

Parenting Without Power (Consultative Parenting)

Whenever human beings are engaged with each other, there is the possibility of disagreement or conflict. That's not surprising and it's not "bad". It is certainly true about human beings living in a family. The key is how it is handled by the parents.

In traditional parenting, parents are ego-invested in being "in control". Sometimes, a parent may find herself saying things should go her way "because I am the parent and you are the child". It is never an effective long-term strategy to remind someone of their weakness relative to you as a means of exerting control. Alternative parents can reframe the goals of parenting and handle conflict in a much different way that is positive for family harmony AND for raising children with healthy self-esteem AND good problem solving skills.

Give Up The Need to "Win": In any human interaction, if we need to "win" or "have it our way" it sets up a situation where we have to prevail to be successful. This is a destructive goal for parents and for family harmony. Treat conflict with children the way you might treat a dispute with a mate over where to go to dinner. You'll have to talk about it, but no one can say "OK, I've heard what you've said but I've made my decision"

Collaborative/Consultative Parenting: Start with the premise that you are not "right" because you have more power, and your children are not "wrong" because they have less power. Add to that a determination that the best conflict resolution is when all parties feel comfortable with the outcome, and maintain a firm commitment to your child being comfortable (even if he wants to just acquiesce). If there's a conflict establish a system where you sit down and talk about – not from a position of being arguing their point but from a position of people stating their needs. So the process might look like this:

Parent: I notice we are having conflict around bedtime and I don't want that, because I love you and don't want either of us to be unhappy. What are your needs around the bedtime issue?

Child: I have a TV show I want to watch at 8:30

Parent: Thanks. I have phone calls I need to make after 8. Can you think of some solution that could meet both of our needs?

Then, LISTEN to your child. He or she may have a better idea to solve the problem than you could have come up with on your own!

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