

Here are some of your choices. It's up to you. You can focus on the positive and the absence of problems or you can focus on the problems. Be prepared that what you reap, you sow. Whichever you put your energy into, whatever you model, that's what you will get more of back.

| Child's Behavior | Oppressive Power | Liberative Power |
|---|--|--|
| Says "No" when asked to take out the trash. | Spanking "Why don't you ever do what I say?" "You are never going to amount to anything if you don't learn to do what you are told." | "I don't like No I like Yes." "I'm waiting to see you remove the trash. You're a good kid and I bet pretty soon you will." Waiting until they ask you for something, like dinner, and saying, "I'm still waiting to see you take out the trash." |
| Hits their brother | "Why do you always hit?" Smack 'em "What's the matter with you?" "Go to time-out." "You just lost your privileges." | Assign a small chore. Require them to demonstrate the right way to be mad 5x. "You're on time out from electronics until you've done something to make your brother feel better." Praise them when they use gentle touch. Reward when they face frustration or |
| Tantrums | | |



| | | |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Property Destruction | <p>You have a tantrum back at them.</p> <p>Try to yell louder.</p> <p>Cursing and telling them to shut-up.</p> <p>Restrain them.</p> <p>Spank them, grab them, and haul them to their room or to time-out.</p> <p>“When are you going to learn to control yourself?”</p> <p>“You’re acting like a baby.”</p> <p>Withdrawing and withholding affection.</p> <p>Threaten in an overly emotional way.</p> <p>Taking away all of their toys.</p> | <p>conflict without hitting.</p> <p>Role-play conflict resolution strategies.</p> <p>“Wow! You’re really mad.”</p> <p>“It’s hard not getting what you want.” (Reflect and downshift)</p> <p>“Is it a big problem or a little problem?”</p> <p>Have them do chores to make up for it, putting preferred activities off-limits until repair is made.</p> <p>Put more energy into when this problem does not occur.</p> <p>Teach emotional control.</p> <p>Counseling</p> |
|----------------------|--|--|



| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | |
|--|--|--|

Notice how the liberative strategies tend to take a little more time and effort. They are, however, generally more effective, build relationship, teach skills, and foster positive self-esteem. Notice also how they can help keep emotions in check and prevent escalations and power struggles.

As a parent when my child asks repeatedly, or demands something from me, do I lecture them about why they don't deserve it, or do I help them find ways they can earn what they want? Wash cars, baby sit, mow lawns, do extra chores. And if they refuse, do you then state that's why they never... or do you say, okay, it's up to you. I'm sure if you really want that you will find ways to earn what you need to make it real. In other words, do you empower, or lecture in a critical, negative, gloom doom prophesizing kind of way? You're never going to get a job unless...

Are you empowering or controlling? At some point we expect kids to grow up and think for themselves, right? How will they do this if we make all their choices for them? When you guide and discipline, are you using your energy to make them feel good, or ashamed? Remember that your posture and tone can have more impact than what you actually say.

Here are some things that I've heard adults say to children that I don't like. Not the children, I mean I don't like what the adult is saying. Often these are messages given to a child who struggles anyway, because they have ADHD, Autism, a mood disorder, a learning disability, or whatever.

Why don't you do what I say?
How come you don't follow the rules?
Don't you ever think?
What's wrong with you?

These are affirming, liberating, empowering kinds of statements:

You can decide.
You figured it out!
I trust you to handle it.
I believe in you.

This is hard, though, isn't it? Your fear can really get in the way. Fear they will get hurt, get in trouble, never learn, never get or keep a job, live with you and drive you crazy forever.



Recently my thirteen-year-old asked if he could do Halloween with new friends at his new school whom I have not met yet, in another neighborhood. I told him no. His shoulders slumped a little and he walked away.

Why did I say no? I was afraid. What if he did some of the things I did when I was a teenager? What if he got caught? One of his teachers said he was associating with some kids who could be a bad influence.

A few nights later, I went upstairs to tell him good-night. He was teary-eyed, which is unusual. I asked him what was wrong, and of course he said “Nothing,” and turned away. That’s a sure way to provoke a parents’ worry. I said “Come sit down with me. Jack, I’m your Dad, I love you, and I don’t know if I’m going to be able to go to sleep now wondering what’s wrong. You can talk to me.”

Aaaand I waited. And waited. After about ten minutes, or what seemed like ten minutes, He said, “Well, it just that... just that I don’t get to do things with my friends enough.” Now, at this point, I could have lectured him about all the dangers of teenaged ideas, Halloween dangers, the parental right to dictate and keep him safe and tell him what to do. But I didn’t. I said, “Oh- is this about Halloween, is it really important for you to be with your friends? He nodded his head. “Would it help if I let you go?” “Yes.” I told him that I would trust him to arrange where he was going and let me know, and to use good judgment if his friends were doing something that wasn’t right and could get them in trouble.

