bed. Our children, like any self-respecting human beings, like to make decisions about their lives. And we, like any self-respecting parents, need to make sure they eat, dress, bathe, sleep, learn to use the potty, and are strapped into their car seats. So these power struggles are inevitable! They spring from what look like competing interests of loving people at very different ages and stages.

The fact that you and your child get into power struggles means that you and your child are each doing the most appropriate thing you can think of. You are being the parent, keeping life safe and somewhat ordered. Your child is trying to keep from feeling helpless in the face of so many decisions that are out of her hands.

Solving Problems by Connecting in Play

There are easy, fun ways to help dissolve the struggle through play. The following approach is based on the idea that when your child FEELS CONNECTED to you, close

to you, loved by you, and safe, she won't feel forced to oppose the things that must be done. What creates a child's opposition is one of two things:

Either she can't think because she doesn't feel close to you, or loved by you. (Even though you're close and loving, she may not be able to feel it because she's been alone in sleep, or without you at day care or school, or has watched you pouring attention toward her sibling.)

Or, she can't think because she has had some bad experience that is jangling in her mind, making her feel mad, sad, or frightened. She can't cooperate because she's got feelings that DID fit some difficult situation in the past, but that don't fit the safe, reasonable thing you've asked her to do.

So, to reconnect with her and begin to dissolve the power struggle between you, you can playfully take the less powerful role.

If your baby refuses to allow you to feed him with a spoon, you can give the spoon to him and let him feed you, even though the food will dribble down your chin because he misses more than he finds his target.

If your child refuses to dress himself, you can spend a few minutes saying, "Want this sock on?" with an eager expression. When he says, "NO!", you can say, "OK, away with the sock!" and throw it up in the air and across the room. Then you ask, "Want these pants?" eagerly. When he says, "NO!" you say, "OK, away with the pants!" and throw them up and away, perhaps so they'll land on your head.

If your child won't brush her teeth, you can yelp and complain while he brushes your teeth over and over.

Laughter Dissolves the Tension; Tears Sometimes Follow

When you are lighthearted enough with games like these, being the goofy "victim" or the poor, surprised target of your child's "plot" to "get" you, your child will laugh and laugh and want to play the game a LOT. This is progress in the making. The laughter helps dissolve his feelings of powerlessness, and the distance he feels from you. It helps connect the two of you in good fun. These kinds of games are silly and deeply sensible. You play the one having trouble, and your child plays the one totally in charge. This reverses the power structure for 5 or 10 minutes, or longer if you have the time. Your child sees that you love him, sees that you don't always insist on being in charge of everything, and benefits from the wonderful release of laughter. After playing a bit, you can then say, "OK, we do need to get dressed now," and you are much more likely to have a child who wants to follow your lead about getting dressed.

Sometimes, after you've had a great play time centered on an issue the child has been balking on, you'll set out your expectations again, and your child will have a big cry about STILL not wanting to brush his teeth or eat his food or get dressed. This is to be

expected. He's taking one more step to dissolve the feelings of powerlessness that get triggered by your requests. Stay close and listen. He's offloading big feelings that, when gone, will help him see you as his ally instead of his warden when you are asking for cooperation from him.

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SUCCESS STORIES

MY SON HAS HIS HAIR WASHED

When my son was about 21 months old, he started to hate having water poured over his head when I washed his hair in the bath. He would scream and scream every time, even when I was meticulously careful not to get any suds or water in his eyes. After a few weeks of this battle, I remembered what Patty told us about Playlistening. One night, during his bath, but before washing his hair, I took the special hair-washing cup and (discreetly making sure it was empty first!) held it upside down over my head. I shrieked, pretended to cry, and shook my head back and forth. My son howled with laughter! He kept handing me the cup over and over again with a big smile on his face, and he laughed uproariously as I feigned intense distress. In between mock cup-pourings, I would smile at him to let him know I was okay. Gradually my hair got wet from the traces of water in the cup, and he was fascinated to touch my wet hair and rub the top of my head, which was now quite wet.

Later in the bath, when I washed his hair, he clearly did not enjoy it much, but he sat still and did not actually scream. Over the course of the next week or so, I always preceded washing his hair with play-washing mine, complete with loud shrieks and cries. He continued to laugh with abandon, and touch my wet hair with fascination. Now he has taken control of the cup, and insists on being the one to hold it over my head! It took three or four baths, but now he does not object to his hair being washed. In fact, what was once a torture session for both of us, is now one of his most gleeful games. In the evening when I say, "bath time!" he runs into the bathroom to get the cup, and runs over to me with it, laughing and holding it out to me! --a mother in Pacifica, CA.

PLAYING WITH MY TEENAGE SON

My son is 15 now, and he's much bigger than I am. He used to chase me, and get me down and tickle me. And he just loves that, absolutely loves that. He laughs and laughs. Now, he'll take a stinky shoe or a stinky sock, and chase me around, or pick his toenails and try to gross me out with what he found. Of course, I am VERY grossed out, playfully! My yelping and running gets him laughing and playing hard. This kind of play is really good, because he's so big and strong; it's a way we can have fun without me being too overpowered.--a mother in Berkeley, CA.

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Please send your stories of how you've used the PLI approach to parenting. We'd love to hear about what you've learned, and to share it with other parents.

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NEWS

****We've posted a new article, Helping Young Children Sleep. It's our approach to using listening to solve nighttime sleeping difficulties. Check it out at <http://www.parentleaders.org/Articles/html>**

****PLI is beginning a Leadership Training program in March. We'll offer a parent-child PlayMorning once every 2 months, where parents and other interested grown-ups can sharpen their Playlistening skills, and share some listening time with other adults. In the afternoon, we'll conduct a 4-hour workshop on building the listening, peer-counseling, and parent-child listening skills needed to present the PLI approach to other parents in your family, community, or as a teacher with PLI. You can attend either the play morning, the afternoon workshop, or both. It's a program you can hop in and out of, at a pace that makes sense for you and your family. See our events schedule for time and place, or contact us at info@parentleaders.org with your questions.**

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BOOK NOOK

This month, we're recommending **PLAYFUL PARENTING** by Lawrence J. Cohen, PhD (Ballentine Books, 2001). It's an excellent explanation of how parent-child play can lead to big gains in your child's confidence and competence, and to more enjoyment and satisfaction in parenting for you. Play is a powerful connector of parents and children, says Cohen, and can be used as a problem solver and nurturing force in the family. His examples are great, and there are lots of them. The chapter on empowering girls and connecting with boys clarifies ways to counter the gender role strictures our children are exposed to as they grow. For an excerpt, go to <http://www.playfulparenting.com/excerpt.html>.

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Parents Leadership Institute is a non-profit organization that fosters healthy parent-child relationships that last a lifetime. We give parents simple, concrete tools to build and rebuild a close relationship with their children, and to lead their families well. We promote parent-to-parent support founded on mutual respect, listening, and the desire of parents to love children well.

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