

Ep #88: How to Stop the Power Struggle with Your Teenager



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With Your Host
Lisa Smith

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Welcome to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*, a podcast for parents that are tired of yelling, threatening, and punishing their kids. Join mom and master certified parent coach Lisa Smith as she gives you actionable step-by-step strategies that'll help you transform your household from chaos to cooperation. Let's dive in.

Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to today's episode. Today's episode goes out to all you moms and dads of teenagers, all you parents and guardians and grandparents of teenagers, and some 12 year olds who just can't wait to get there.

Now I'm here to tell you right out of the gate, that you are not alone, and much of your teenage parenting woes are normal, and have nothing to do with you or the way you are parenting. Nothing. Most situations involving the parenting of teens are quite simply ripe for conflict. There's a very logical and scientific reason for this.

So let me explain. Anthropologists believe the teenagers are preparing to leave the cave, just as they did in caveman days. To go find their own cave and mate so they can procreate and keep the species going. In caveman days, 12 year olds were considered adults because most cavemen only lived into their 20s. In caveman days, we have very short lives. So part of the whole puberty experience is for our teenagers to prepare to leave our cave and go find their own cave so that the species can procreate.

So one of the many things that happens in puberty is that the brain is hardwired to start caring about the outside world more and more and more and more. Yeah? Listen, this is why friends become important. This is where the fear of missing out, aka FOMO, kicks in. What their friends think of them is far more important than what their mom or dad thinks of them all of a sudden. You feel this? Have you experienced this?

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Most teenagers want to spend all of their time with their friends. If they're not with their friends, they want to be in their room resting to go be with their friends, or making plans on social media to go be with their friends, or making sure they aren't missing out on being with their friends, or talking to their friends through apps or gaming with their friends. You get the idea, right.

Now that there are phones and apps, like Snapchat and Instagram, our kids can literally be with their friends 24/7. A teenager's bedroom is her sanctuary and safe place. It's where she goes when she wants to be alone and have some privacy. When he camps out in his room, he's signaling that he doesn't want to be with you.

Please, please, please, please, please, I beg you do not take this personally. It's absolutely ridiculous the amount of privacy teenagers want. It's ridiculous the amount of time they want to spend in their room. But please, please, please, I beg you do not take this personally. Let me say this again, please do not take this personally. It's ridiculous the amount of privacy teenagers want. It's ridiculous the amount of time they want to spend in the room.

But there's a lot going on for them in that room. They're exploring. They're growing. Their brain is developing. They're trying to figure the world out. They're trying to sort out their feelings. They're trying to figure out their friends. They're trying to understand who they are. They're trying to make sense of the world while their brain and bodies are growing and expanding. There's so much going on for them.

If you don't have a clear understanding of this, if you're not sure, or you're not grounded in what's going on for them biologically and anthropologically, it's so easy as the parent to feel rejected and disrespected. Like you no longer have any control of your teenager. Right? Oh.

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When you get triggered by your teenager, I want you to ask yourself why am I so triggered by this? In many situations, you might find that your answer, if you're totally honest with yourself, is something like because I don't feel in control, because I don't know what to do, because everything feels out of control. I want you to ask yourself why is your teenager triggered by the situation? Again, more times than not the answer will be because he feels like he's not in control.

If you're oblivious to what's going on for him, you can very quickly and easily find yourself in the middle of a power struggle, and one that you're likely losing. Because newsflash, we interrupt this regularly scheduled program to bring you this late breaking news. Teenagers hate to be told what to do, right, especially strong willed teenagers, but most teens hit this point where they do not want to be told what to do.

You're thinking what happened to my baby? What happened? The transition to this stage of development typically catches most of us parents off guard, especially with our first teenager, because it happens literally overnight. Literally. One day, your child may be a tween who's pleasant, compliant, affectionate, and secure in their boundaries with you as a parent and the boundaries that you set for him.

Bam, the very next day, he's on a rampage because you're telling them what to do, just as you did the day before. It's time to get up. It's time to eat. It's time to brush your teeth. It's time to do your homework. It's time to take a shower. Bam, all of a sudden your teenager doesn't want to be told what to do.