Yes, it would have been safer to keep him with me to go trick-or-treating. Which would also be communicating that I know better, and he doesn’t. At some point he’s going to be on his own anyway, and I can’t hold his hand and babysit him 24/7 forever. I’d like him to feel confident in himself, and to think I believe in him, I trust him, I see that he is good and capable of making wise choices. Which lessons with value and impact did you get from what your parents or teachers said, and which one’s did you have to learn for yourself, even if it meant a big screw-up?

Would I really be fostering and maintaining authority with him if I made all the calls and forced upon him my adult will? Somewhere, to be the best parent, I think we have to find that place between ruling with an iron will, and idolizing, entitling, and being overly permissive.

No, he didn’t get run over by a car or picked up by the police. I’ve gotten to know the kids and parents he was with and they are great. Happy ending.

So am I saying the goal is to diminish the power of the parent over the child? Yes. Ideally the relationship will evolve to a place where neither has power *over* the other. They grant one another power.



Who has the right to decide who they are? We all do, right? I hope you didn't let your parents decide who you are. Chances are, if your parents did and maybe still do try to make you be as they would wish, you still harbor resentment and hurt. Maybe you even acted out in excess to demonstrate your individuality and resentment, perhaps taking greater risks or hurting yourself in the process. So our goal in parenting should be to empower and allow our children to explore and become on their own path. We should not try to make them who we think they should be. An extreme, and extremely painful and perhaps controversial example would be the child who grew up to be gay. If their parent would not accept this, what are the consequences? How often do you think a parent is able to influence a child to not have their sexual preferences? Make them straight? Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Think about this. Hopefully you had somebody, even more than one person, who always saw you as essentially capable and good. A teacher, friend, someone else's parent, maybe even, if you were really, really lucky, a parent. What sort of impact has this person had on your life? What if you aspired and succeeded in being this type of mentor for your own child? Did this person always tell you what to do, or did they encourage you that you could decide?

This is often the misguided but conventional Christian view on authoritative parenting. Provide a sturdy framework, dictate right and wrong and they will grow into it as fine and upstanding obedient citizens.

Where does the bible speak to this issue?

"the Father judges no one, but He has given all judgment to the Son, the Child" (John 5:22)

"From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise" (Matthew 21:16)

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:1-5)

"People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them." (Mark 10:13-16)



An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest." (Luke 9:46-47 also Mark 9:35-37)

You need me to keep you safe, I can't trust you, the world is too scary, you won't make it without my direction and following the 'golden path'

So when a child speaks out against their parent, what to do? Is this always bad? Are they never to disagree or "win?"

At the same time, it wouldn't do to give children too much power. When children are allowed to have too much power in the family, the results can be unpleasant. The child who manipulates their family with tantrums and threats is not really ready to or emotionally mature enough to make all the decisions. Allowing them to do so increases their anxiety, resulting in even more angry, entitled, controlling, and abusive behavior. Children do need to know their parents are ultimately in charge and maintaining boundaries and structure to keep them safe- even from themselves!

I also suggest not engaging in arguments with children, as this not only gives them inappropriate power, arguing and debating can create power struggles. They can sidetrack and avoid responsibility and contributing to the family by doing chores this way. Here's a couple of tips for you. Don't act on your desire to justify, explain, and lecture. If they want to eat candy all day, and you say, "No," they say "Why," just say "Because I'm mean." This always got a smile from my kids, and when they were too little to understand the problems with processed sugars in their metabolism, they would cease questions and demands.

When my kids were teens, I learned two valuable one-word tactics for arguing. If I ask them to do something and they start arguing, "But..." and I don't want to argue, I say this: "Hmm." That's right, I just grunt. It's like tennis where they bat the ball back at me and instead of serving back a counter-argument, I simply catch the ball and walk away. Game over.

Another trick is to ask "Are you arguing with me?" Then they may roll their eyes but they usually walk away from the argument. Here's why. Their stuck. If they say "Yes," they have to admit it, if they say "No" they realize that is arguing.



Don't get me wrong, it's okay to tell them why once in a while. Repeating why over and over is just lecturing, and honestly, I don't know why as parents we feel so compelled to do this. Do you see kids learning lessons and changing behaviors from lecturing by parents? Or do they learn from trying things out for themselves and experiencing what happens?

Having said all this I do agree that as children become teens, they should start having more power and influence over rules, and at times planned discussions and compromise are appropriate. You relinquish your power and control gradually, creating opportunities for them to demonstrate safety and responsibility for themselves. You watch to ensure they are keeping themselves safe.

When these experiments are successful, you can let them go a little more. If not, pull them back a little. A family can be a safe place for a teen to experiment with who they are and what they like, where failures are not fatal or final. You don't have to approve of their current costume, but ideally you let them know you approve of them as a person.

Exerpt from *My Power Book* (2017) by Brad Mason.

