

July 2020

Dear Parents,

We hope you are staying healthy and finding your footing, at least in some ways, in the new world we find ourselves in. We are all navigating new paths, not only in the practical, daily activities we used to take for granted such as grocery shopping, getting a haircut, or holding a birthday party but also in family relationships that are being tested in ways we couldn't have predicted.

Since May 25, when George Floyd was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, many of us in the United States (and elsewhere) have also been confronted with new awareness about the effects of power relations in the outside world. There are increasing demands to shift from “power-over” police enforcement to “power-with” solutions grounded in community relationships. More and more people are seeing that no one's needs can be met while others' needs are still denied.

In our families as well, no one's needs can truly be met while others' needs are denied, and every interaction expresses one of these two kinds of power: power-over, or power-with. At the core of NVC is a question Marshall used to ask:

Do I want to connect, or do I want to be right?

The answer to this question has a lot to do with the direction our relationships take—toward closeness and connection or toward separation, disconnection, and conflict. “Power-over” expressions are most likely to lead to disconnection. “Power-with” expressions will likely lead to connection. And every interaction builds a foundation for the relationships that take place in our home.

The Personal Practice and Family Activity ideas we offer today explore power-with strategies for families. Our desire, as always, is to contribute to ever-increasing connection, stability, ease, and flow among you and your family members.

Personal Practice

Read the two lists on the next page and add a checkmark to the phrases you can hear yourself saying. As the day goes by, listen to yourself talking to family members. What do you say most often? You might even want to write down some of the things you actually say in your own list.

List (A)

- *I want you to do this right now.
If you don't ...*
- *Don't make me ask you again!*
- *No back talk from you!*
- *You should be more respectful.*
- *I know you want to play, but you
have to ...*
- *How many times do I have to tell you?*

List (B)

- *I'd like us to find a solution that works
for everyone.*
- *I feel sad when one of us is left out of
decisions.*
- *I'd like to hear how this sounds to you.*
- *Would you be willing to ...*
- *Please help me understand what you
have in mind.*
- *What are your thoughts about what
I just said?*

These lists come from our book *Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids: 7 Keys to Turn Family Conflict into Co-operation* (pages 21–22). List A contains power-over expressions. List B presents power-with expressions.

Now read your list of the things you often say at home. Ask yourself: How am I using power? How are my family members responding?

At some point, try using or adapting the expressions from list B. Notice how your family responds. What happens when you experiment with sharing more and more decision-making power with the family members who are affected by those decisions?

Family Activity

Family meetings are a power-with strategy for living and growing together. The goal of your first meeting will be to explain the idea. Tell your family members that regular family meetings create a time for these things:

- To share and celebrate accomplishments
- To plan upcoming events
- To find solutions to problems as a group
- To share feelings and needs
- To make requests of one another

Ask everyone to share their thoughts about how to make family meetings safe for them to participate in, fun, and something each person can look forward to. Write down these thoughts. Can you summarize them in four or five key points that could guide interactions during your meetings? For example:

1. Pass a talking stick so everyone gets a chance to talk.
2. Let people talk without interruption.
3. No screens during meetings.
4. Anyone can pass if they don't want to talk.
5. No threats, fault-finding, or punishments during meetings.

A family conversation about how to hold meetings—listening to one another carefully, learning to share feelings and needs, and practicing making requests—is a good first step to power-sharing. Together, you'll all decide where you want to meet, when and how often, how long the meetings will last, whether there will be snacks, and so forth. Keep these meetings relaxed and short (especially in the beginning), and model being open to and appreciative of input whether everyone agrees with it or not. Then watch and listen for how this fault-free meeting “zone” affects your family life.

In future letters we'll share more ideas for family meeting topics that support family trust, harmony, and connectedness.

Warm regards,

— Victoria & Sura

Explore more support materials for your tool chest:

- [*Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids: 7 Keys to Turn Family Conflict Into Co-operation*](#)
- [The No-Fault Zone® Game](#)
- Free downloadable [Feelings & Needs Cards](#) in English and 20 other languages
- Contact us for parent coaching and consultations:
 - Victoria@thenofaultzone.com
 - Sura@thenofaultzone.com