It's because teens are desperate to be in control of making their own decisions at this stage in their brain development. As parents, it is so important for us to let them make as many decisions as possible, especially the ones that won't harm them. Now, they're not ready to make every single

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decision because they don't have a fully developed prefrontal cortex. Otherwise, they'd be out living on their own.

So again, let me say this so you can hear it. Teens are desperate to be in control of making their own decisions. As parents, it's important for us to let them make them, especially the ones that won't harm them. I strongly encourage you to find ways to meet in the middle. Negotiation is your best friend through the teen years, and really the best tool you can teach your child as well.

He's in transition. Each transition from newborn to infant, infant to toddler, toddler to little kid, little kid to big kid, etc. is noticeable. The transition to teen at the age of 12, 13, or 14 is typically the most intense and sometimes painful one.

Because teenagers want to pull away, but they have an underdeveloped brain, as I mentioned, and they can't understand their limitations. They want all the autonomy and freedom, but they don't know how to handle it, and they're not quite ready for it. So it can be very confusing for all of us. Sometimes they want to pull away while at the exact same time be close to us. Sometimes it scrambles our brain as parents of teens.

Now let's talk about what you can do to feel better as the parent of a teenager. Number one, when your child indicates he wants to make his own decisions and mistakes in a given situation, help him think it through. First ask him how he sees the situation playing out in his mind. Let him explain it to you. Then you take your turn and explain to him how you see it playing out in your mind. Together, look at where you can compromise and meet in the middle. Even just having the conversation about compromise and how he sees it playing out will help alleviate the power struggle.

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Number two, constantly remind yourself what's going on, and stop taking it personally that your teenager has an innate need to pull away from you, at least for a period of time. This is not about you personally. This is about the teenage brain and how it's hardwired. This is a natural part of the growing and developing process. The more you can do to remind yourself of this and the more you can do to remind yourself to not take it personally, the better the connection is going to be.

Number three, set some guidelines and be very clear about your expectations. This is the time in your parenting to be crystal clear about your expectations. Number four, use what leverage you have. You have leverage. You have something he wants. You have something she wants. Use whatever it is to your advantage. There's no need for argument or debate. Set clear expectations and stay consistent.

Let me give you an example. In our household, my son gets a certain amount of money each week for gas and food and entertainment. I am very, very, very specific about what he needs to do to be awarded this money each week. One of the things is that he needs to be in bed every night, school nights by 10:00. If he meets these expectations, he earns his full allotment for the week. If he fails to meet the expectations, there is a deduction from the amount. We've laid this out ahead of time. He's clear on what the expectations are, and there's very little power struggle over this.

Now, let me be clear, as a strong willed kid, choices are everything to him. So he has a choice in this situation. He has the option to choose not to do what's expected of him, and he has the option to do what is expected of him. My job as the parent is to set the expectation and then be very careful not to take it personally when he chooses not to go to bed at 10:00, or let him trap me into my middle brain. Depending on which choice he makes, he knows what the cost is. So do I. No emotion or power struggle is needed

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because we're very clear about the expectations, and we follow through on them each and every time.

Use whatever leverage you have in the situations in a kind and empathetic, but clear and limit setting way. You want to set limits and guidelines, and handle your negotiations ahead of time while you're both regulated, not in the heat of the moment. In the heat of the moment, you want to make it clear that negotiations will not be accepted, but they can be discussed later, when you're both regulated.

One of the things I promise you that your teenager does not want right now is to be told what to do all the time. So if he says I'll go to bed when I'm tired, you want to say okay let me give you some choices. This is where setting limits in a very clear way can be your best ally during these difficult years. So you might say you don't have to be in bed by 10:00. But if you choose not to be in bed by 10:00, we deduct \$20 from your allowance. It's got to be super cut and dry. You've got to be very clear about your expectations.

Here's another way for us to all look at this. When your kids are little, you have one toolbox of leverage. As they get older, you have a different toolbox of leverage. Just use the leverage you have in an effective way that is peaceful, not dominant. So for example, you can also sit your teenager down and say I can feel change happening right here. What are you thinking and feeling? When I tell you it's time to go to bed, what goes through your mind? Why are you so resistant to it?

