

ACT SOONER & EXPLAIN LESS

EPISODE 16



Key Principles

- Learning to manage yourself
- Encouraging contribution
- Acting sooner; explaining less
- Using logical consequences

MEET... Lee, Trish, and three-year-old Trey. Trey has gotten used to getting her own way. To turn things around, Trish and Lee are working on setting limits and following through consistently, but are finding it challenging to be clear and consistent with Trey.



Learning to manage yourself....

In *Episode 10*, where we met Marina and Karen, we learned that one of children's most fundamental goals is to have influence in their family group. We watched as Marina, an expert at gaining influence by pulling her mother into power struggles, violated all her agreements with her mother and ended up having a tantrum. When a child pulls her parents into power struggles on a regular basis, it indicates that she has not found constructive ways to participate in family life. You'll also remember from *Episode 10*, that the way parents manage themselves when children try to exert influence through power, has a profound affect on the quality of the parent-child relationship. It is difficult to have an enjoyable relationship with a child who ignores reasonable requests, is uncooperative, violates agreements, doesn't respect others' needs, and behaves unreasonably by, for example, throwing tantrums. When power-seeking children are allowed to control their parents and family activities, it also gives them a flawed message about how the world works. A child who behaves this way is in for a rude surprise at school, at friends' homes, or with her widening social contacts as she grows up. It's safe to say that people will not enjoy spending time with her and might label her as a problem child. In this episode, we will look at how you can use effective self-management to avoid promoting misbehavior and to encourage your child to be cooperative and make positive contributions to family life.

Encouraging contribution

If a child's efforts to pull her parents into power struggles are a misguided effort to have influence, it stands to reason that providing a child with more constructive ways to influence the family will reduce power struggles. For example, we saw in *Episode 9* how effectively Esther established this approach with chefs Jonathon and Miranda. Providing well-planned opportunities for children to contribute to routine and special activities helps build a sense of family and encourages constructive, co-

operative behavior. In addition, recognizing and fostering a child's special talents and interests can also provide avenues for them to have a positive influence on family life.

Acting sooner; explaining less

In earlier episodes, we've discussed how parents can inadvertently train their children to ignore them by talking and explaining, rather than by taking action when a child is behaving inappropriately. In *Episode 5*, Stephanie struggled with taking action without giving her daughters long explanations. Then, in *Episode 6*, when she acted swiftly to remove puzzles that were being fought over, we saw how the girls played well with the puzzles the next time Stephanie made them available. In this episode, we see how a young girl has turned ignoring her parents into something close to an "art form." Yet, even with a child who has been able to repeatedly ignore her parents requests, we see how quickly she cooperates when one parent takes decisive action.

Using logical consequences

In *Episode 4*, we watched as Devante made a choice to help with chores rather than lose his allowance to Miguel. When Miguel bypassed Devante and suggested he would complete Devante's chores for the allowance, we saw a flawless example of a logical consequence. Why? First, the consequence was logically tied to the problem situation: allowance is paid for helping with chores. If Devante chose not to do his chores, he would not get the reward. Secondly, Miguel and Juanita used the logical consequence to sidestep an argument or power struggle with Devante. In fact, by not allowing themselves to be pulled into an argument, their message to him was that life goes on and if he doesn't want to participate, it will be his loss. In this way, Devante experienced a result (or logical consequence) from the social environment that his parents arranged to encourage him to make a responsible choice. When parents act rather than talk by putting logical consequences into place, power struggles diminish and children become more cooperative



A CLOSER LOOK...

Applying key principles in this episode

Learning to manage yourself..... *Who's in Charge Here?*

Trey certainly seems to be in charge of how the evening goes at Lee and Trish's house. When it's time to turn off the television, Trey keeps watching. During dinner, Trey smears salad dressing on the table, then crawls under the table to get away. While making cookies, Trey deliberately makes a mess and stirs the batter with her fingers instead of a spoon. While Trey might be in charge, family life is out of control. For Lee and Trish, the evening is one struggle after another. While it would be easy to label Trey as out-of-control, it is more helpful to understand why she behaves as she does. There is a simple answer: Trish and Lee let her. In *Episode 7*, we looked at how mature parents who accept their natural authority can act as valued guides for their children as they struggle to make sense of a large, and often confusing, world. While

Trish and Lee seem to be uncomfortable with their natural authority, they recognize that family life needs to change. By managing themselves more appropriately, Lee and Trish can turn the situation around. Trish's experience with Trey's uncooperative bedroom performance shows how quickly Trey will come around if her parents change their behavior. If Lee and Trish set limits and act on them quickly, Trey will realize she can get more of what she wants by being cooperative. As Lee and Trish take charge of the family life as mature parents should, Trey will also come to respect and appreciate their influence. These changes will open the door to building a more positive relationship.

