

Pick Your Battles

Are you feeling exhausted from battles with your child?

How often do you lose battles?

Have you ever wondered if the stance you took with your child was worth the fall out?

As parents we want to nurture our children carefully and comprehensively. It is easy to fall into the practice of battling over everything from hairstyles, food, bed time, manners through to friendships, driving, boyfriends, girlfriends, alcohol, other drugs and curfew times. Sorting the behaviours from those minor but annoying behaviours that will most probably pass causing no harm, to those which fly in the face of the values you are working to instil in your family, can be a very useful exercise. Being sure of the behaviours you wish to modify in your child and putting your energy into them, will lead to fewer moments of confrontation and less battles. Does it really matter if your preschooler wants to wear their pyjamas to school? Does it really matter if your teenager wants to have green hair for part of the holidays?

As your child grows he or she asserts their independence and often a push is necessary to find this new ground. Ignoring things that don't matter morally or put them in physical danger, is one way to sort what matters and what doesn't. If your child is doing something that does not hurt them, others, or affect their moral standing, try not to turn it into a battle. Have a rule for it and a consequence that is matched sensibly to the rule. Allow your child a measure of independence within some limitations that are reasonable for their age and situation. This will be empowering for your child and be balanced by those times when you do need to stand your ground.

In setting rules, you are giving your child guidelines for developing the values you know to be important and at the same time you are setting the ground work for a possible battle. You either hold on to your rule when challenged or you give in and let your child have their way which of course undermines your authority. This may have consequences for your credibility with future issues; so set rules that matter and stick to them. Setting rules together (or you might call them agreements which has a less authoritarian ring to it) with your child is also empowering for him or her and does not undermine you in any way. When shown this kind of respect, you may be surprised how sensibly your child will approach

the formation of these agreements. In fact when working together on the agreements why not come up with the consequences together as well.....more chance of the child "owning" and respecting them.

Here are some useful websites on the topic of choosing your battles:

www.surfnetparents.com

www.andrewfuller.com.au

www.michaelcarr-greg.com.au

www.abcdparenting.org

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