He'll probably say something like, "Well, you know, Mom, I'm not a kid anymore, and I don't need you to tell me when to go to bed." Oh, sounds like that really bothers you. Tell me why. Really have an open and honest conversation about it.

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If he says he can't go to bed if he doesn't feel tired, you can say something like okay, I hear you, but you also can't go to bed at midnight and skip out on responsibilities you have in the morning because you're too tired. So how do we meet in the middle here? What should we do? How do you want me to approach you to help you get to bed at a reasonable hour, so that you can get up in the morning, and do your chores, get to school, participate in the family, get to practice on time?

What do you need to do in the evenings at what time to help you unwind, relax, and get sleepy teenager? Around what time do you think you could do that? What do you need me to do to help you be successful in getting to bed by 11:00? Have an open collaborative conversation. Then once decisions are made, hold your teenager to what he committed to do.

So for example, if he says I'm gonna get off gaming at 9:30 and get completely ready for bed, and then watch a little bit of TV while I wind down, he set that limit himself. Then your job is to support and hold him to that limit by making sure that he gets off the gaming, gets ready for bed, and watches a little TV to unwind. You're assisting him in holding himself accountable and finding the discipline to follow through on what he thinks is going to help him get to bed by 11:00.

If it doesn't seem to be working, then you can reengage in another open honest conversation about what to try differently, but only when you're both regulated. You cannot be having these conversations when you're both dysregulated in the heat of the moment. Because what's going to happen is you're going to end up in a power struggle, and that's going to take you further away from connection and cooperation rather than closer to connection and cooperation.

If you don't work on ending the power struggle, the two of you are going to end up power struggling over each and every subject you bring up. So for

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the sake of your relationship, for the sake of the connection, you want to avoid the power struggling as much as possible. Think drop the rope. If your teenager wants to play tug of war to win power and control, you just drop the rope on your end and do not engage. We'll discuss this tomorrow when we're both regulated. Good night. I'll see you in the morning.

Now the last thing I want to tell you, which may be the most important thing I've said in this episode is this. The teenager stage of needing to pull away is temporary. They do and we'll come back around when they get older and start figuring things out for themselves. When the brain develops more, when the prefrontal cortex gets a little more developed, when there's more confidence and understanding about what's going on in the world. This pulling away right now is just a necessary, logically, biological, physiological and natural stage that has absolutely nothing to do with you personally. Nothing. Not one thing. Nothing. So please do not, please, please, please, please do not take this personally.

If you can understand and accept this that this is the stage their brain is in, it will be so much easier for you to hold space for your teenager and build the connection. That connection will draw him or her back to you in time. She will want to spend time with you. She will ask you for your advice and connect with you. But both of you have to get through this stage of development first.

So today's episode is an opportunity to begin to understand brain development. It's an invitation to be patient and loving with your teen and still hold limits for them, but without taking their behavior personally. I want you to remember that even teens are having a hard time not giving you a hard time. Let me say that again. Even teens are having a hard time not giving you a hard time. So please do not take the snark, the pulling away, the wanting to be in their room, the wanting to not be told what to do. Please do not take it personally.

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Oh, so good, right. Okay, so let me ask you, did you love today's episode? Do you love this podcast? I am hearing from so many of you who are finding it inspiring and helpful. If you have your hand raised or you're nodding your head, would you do me a favor? Would you join me in getting the word out to other parents, grandparents, teachers, foster parents, co-parents, anyone influencing, supporting, and raising kids?

How you ask? Well, one of the best ways that I know to get the word out is to screenshot this episode, or your favorite episode, and share this podcast on your social media. If you do that, I'd love for you to tag me so I can follow you and comment. There are so many kids who need their parents and guardians to hear these tips, tools, and coaching. So thank you in advance for paying it forward. I so, so, so appreciate it. So much I can't tell you. Okay, until we meet again, I'm hoping you won't take your teen to attitude personally, and I'm wishing you peaceful parenting.

Thanks for listening to *Real World Peaceful Parenting*. If you want more info on how you can transform your parenting, visit thepeacefulparent.com. See you soon.