

SESSION 7

PICK YOUR BATTLES



INTRODUCTION TO THE TOP OF THE PYRAMID

During this session, we will climb to the top of the pyramid. The goals of the methods at the top of the pyramid are to reduce negative attention for what does not work and find better ways to intervene than nagging and yelling.

Picking your battles involves reducing the amount of attention you give to the child for whining and arguing. Your child may perceive negative attention as better than none at all (*the Attention Principle*). That is why it is so important to continue giving positive attention in the form of one-on-one time, praise, and confirmation.

Remember the 5-to-1 rule!



PRAISE SETTING BOUNDARIES
 CONFIRM MAKING DEMANDS
 CONCERN
 PRAISE
 TIME TOGETHER



PICK YOUR BATTLES
 PRAISE
 PREPARATION
 ONE-ON-ONE TIME

Before I begin picking my battles...

- Am I setting aside time for one-on-one time?
- Am I giving clear preparation and instructions?
- Do I praise my child when he/she tries to do something good?

CONFIRM THE CHILD'S FEELINGS

It is difficult to reach a child who is very upset. Confirming the child's feelings often has a calming effect and makes it easier to reach the child. The child learns to understand his/her feelings and to put them into words, and that it is okay, for example, to be mad at his/her little brother even though it is not okay to hit him.

This is what you can do to confirm your child's feelings:

- Summarize what the child wants. Very briefly, summarize what you believe your child wants. Speaking in a calm voice will help calm your child down. Make eye contact and crouch down so you are on your child's level.
- Put your child's feelings into words. Children who scream or throw things might actually be more sad than angry. Put your child's feelings in to words and show that you understand and accept that the child feels as she/he does.

Here are a few examples of how you as a parent can confirm your child's feelings.

"I can understand that you think it's really boring to stop playing and go to bed."

"You really want to go home now because you're bored, aren't you? I can really understand that."

"You get sad and disappointed when you are not allowed to watch more TV. I think it can be hard to stop sometimes, too."



CHECKLIST FOR REFUSING TO FIGHT BATTLES

There are several ways to refuse to fight battles. The common goal of all the ideas below is to reduce the attention given for whining and arguing.

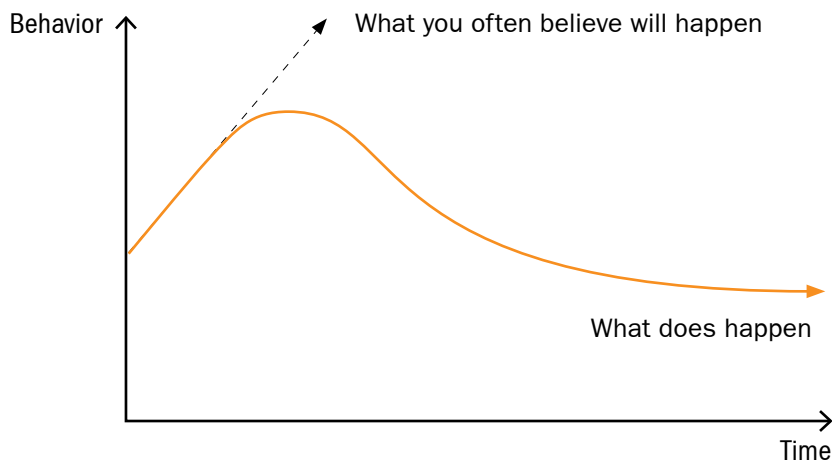
- Prepare the child. Tell the child that in the future, you will not get into discussions in situations that involve a lot of nagging, whining, and arguing.
- Turn down the volume. Remain calm and speak quietly. Otherwise, anything you say may lead to more argument. It is often a good idea to use body language, such as putting your hand on your child's shoulder without saying anything.
- Say no once. Sometimes you have to say no - calmly - so that the child understands what you want.
- Reduce the attention. Reduce the attention you give to your child's whining and arguments. Avoid heated discussions. Once the child stops, you must give him/her attention immediately.
- Distract the child. Distracting the child might involve something like saying "Please come help me set the table, Joshua," when Joshua is teasing his brother. Joshua cannot tease his little brother while he is helping you set the table. This gives you an opportunity to give Joshua positive attention ("Thanks so much for helping me set the table!").



THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU REFUSE TO FIGHT BATTLES

- You should ignore the child's behavior - not the child! When your child has stopped whining or arguing, you have to act quickly and give your child attention again.
- Do not refuse to fight battles in order to punish your child. If you refuse to fight battles, it is important that you do not do so in order to punish your child or make him/her feel guilty. For example, if you demonstratively turn your back on your child with an angry expression on your face or a sarcastic remark, it will all go wrong. You should instead simply withdraw your attention in the most neutral manner possible. If your child gets frustrated because you do not respond or react, you can calmly repeat your "No, you may not."
- You cannot refuse to fight all battles. As a parent, there are certain situations in which you must intervene - if your child becomes violent, for example, destroys things, or is in danger of hurting himself/herself or others. Still, you should intervene with as little attention as possible (turn down the volume!). We will talk more about how you can go about this in session 8.

The endurance curve



When you start refusing to fight battles, your child may actually start to argue more. Children who are used to getting attention or getting their own way by arguing and whining may start trying even harder. In these cases, parents can easily find themselves giving in because they are afraid the problems will just keep getting worse. But if you stand firm about picking your battles and refusing to fight certain battles, your child will learn - and it will get a little bit easier every time.

HOMework - SESSION 7

One-on-one time

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PIP/Snake

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Pick your battles. In these situations, I plan to refuse conflicts or work with confirming my child's feelings.

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BEFORE SESSION 8

One-on-one time

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PIP/Snake

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Battles I refused to fight during the week

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Situations in which I confirmed my child's feelings

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