

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator



Wielding 'soft power' at home

Your parenting authority works well with easy, compliant children but teenagers and demanding kids require some pretty nifty communication skills if you are going to win their co-operation.

Many people ask me: "How do I get my kids to cooperate with me?" This question reflects a frustration that many parents have with their ability to influence their children. It's also indicative of the changing times in which we live where kids don't necessarily blindly obey their parents, as they did until a few generations ago.

As a parent you have two sorts of power: positional power and soft power.

Positional power is better known as your authority as a parent. Parenting has a huge vocabulary built around 'positional power' with terms such as discipline, punishment, child management and behaviour management to name a few.

When I began as a parenting educator 20 years ago the term 'parenting' was code for behaviour management. It was mostly about helping parents exert their 'positional power'.

The second type of power is **soft power** and is mostly about effective communication. It's about influencing rather than simply exerting your authority over kids. Interestingly, your authority works well with easy, compliant kids but teenagers and demanding kids require some pretty nifty communication skills if you are going to win their cooperation.

Don't get me wrong. It's okay to use your positional power. Kids need to know that someone is in charge. They need parents who feel comfortable in their role.

But relying solely on positional power is hard work. A statement directed at you by a child along these lines: "You can't make me do anything I don't want to do!" is a challenge to your position as parent.

When positional power fails, which it inevitably will, you can only rely on soft power to influence your kids. Here's the rub: there is nothing soft about it because it carries significant weight when all else fails!



Here are five ideas to make you less reliant on using **positional power** and help build your **soft power** skills:

- 1. Get** your head around the fact that discipline (there's that positional power thing again) is not about winning and losing, but about teaching kids how to behave and be responsible for their behaviour. The key to successful discipline with adolescents is to speak to them in ways that don't threaten their need to feel like they are in control.
- 2. Choose** a role model who wields soft power well and start to copy their way of speaking and acting with kids.
- 3. Talk** about the difference between positional power and soft power with your partner or a friend to help you clarify the differences, as well as find an ally to support you.
- 4. Make** soft power your priority for a week and see how it feels to influence rather than brow beat; to mediate rather than negotiate; to use consequences rather than yell when kids don't cooperate with your way of thinking.
- 5. Practice** one skill at a time. Read books, blogs and other resources to help you understand more about soft power, then gradually practice and experiment with new ways of communicating with kids.

Next time you speak to your kids in a potentially tricky or challenging situation check to see if you are using positional power to win the situation or soft power to win the kids over to your way of thinking.

Hopefully, it's soft power that you are using to win the day!

Great ways to develop your soft power skills with Michael Grose:

- 1. Subscribe to Happy Kids** – Michael's free weekly email guide.
- 2. Download our free Parentingideas Skills Guide:** 10 BEST tips to get cooperation from kids without tears, fears or putdowns.

These great resources are waiting for you at Parentingideas.com.au/Parentingideas-Newsletter