



Quality ChildCare

For Registered Home-Based Providers

LEARNING TO GROW ★ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Vol. XII, No. 2

10 Hallmarks of Quality Child Care

- ★ Build trusting relationships
- ★ Provide consistent care
- ★ Support children's health
- ★ Provide a safe environment
- ★ Provide positive guidance
- ★ Provide a language-rich environment
- ★ Foster curiosity and development through play
- ★ Individualize care and learning activities
- ★ Partner with parents
- ★ Pursue personal and professional growth

This Month's Hallmark of Quality Child Care

Provide Positive Guidance

Navigating Power Struggles

Do you have a child who often says “no” to everything? Does it become a back-and-forth battle that erupts into a tantrum? If so, you are experiencing a **power struggle**. A power struggle is a competition for power where both the child and adult are trying to assert their authority or control. All children want and need a sense of power or control, which is normal and developmentally appropriate. In order to understand this need for power, it is important to look at it in the context of social-emotional development. By 18 months, children understand that they are separate from their caregiver and their actions can cause an effect. This emerging self-awareness is a normal part of development, and along with this comes a need for a sense of control.

Experts from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations tell us that there is always a reason behind a child's behavior. They may be feeling insecure, bored or overstimulated, or lack the skills needed to communicate their feelings and needs. Understanding this and remembering that children are not misbehaving on purpose can help to reframe your thoughts, thus helping to diffuse the power struggle. By reframing your thoughts, you can respond in a calm way. On the other hand, yelling or shaming a child will escalate a child's aggression and lead to increased misbehavior.

The key to decreasing power struggles is by first managing our own emotions. Try the following for a positive mindset:

- Remove yourself from the power struggle by saying, “I need a minute to feel calm again. I'm going to take a few deep breaths.”
- Practice reframing statements. For example, instead of, “Kayla is so naughty!” think about the possible reason behind the behavior, e.g., “Kayla is learning how to take turns. She may need some help using her words to ask for a turn.”

This newsletter will share helpful strategies for navigating power struggles through using visual supports, providing two GREAT choices, and diffusing a power struggle with empathy.



Power struggles happen when a child feels that they have no control or power over their lives and that an adult holds all the power. In their eyes, the adult makes the rules, sets the schedule, decides what food to eat, when to wake up, take a bath, or go to sleep. While these rules and structure are important and necessary, the following strategies can help maintain the child's sense of control without compromising important rules and routines:

- Using visual supports
- Providing two GREAT choices
- Diffusing a power struggle with empathy

Visual Supports

Power struggles often happen when rules and limits are not clear. You can help by establishing clear boundaries so the children know exactly what is expected of them. Visual supports are cues that help children understand what will happen in their daily routine, explain how to do something step-by-step, and remind children of important rules. Having visual cues can reduce power struggles, empowering children to become more independent, and support self-regulation. Try creating the following visual supports by gluing simple photos or clip art on a piece of cardstock or manila folder:

- **First/Then board** – helps children understand the sequence of events (see Featured Activity)
- **Rule chart** – Write down 2-3 simple rules of what children CAN do (e.g.,



We go DOWN the slide) along with the corresponding image. Allow children to have input in creating the rules (e.g., What is a good rule during outdoor play that helps keep us safe?).

Provide Two GREAT Choices

If the child needs support in completing a task, state what needs to be done in a firm but loving way. For example, “You need to clean up the toys so we can have snack.” This differs from asking a child to clean up (e.g., “Can you clean up?”), which tells a child that she has the option to refuse. If the child begins to clean up, provide descriptive praise for their actions (e.g., You cleaned up the blocks so quickly!).

What if the child does not comply? Raising your voice may possibly scare the child and escalate the power struggle. Try to remain calm and provide two GREAT choices that allow children autonomy or independence without compromising expectations. This gives the power back to the child, increasing the likelihood of compliance. Here are some ideas for appropriate choices during difficult times of the day:

- Do you want to hop like a bunny to the bathroom or would you like to fly like a bird?
- Do you want to be in charge of putting away the blocks or the cars?
- Do you want to spread out your own blankie for nap or do you want Aunty to help?

Diffuse a Power Struggle with Empathy

Although you might be able to avoid a power struggle by providing two great choices, sometimes a child will dig his heels in and refuse. When children are upset, it often helps them to know that someone understands their feelings. During a power struggle, de-escalate the interaction by calmly saying, “I know cleaning up is hard and you want to keep playing. This is hard for you.” After the child begins to relax and returns to a calmer state, repeat the two choices again.

