

Getting What YOU Want in Parenting

by Kim Olver

Have you ever noticed that everything is a battle with your child? If it is, then one of three things is happening. Your child, you or both are in a competitive need cycle. What is a competitive need cycle?

As humans, we are all born with five basic needs that we are genetically programmed to attempt to meet. They are survival, love & belonging, power, freedom and fun. Without getting into the detail of the developmental model described in Nancy Buck's book, Peaceful Parenting, power and freedom combine to make the competitive need cycle.

When people are in a competitive, need cycle they are most strongly driven by the need to gain more power and freedom in their lives. With a parent and child, this is typically represented by the parent refusing to consider to allow their child to do something. The parent is attempting to meet the power need by keeping his or her child safe and the freedom need by extricating him or herself from the worry of wondering about his or her child while the child would be engaged in the forbidden activity.

The child, on the other hand, is attempting to meet the power need by having new experiences and exploring the world and to meet the freedom need by gaining time away from restrictive parental supervision. When a parent and child are both in their competitive need cycle, naturally a power struggle ensues.

I have four examples of situations and possible solutions if you, the parent, are willing to consider focusing on your cooperative needs of love & belonging and fun instead. Why do you, the parent, have to be the one to it differently? Because it is you who are dissatisfied with the situation. Whose behavior can you control? Hopefully, you understand that you cannot control your child's behavior as much as I know you'd like to at times. The only person's behavior you can control is your own.

Since it is you and not your child who is reading this article, I'm talking to you about what you can do to improve the situation.

Staying focused on changing your child will only lead to your frustration and a break down of your relationship. You won't be successful at long-term change in your child. He or she may acquiesce while in your presence but there won't be the required internal motivation to change required for any long-term transformation. So, let's look at what you do have control of---the way you respond to your child's push to meet his or her power and freedom needs.

Rebecca:

The first situation I want to talk about involves ten year-old Rebecca. Rebecca's parents came to me frustrated over the fact they were unsuccessful enforcing Rebecca's bedtime and she would frequently be grumpy because of lack of adequate sleep. They also were

hoping for some down time to spend some quality time with each other without children around.

After, evaluating what was really important, the parents spoke to Rebecca about no longer enforcing her bedtime. They explained that she could go to bed whenever she pleased as long as she was able to get up in the morning, get to school and be relatively pleasant with family members. However, there would be a household quiet time that would begin at 9 PM. At that time, everyone needed to be in his or her own bedrooms engaged in quiet activity.

These parents couldn't wait to tell me how great it worked! Since Rebecca had no parents fighting with her to go to bed, she could no longer meet her power need fighting with them. Consequently, she began to go to bed when she got tired and stopped fighting sleep. Steve and Mary were able to get the quiet couple time they needed so everybody won.

Veronica:

The second situation involves my friend, Denise, and her daughter, Veronica. Veronica is 11 years-old and wanted to have her hair highlighted like all her friends do but Denise was opposed to the idea. While discussing the situation with me, Denise realized that she was concerned about the maintenance costs of highlights and the damage that would be done to her daughter's beautiful hair if she started applying chemicals to it at her early age. Of course, Denise had explained none of this to Veronica.

What she did say was, "No, you are too young to have your hair highlighted. Just because everyone else is doing it doesn't mean you should." Does that sound familiar? What I suggested instead is that she tell Veronica her concerns.

Denise started by saying that she wanted to revisit their conversation about highlights. Denise agreed to Veronica's initial request to be given the highlights as a birthday gift. But then, she asked Veronica what her plan was for upkeep. Denise explained that she would have to have the highlighting process done every two months or so and that it would cost approximately \$60 each time. Denise offered to give Veronica money for helping out doing extra chores around the house.

Since Veronica had agreed to this before and failed in her follow through, Denise asked another question. She said, "Veronica, I know you have agreed to do extra chores in the past and you didn't consistently follow through. If history repeats itself and you don't have the money you need for the highlights, are you prepared for what your hair will look like once the roots grow out?"

