

## Avoiding Conflict: Week 2

Month: Sept.

Week #: 5

Day: d. Thur. Time: 30 min.

# Power Struggles

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### Objectives/Aims

The students will: recognize when they are in a power struggle, identify three possible causes of power struggles, and explore different, non-violent ways to resolve these power struggles.

### Materials

a short length of rope

### Illustration

Why are those guys pulling on the rope? It's almost like they're trying to pull the other person their way... And in the other picture it's like he's trying to make her do something and, well... 'raspberries to that' seems to be her response.



### Background

Power struggles can happen for any number of reasons. They can be caused when people take an uncompromising stance based on their strongly held beliefs and values, hierarchical position and status, different perceptions of the situation, or need for control. Often, their stance is deeply rooted in 'who they are,' so it is accompanied by a fair

amount of emotional intensity. Because of the emotional intensity, these power struggles can elicit feelings of anger, and in their extreme, resentment and violence.

### Group Activity

1. Say, "We are looking at three possible causes of 'power struggles.' Using people puppets, we're going to have a three act play with one act about each cause. After each act, we will discuss the conflict to figure out what caused the power struggle and what could have prevented it.
2. For each act of this play, choose two students to be actors. Give them names, different than their own, of their own choosing. Then, ad-lib each situation, giving the actors the words to say and actions to do by demonstrating through your own facial expressions and physical gestures.

### Three Causes of Power Struggles

#### Act 1: I'm Right & You're Wrong! (i.e. strongly held beliefs and values)

Have the two actors stand opposite each other holding a short length of rope. Assign one actor to be a vegetarian and the other a meat eater. Then, create a back-and-forth dialogue between them with each of them giving reasons for being either the vegetarian or the meat eater. Start the discussion amicably and have it degenerate into an argument. As the discussion becomes more intense, have the actors tug more and more aggressively on the rope. End the act with the students shouting, "I'm right and you're wrong!" and calling each other names.

Possible dialogue:

Vegetarian:

- I eat vegetables.
- Vegetables give me vitamins and fiber.
- I don't have to kill innocent animals for my food!
- we
- You lamb and calf killer!
- You're a meat head!  
(Explain that this means they're brain-dead.)

Meat Eater:

- I eat meat.
- Meat gives me protein for my muscles.
- We humans have canine teeth which means we were made to eat meat!
- You rip vegetables out of the soil and destroy the land!
- You live in a persistent vegetative state!

**Act 1 Group Discussion Questions:**

1. How was this act similar to when we did the lesson on 'Agree to Disagree'?

A: See lesson, 'Agree to Disagree' for possible answers.

2. What did the rope represent?

A: The struggle to be right.

3. How could this power struggle have been avoided?

A: Stay calm.

A: Respect the other person's viewpoint. You might even learn a truth from them. Agree to disagree in an agreeable manner.

A: Say something friendly or funny.

**Act 2: I'm the Boss!** (i.e. hierarchical position and need for control)

Have an older student boss a younger student around.

Possible dialogue:

Bossy Student:

- [In a loud, demanding voice] Get me my lunch box.
- [Puffs up chest to look big] I don't have to, Squirt.
- Get me my lunch box.
- [Looks threatening] Get it or I'll turn you into lunch meat!

Younger Student:

- No. You didn't even say, "please."
- No. Get it yourself. I'm not your slave.
- No. [Goes and stands next to a friend]

**Act 2 Group Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think the older student wanted to boss around the younger student?

A: It helped him feel stronger and more powerful.

2. Why did bossy student call the younger student "Squirt," puff up his chest, and threaten to turn the younger student into lunch meat?

A: To intimidate the younger student by making him feel smaller and weaker.

3. Did the younger student have the right to say "no" and take a stand? Why?

A: Yes, because the older student was not showing the younger student respect.

### Group Discussion Questions (continued)

4. How could this power struggle been avoided?

A: The bossy student could have said “please” in a pleasant voice.

A: The older boy could have gotten his own lunch box and offered to get the younger student’s lunch box for him.

### **Act 3 You Cheated!** (i.e. different perceptions)

Have two students play ‘Heads Up, Seven Up!’ or any other game familiar to the students. One student is the Chooser and the other student has her head down with her thumb up.

Possible dialogue:

Student with head down :

- [Raises head slightly to look at an ant crawling on the carpet]

- I did not. I looked at an ant.

- I didn’t look at you.

- I’m a not a cheater! [Angrily] You’re a liar!

- Fine... Liar, liar, pants on fire!

Chooser:

- You cheated!

- You raised your head and peeked at me!

- You raised your head and that makes you a cheater!

- I’m a liar? Well, you’re a jerk and I’m never going to play with you again!