Encouraging contribution

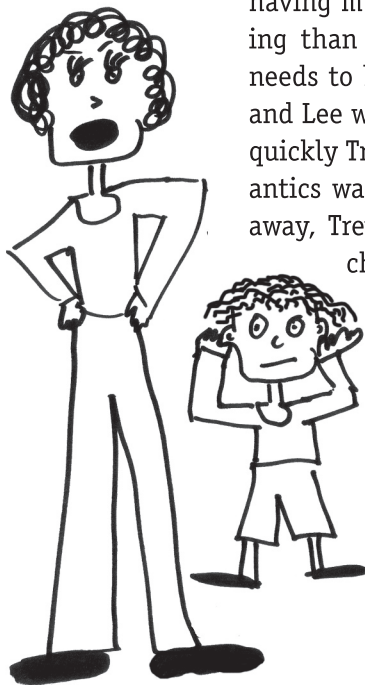
Under the Power Seat, Discouragement Is Hiding

At first glance, Trey looks like a powerful child. She controls how events unfold. By being disrespectful and uncooperative, she intimidates her parents; Lee avoided turning off the TV as agreed because she did not want to have a battle with Trey. Despite appearances, though, Trey is a discouraged child. She clearly wants to be involved in family life, but is confused about her role. As Lee and Trish learn to manage themselves more effectively, they can turn many routine activities, such as dinner preparations, into opportunities for Trey to contribute. They can also encourage Trey's imagination and give her constructive opportunities to be in charge, as they did when the three played Goldilocks and the three bears.

Acting sooner, explaining less

A Whole Lot of Talkin' Going On

Lee and Trish spend a lot of time reminding Trey to do things, and explaining why they need to be done. The result: Trey gets lots of attention for negative behavior, and Trish and Lee are struggling almost continuously to carry out basic activities of family life. Both Lee and Trish have expressed concern that they want to be fair to Trey. Yet, in their efforts to be fair to Trey, the quality of their lives is unfairly affected. And in fact, they are also being unfair to Trey: will it serve her well in other settings to be uncooperative and disrespectful of other people's needs and desires? Trey needs to get a new message about how the world works: being cooperative and having mutual respect for others in your life makes life more enjoyable and rewarding than trying to exercise inappropriate power. This is a message, though, that needs to be communicated without words. More action and less explaining by Trish and Lee will take the wind out of Trey's control-boat sails. We have already seen how quickly Trey changed her behavior when the audience for her uncooperative bedroom antics was removed. When Trish turned off the light in Trey's bedroom and walked away, Trey immediately stopped jumping on the bed and followed Trish. Here is a child who clearly wants her parents' attention. If Trish and Lee use the same approach in other contexts as Trish used in the bedroom, Trey's behavior will change. If Trey wants to be the one to turn off the TV when it is time, she will learn that she needs to do it the first time one of her parents makes the request, otherwise Lee or Trish will turn it off.



If Trey wants to eat dinner, she needs to settle down and eat or her plate will be removed. If Trey wants to make cookies, she needs to be helpful and cooperative or the cookie-making activity will be stopped. Lee and Trish need to be prepared for power struggles and possible tantrums. But, if they are firm, calm and consistent, Trey will come around. Soon, there will be many opportunities in family life for positive, relationship-building activities.



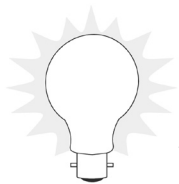
Using logical consequences

“But I Want to Be Nice”

Parents, particularly ones who have not accepted their natural authority, are often concerned about being fair to their children and treating them respectfully. This concern is a good one. Children should be treated fairly and respectfully. In Lee and Trish’s case, this concern has affected their ability to appropriately balance Trey’s need for freedom with the family’s need for order. As a result, Trey has become confused and is pushing the limits in search of boundaries. Now she has more control over the relationship than her experience has prepared her to handle. Lee and Trish can talk with Trey about what the consequences will be if she continues certain behavior. For example, her plate will be removed if she fiddles around or is disruptive at mealtime, the TV will be turned off by Lee or Trish if Trey doesn’t turn it off when she is asked, and fun activities like cookie-making will be put away if Trey is disruptive. These are all very logical consequences for Trey’s lack of cooperation. If Lee and Trish set up reasonable logical consequences and follow through consistently, Trey will realize she will get more attention by being cooperative and participating constructively in family life.

Action Guidelines from This Episode

- Don’t continue an activity when children aren’t cooperating.
- Being nice won’t resolve a power struggle.
- Avoid giving multiple chances.
- Act sooner and explain less.



YOUR TURN

What would you do?

1. Pick one routine or special activity that you would like to go more smoothly with your child. Listen to what you say to your child during the activity. Don’t ask the child to change his behavior. Change yours by setting up a logical consequence with the child and following through swiftly, kindly and firmly when necessary. Tell your child he’ll have another chance later. Note how your child behaves the next few times the activity occurs.
2. Identify one thing your child enjoys doing or is good at. During the week, set up at least three occasions when the child can participate in the activity. Let your child know how great you think he is for having this special skill.