

Changing the Tactics

Children caught up in their own struggles for power frequently engage in behaviors, or tactics, to shift the focus from themselves, get their way through deceit or try to remove themselves from taking responsibility entirely. When they use these tactics they gain a sense of power and often the goal is to engage the adult who is confronting the behavior on an emotional level. In working with resistive and non-compliant youth one thing I have learned is that once you start “doing the dance”, you lose! Even if you win the argument, you lose the war because the “dance” itself, while unpleasant for the adult, is extremely fun for the young person. Provoking you to anger means they win, and our goal is not to win but to encourage change.

Some of the common tactics are:

- Attempting to confuse
- Pointing out others' faults
- Making a big scene over minor issues
- Accusing others of misunderstanding
- Arguing over “words” to avoid the real issue
- Introducing irrelevant material
- Being deliberately vague
- Telling others what they want to hear
- Omitting facts
- Saying “yes” without meaning it
- Not paying attention
- Minimizing behavior
- Refusing to communicate-silence

The use of tactics is based on a self-serving attitude. For open communication to occur and change to take place it is imperative that as an adult you are able to intervene and stop the use of tactics. To do this requires that you be non-emotional and respectful and that you follow these guidelines:

- Establish group rules, set the tone and limits and specify acceptable behavior
- Provide corrective choices and require them to choose one or the other
- Clarify and reinforce their responsibility
- Stay on task. Avoid reacting and avoid taking their behavior personally. *Emotional reactions encourage tactics.*
- Focus on what they are thinking, not on the specific behavior
- Keep a calm, neutral, “matter of fact” stance
- Avoid power struggles (threatening, provoking, intimidating, arguing)
- Maintain consistency