### **Act 3 Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you think it’s possible that both of the students were right? How could that be?

A: While the one student did raise her head, she did not peek and cheat. On the other hand, the chooser was right when he said that the other student had raised her head, which can have the appearance of cheating.

2. How could this power struggle have been avoided?

A: They could have started over.

A: The student with her head down could have apologized for lifting her head and giving the appearance of cheating.

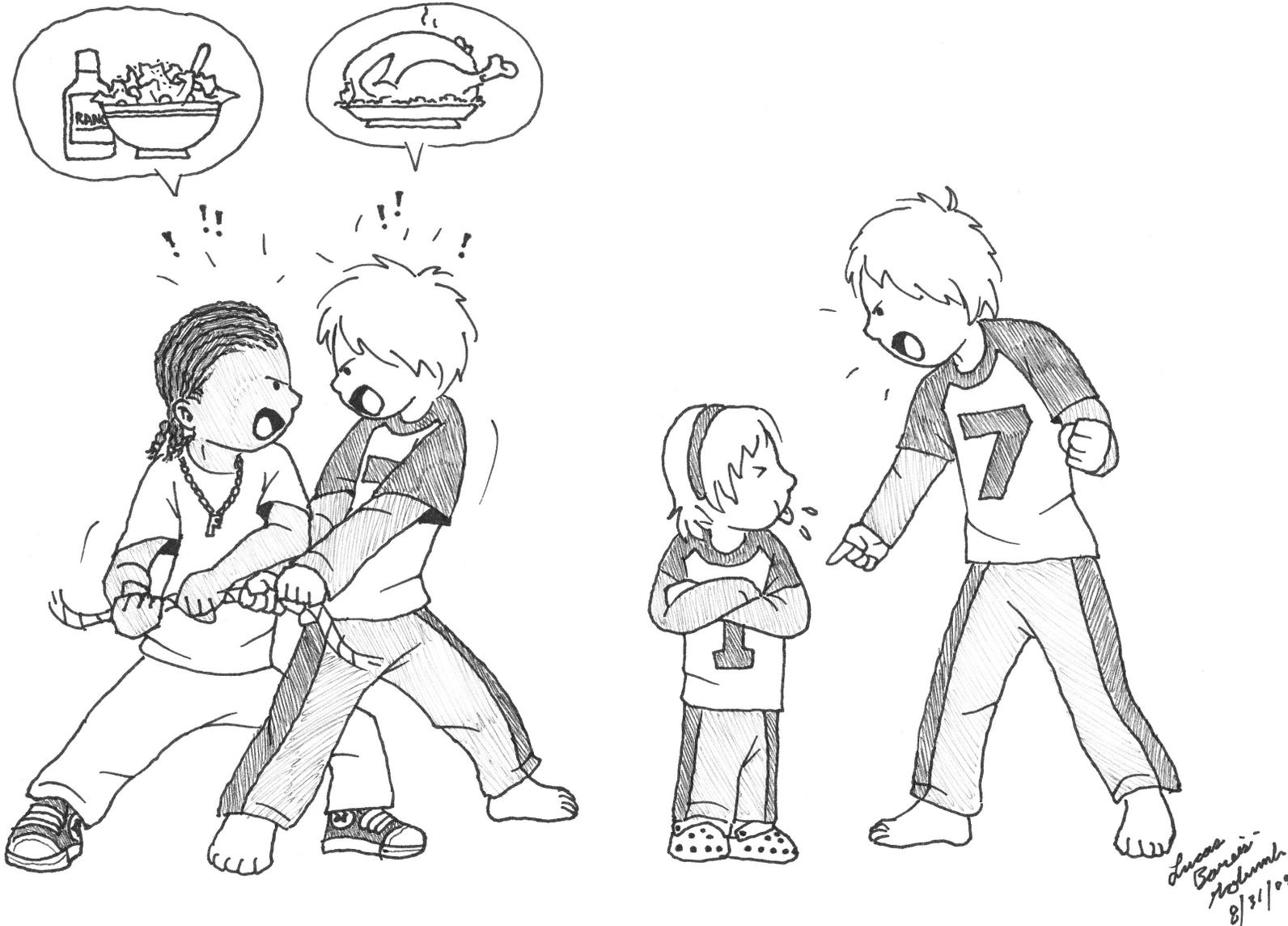
A: The Chooser could have accepted the other student’s ant explanation.

A: They could remember that it’s a game and games are supposed to be fun.

### **Variations/Extensions**

#### **Conclusion**

Say, “Power struggles often lead to conflicts in which nobody wins and everybody loses. Next time, stop and think, and perhaps you can end a conflict before it starts.”



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