

# A Handy Guide to Parenting

One hand is the parent. The other is the child. It's an easy way to understand the dynamic that is at the heart of raising another human being.



## Child in Charge

While we may think our children are enjoying their sweet reign, the truth is nothing makes a child more anxious than knowing they're dealing with a desperate parent. And that's what our children get when we resort to bribing or threats—a role best characterized as “The Tyrant.” In that dynamic, we are desperate for a quick fix to make *them* feel better, so that *we'll* feel better. Bribes and threats only prompt our kids to test the limits—because they know the parent is the one who's supposed to be in charge. By staying present with our kids—conveying our affection, appreciating them—parents come across as loving allies as opposed to people always poised to criticize and make demands.

Adapted from Susan Stiffelman's Parenting Without Power Struggles: Raising Joyful Resilient Kids While Staying Cool, Calm, and Connected.



## No One in Charge

When no one is taking the lead, we have “The Two Lawyers” arguing and attempting to persuade or hold out until the other person is exhausted. From the parent's perspective, it may be a thought or reaction that triggers us, and we start building up a case, looking for evidence that justifies our strong reaction: “The kids should come the first time when I call them for dinner.” “My daughter shouldn't whine.” We are not in charge because our ability to keep our cool is no longer independent from our child's behavior—or misbehavior. We latch on to particular thoughts that cause us to lose that calm feeling of being in charge, and simultaneously provoke their defensiveness and resistance.



This is the one we're all aiming for

## Parent in Charge

Many parents want their children to see them as their friends, but a quiet and comforting authority is what our children need most. Frustrated children don't need someone catering to their every demand, or explaining why they can't always get what they want. As “Captain of the Ship,” we don't come at our kids with logic and ultimatums when they're upset. Hand on top doesn't mean being a dictator, though. It usually means coming *alongside* them, focusing on making them feel heard or understood. When we give our children the feeling of being on their side, they can be more receptive to suggestions and support. They can learn to feel their disappointment when they can't do or have something and make peace with it instead of being stuck in aggression. In that way, the captain creates a safe space for big emotions to pass through.