

Power Reversal Games



Power reversal games are activities in which the child is capable and in charge, and the parent often pretends to be inept, clumsy, weak, and/or powerless. These games are helpful for children to work out their feelings about having less power than adults—something they experience daily. Opportunities to be the boss are fun for children, and almost always cause lots of giggles, an indication that children are healing from the stress of feeling powerless. These games also promote a close connection between parents and children. Many of the games described below are drawn from ideas presented in the book *Playful Parenting* by Lawrence J. Cohen, Ph.D., a wonderful resource for parents.

For Young Children

Push Mommy/Daddy Over

This is a great activity for young children. Get on your knees and pretend to be really, really strong, saying “nobody will ever be able to push ME over!” Then let your child push you over, and make a big deal about how strong she is. Adjust how hard or easy it is to push you over based on your child’s age, strength, and temperament.

Chase Me

This is a great activity for young children. Run around and have your child try to catch you and tackle you to the ground. You can use the tackle as an opportunity to be physically close to your child by hugging or kissing him while you’re on the ground. Adjust how hard or easy it is to catch you based on your child’s age, strength, and temperament.

Couch/Bed Game

Be the “guard” for the couch or bed (or some other soft surface), and have your child attempt to get past you to the couch. Have her use her physical strength to get past you so that she’s building an image of herself as a strong person. Adjust how hard or easy it is to get past you based on your child’s age, strength, and temperament, but encourage her to try hard, using her physical strength to succeed. If your child does not want to use her physical strength, an alternative is to have her think up new and creative tricks for getting around you (such as distracting you, going between your legs, or even hypnotizing you). Make a big deal when she does get past you, going on about how clever/strong she is.

Swing Game

On a soft surface (grass is preferred), have your child swing while trying to knock you down with his bare feet. Make a big deal about how there’s no way he can knock you over, but then purposely run into his foot, fall over, and make a big show of being surprised that he got you. You can then stand up and announce that you’re going to get some power so you’re stronger. Then go over to a tree or a trash can or something, making a big show of getting more power. Announce that NOW there’s no way you will be knocked over. Then, when you DO get knocked over, complain about how it must have been false power and ask your child where you can get real power like he has. This should produce lots of giggling.

Feed Me, Baby

This is a good one for babies and toddlers. Allow your child to feed you, and act like a baby while she does it. You might want to use food items such as apples, bread, or cheese to minimize the mess.

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For All Ages

T-Shirt Fight!

This is a good game for kids of all ages. Gather up some of your kid's T-shirts (or something else that's soft like several pairs of balled-up socks, stuffed animals, or a super squishy ball) and start throwing them at each other. Make a big show of falling over when you get hit, acting as goofy as you can in order to get lots of giggles. Children usually enjoy being tagged by you, too! As always, adjust how hard or easy you play based on your child's age, strength, and temperament.

Push Me

This is a good one for older children. You and your child stand face to face in the middle of a room. Both of you put your hands out in front of you and grab each other's hands, then try to push each other across the room. Allow your child to push you across the room and against the wall. As always, adjust how hard or easy it is for them to push you based on your child's age, strength, and temperament.

Follow the Leader

Do everything that your child wants to do, even if it is uncomfortable (crawling on your knees all over the house), unpleasant (pretending to eat worms), or nerve-racking (making loud screaming noises). Your child wants to find out if you really will follow his lead! Of course, if something is truly unsafe you will need to make a suggestion about doing something else, but you'd be surprised how infrequently that will happen. This game can also be played with older children in a less literal way but asking them what they'd like to do and doing it with them (i.e. going to the mall, listening to their iPod, or watching a movie together).

Sit, Mommy!

Pretend that you are a dog and your child is the dog owner. Do everything your child tells you to do. You might want to invest in some knee pads for this one!

Wrestling

Wrestle with your child, having her attempt to pin you down or end up on top of you. When wrestling, it's important to have a connection with your child through eye contact, cuddle breaks, hugging, smiling at each other, and giggling together. Let your child take the lead on how hard to wrestle, and what the goal of the wrestling is. Your wrestling style will develop naturally as you do this more with your child.

Pillow Fight

When pillow fighting, follow your child's lead, and hit only as hard as it takes to get a lot of giggles. Make a big show of it when you fall over after your child hits you, and, as always, adjust how hard or soft you hit based on your child's age, strength, and temperament.

No Giggling!

Make up a silly rule such as "no giggling," "no smiling," or "no blinking," and then make a big pretend fuss about it when they break the rule. This allows them to make light of an area in their lives that is very challenging, and will actually help them to more easily follow the rules later.