She also discussed with Veronica the concern for the health of her hair. She said that starting to put chemicals into one's hair at eleven did not bode well for maintaining healthy looking hair into adulthood.

Denise marveled at what happened next. She said that what had been a heated battle between them for months turned into a non-issue. Veronica decided she no longer wanted highlights in her hair. She realized that she probably wouldn't do the chores to earn the extra money needed and that she didn't want to look "weird" while her hair was growing out. It's amazing what happens when we align ourselves with our opponent's resistance. It's a concept that has been taught in martial arts within the physical realm for centuries but it can easily be applied to the mental realm in parenting just as easily

Carrie:

The third scenario involved a mother's horror when she learned what her eight year-old daughter had done. This mother, Linda, sent her daughter, Carrie, to swim camp. Carrie had been a swimmer for quite some time but this was the first time she was actually exposed to older swimmers at sleepover camp.

She learned from them that a good way to take time off her record is to shave the hair off her entire body. Now what hair could an eight year-old have? It didn't matter---Carrie was determined to shave everywhere except the hair on her head. Linda, in horror, forbid her to do it.

What was Linda concerned about? It was a multitude of things. First of all, her daughter was too young to start shaving. Secondly, she was concerned that if she began shaving, then her hair would grow back very dark and coarse. (Of course, this is an old wife's tale that many of my generation was exposed to.)

Linda was shocked to learn that despite her refusal to allow Carrie to shave, Carrie later secretly went into the bathroom, took a dry razor to her skin, and shaved anyway. Unbelievably, at her next swim meet, she had the best time of her short life to that point. Did shaving help her or was it the power of her belief that the shaving helped? I can't answer that question. However, the point is that what actually happened was worse than the original fears Linda had about Carrie shaving.

Had Linda listened to the desires of her daughter and she was willing to consider the request, she may have spoken to a pediatrician and learned that her second fear was unfounded. Then she might have been able to assist Carrie to shave safely instead of with a dry razor and no supervision at all.

What parents often fail to realize is that just because they tell their child no does not mean that their child will dutifully obey. Often a "no" means that their child will proceed stealthily without parental permission anyway. When this occurs, the child is doing something the parent doesn't approve of and the parent has no idea and therefore, no opportunity to discuss the possible dangers and concerns.

My Children & Their Friends:

I used to see this a lot when my boys were older. They would have friends whose parents

were quite strict and would not give permission for them to attend parties where it was known there would be alcohol and no parental supervision. On the surface, this makes perfect sense. What responsible parent wants their child at a party drinking without any adults to intervene if there is a problem?

However, in refusing their child permission to go, what I often saw was that same child telling their parent that he or she was going to stay overnight at a friend's house. Then that friend would tell his or her parents that he or she was going to stay at the first friend's house. In essence, what resulted was two children out all night, doing God knows what, without any adult having any information about what was happening.

My approach with my children when they would want to go to a party was to discuss the things I was afraid of. If they had an explanation for what they would do to handle the problems about which I was concerned, then I would generally allow them to go. If they couldn't address certain situations, then they would not be permitted to go until there was a reasonable plan in place to address my concerns.

The main thing I was concerned about was drinking and driving. Additionally, what would they do if offered drugs? What would they do if someone showed dangerous signs of having too much? What would they do if violence broke out or things got out of hand? What would they do and what did they expect me to do if the party were raided by police? Over time, we discussed all of these situations so that I was satisfied that my children could handle them if they ever came up.

This resulted in me having peace of mind and generally, enough information about where my children were going to be and what they were going to be doing to satisfy me. It is not an easy way to parent and it sure doesn't guarantee that your children will always make the best decision.

What it does do, however, is it stops making you the person your children have to fight in their attempts to get their needs met. It keeps your relationship with your children strong and influential. It allows you, as the parent, to discuss situations and possibilities you normally wouldn't have the opportunity to discuss. In addition, it helps your children to become better decision makers, problem solvers and to anticipate circumstances before they arise.