If the child still doesn’t comply, calmly help him to clean up using empathetic language, “This is hard. You are angry, but it’s time to clean up.” When you provide empathy and understanding, it reduces the power struggle.

Children who often get into power struggles may be feeling stressed and powerless. You can help break this cycle of negativity by creating a safe, consistent, loving environment. Some of the following strategies are effective according to Dr. Becky Bailey:

- Find something that the child can feel successful doing (e.g., sports or art).
- Intentionally interact with each child for at least 5 minutes of focused, uninterrupted play each day to help them feel connected.
- Create a safe place for the child to feel safe and regain a sense of power.



Remember that working with young children is rewarding, but hard work! Forgive yourself when a power struggle occurs and then involve the child by asking the child how you can work together in order to help him be successful. This helps to place the power back into his hands.

Lastly, consider sharing program expectations and some of the strategies outlined in this newsletter with families. By working together, children will receive consistent messages about expectations, thereby reducing challenging behavior.

Citations

Bailey, B. (n.d.). *Preventing Power Struggles*. Conscious Discipline. Retrieved September 11, 2025, from <https://consciousdiscipline.com/free-resources/type/audio-series/>

Preventing Power Struggles: How to Provide the Loving Boundaries Young Children Need to Thrive by Claire Lerner, LICSW | Early Childhood Webinars. (2025). *Earlychildhoodwebinars.com*. <https://earlychildhoodwebinars.com/webinar/preventing-power-struggles-how-to-provide-the-loving-boundaries-young-children-need-to-thrive-by-claire-lerner-licsw>

Training Opportunity

Preventing Power Struggles: How to Provide the Loving Boundaries Young Children Need to Thrive
by Claire Lerner

Register for Early Childhood Investigations Webinars to view this recorded webinar and earn a 1.5-hour certificate of participation. Learn an effective and loving approach to helping preschoolers accept and adapt to rules and limits while avoiding power struggles, both in group settings and in homes.

<https://earlychildhoodwebinars.com/webinar/preventing-power-struggles-how-to-provide-the-loving-boundaries-young-children-need-to-thrive-by-claire-lerner-licswliteracyhero20250715/>

Featured Activity

First Then Board



What you need:

- Cards included in this packet
- Pen
- Adhesive (glue, tape, or Velcro)
- Manila Folder (or cardstock)

What to Do:

1. Think of an activity in which a child has difficulty completing (e.g., cleaning up). Structure the day so that fun activities follow challenging ones. For example, first we clean up, then we go outside.
2. Use the cards included in this packet or create your own based on your activities.
3. Cut out the cards. Optional: Attach cards to thicker paper, or make cards sturdy by covering them with clear tape.
4. Using a manila folder, write "First" on the top, left side. Write "Then" on the top, right side. Use glue, tape, or Velcro to post the challenging activity under "First" and the preferred activity under "Then." This will increase the likelihood that the child will complete the activity on the "first" side.
5. Celebrate! Provide feedback after the child completes the "first" activity and describe what is happening next (e.g., "You cleaned up all the toys. Now we get to go outside!").

Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the Hawai'i State Public Library www.librarieshawaii.org

Infants and Toddlers

Baby Faces

by Margaret Miller

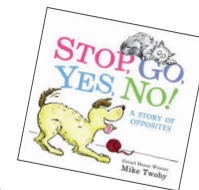
This adorable book of baby expressions is perfect for capturing baby's attention and introduces them to their first book of feelings.



Stop, Go, Yes, No! A Story of Opposites

by Mike Twohy

This funny picture book highlights an enthusiastic dog and a less-enthusiastic cat on an adventurous chase. Teach toddlers new vocabulary and its meaning through this hilarious book of opposites.

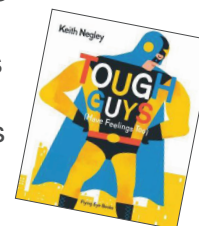


Preschoolers

Tough Guys Have Feelings Too

by Keith Negley

Did you know that superheroes have feelings too? This book teaches keiki that everyone has feelings and that it's okay to show them.



The Little Red Hen: Hawaiian-Style

by Jennifer Morgan

In this local version of the classic tale of the Little Red Hen, friends learn about helping others and showing aloha.



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