

Avoiding Power Struggles

If you work in children's or youth ministry, then you know that students don't always want to cooperate. When this is handled ineffectively, it can lead to a power struggle.

And nobody likes that. Today, we will look at three steps that may help you AVOID POWER STRUGGLES with strong-willed students at church.

Three Steps to Avoiding Power Struggles

1. Find a Place to Agree - A great way to take some of the conflict out of a potential power struggle is to start with where you can agree. When a conflict begins, instead of repeating the command and telling the student why he should agree with you, try finding a place you can agree with him. A great place to start is by acknowledging his feelings. "I know what you are doing is fun. I think so too. But, it's time for the Bible lesson." Then...

2. Help The Student Work Through The Conflict- We suggest trying one of these options, depending on the student and the situation.

- **Option 1 - Give Controlled Choices** - Give the student two choices that are both OK with you, then let him pick what he wants to do. "Would you like to take a fidget to the lesson or leave it on the table?" This gives some control back to the student.
- **Option 2 - Give a Face Saving Way Out** - For some students, once they say no, they mean no way-no how, because backing down would feel embarrassing. To avoid this, instead of repeating the initial request, try giving them a new option. "Maybe you could pass out the Bibles. What do you think?" This allows them to cooperate and save face.
- **Option 3 - Talk it Through and Listen** - Ask the student what might make things better for him. Then listen to what he suggests. If it's a good suggestion, let him do it. If it's not, thank him for his input and let him know you will think about what he said. This helps students feel empowered and respected, which makes staying in a power struggle much harder.

3. Give Them Time - No matter what you do, some students may need time to process things. After speaking with them, you could say, "I'll give you a minute to think. When you are ready to talk, I'll be here." Give them space, but keep an eye on them too.

One More Thing...

Always use warm, open body language and a calm, neutral tone of voice. Work on building relationships.