

# BALANCING POWER

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Traditional values are often said to insist that husbands have authority over wives in their household. This is



sometimes even put forward as the solution to family conflict. Feminism, in this school of thought, is often blamed for causing friction at home by encouraging women to contest male authority.

These are not ecologically valid arguments.

The truth is that traditional values saw women as the chief authority in their home and of children in their care—excluding boys over the age of twelve. Men on the other hand generally had authority in the den/yard/garage/workplace and of male children over the age of twelve.

Power struggles have arisen primarily from societal changes that have caused the need for women and men to share authority in many of these areas.

In this chapter we will work through a number of exercises that will improve decision making and increase productivity in your home while also nurturing harmony and rapport in your marriage by helping your family to balance power.



**Power does not mean using anger to push people around.**

**Using anger to get your way is a sign of weakness, not of strength.**



*George had a short fuse with Kelly. He would get into a rage about trivial things and sometimes not let up for days. His embarrassment about this and his refusal to look at it made him exaggerate what Kelly had done to try to 'prove' it was her actions that had caused his rage. Kelly decided first to call his brother. She asked if George had always been so proud and angry. Kelly told him that she was concerned about George and made sure she did not complain about him or ask his brother to take sides. She discovered his last girlfriend had left him for this same reason! Kelly then followed through with the exercises in our workbook exercise manual and George finally admitted that he did have an anger problem. Kelly's actions caused him to stop seeing her as a 'soft target' and to think twice before letting his anger get the better of him. The surprise for Kelly was how much George loved her for standing up to him. He knows now that she will not allow him to let his anger get so out of control that she might end up leaving him because of it.*



Despite the number of movies we have all seen where peace is restored when ‘the hero’ vanquishes all rivals, awarding authority to one person in any organisation of people is not a lasting means to end conflict.

If one party has more power, they will usually not take the time to talk plans through to reach mutually acceptable agreements. Power must be balanced in a marriage for a peaceful and productive home life. Quality decisions can only be made by consensus.



Even more alarming is that a power imbalance is likely to cause the whole system to break down. In a family system breakdown equals separation, divorce, mental illness, murder, suicide and/or destitution.

Righting a power imbalance will, likewise, solve a whole host of problems. Once everyone in the group must agree before funds can be released for major purchases, for instance, the person who used to control the finances will usually have more reason to take the time to talk things through, causing the family to come to much higher quality (and enduring) agreements.

## **Agreements**

Quality agreements help groups prosper and avoid conflicts. They take time, however, and without 100% consensus will end up breaking down later. In this chapter you will be introduced to our decision making process (DMP) which we hope your family might consider adopting.

## **The DMP Process**

To balance power you will benefit from adopting our decision-making process (DMP). *You can use this process to fine-tune your family's operations manual, including roles, responsibilities, rewards, procedures, and your family's facility layout.*

The DMP should also be used in situations where agreements need to be made that lie outside the authority of family members roles or portfolios.

Other decisions that should require a DMP include:

- a. Holiday or vacation plans.
- b. Life path decisions about each other's work and career and how these decisions influence everyone.
- c. Renting or buying a new house and/or moving.
- d. Big purchases.
- e. Budgeting and how money is shared.
- f. Problems one member may have with how another is handling their portfolio.
- g. Accountability.
- h. Coordinating schedules and plans for free time.

You will find instructions for setting up your family's operation handbook (FOH) and running DMP's in Part 2. the exercise manual.

## **Roles & Responsibilities**

Taking the time to first agree on basic roles and responsibilities, will save considerable time making day to day decisions.

To get organised, couples must first decide who will have authority over each area of family life, and who should report to whom for all chores and tasks.

## **Why Setting Up a Family Operational Structure is Important**

Let's take a little time out to explain why putting all of this in place is so important...

Everything is good as long as everyone agrees, but when couple's disagree, what happens then?

Avoiding fights usually has more to do with improving a family's organisational structure than it does about good and bad people.

If you were running a retail shop and didn't have a solid organisational structure in place, it wouldn't be long until your merchandise started to disappear and money go missing from the cash register—or bank account. You might blame your staff, but with no roles and responsibilities (or portfolios) in place, staff would probably feel entitled to make their own rules.

In a family, just the same as in a business, disorganisation almost inevitably leads to corruption.

Corruption in a family equals some members commanding more of the families shared resources (and less of the unpaid work) than other members. This includes money, food and material goods but also time, love and attention.

This type of corruption breeds hostility, resentment and conflict. Negotiations are not run on a meaningful process but run instead on emotional intimidation and manipulation, with weaker family members needs regularly being neglected.

Setting up your family organisational structure to balance power and avoid corruption (share rewards) will be a challenge, but not nearly as tough as allowing a corrupt system of decision making to drag your life in circles.

## **Learning to Negotiate Fairly**

Using anger, put downs, humiliation, threats or other emotional manipulation (guilt tripping, crazy making etc.) to get your way in a negotiation is one form of abusing power. Another is insulting or humiliating another person to make yourself feel better, when you know that you have failed in your role or done something you really shouldn't have.

Abuse of power often amounts to exploitation, like when a person expects more than their share or outright steals from another person. Other times it occurs when two people are vying for status or position. Power struggles like this often arise between siblings as they do between husbands and wives. Likewise, teenagers in unstructured homes often end up in power struggles with their parents.

Undisciplined younger children will often use screaming, violence and tantrums as means to dominate decision making in an unstructured home.

Dividing parents against each other is a tactic older children will often use to dominate decision making.

There is something attractive about being a 'no nonsense' person who can stand up for themselves in these situations—even if you are a woman.

If you are dealing with a family member who is abusing power, please work through the exercises towards the end of the balancing power section in Part 2 of the exercise manual and let's find out how no nonsense you really are!

Learning to put a stop to bad behavior, while staying reasonably calm, is one of the fastest ways to earn a persons' respect.

Do you remember the teacher at school who everyone liked and whose class was always well behaved? I bet that teacher put badly behaved kids in their place without a moments thought or hesitation.

Knowing that family members are behaving this way as a poor means of negotiation is a start. Following are the basics of how to stand up for yourself if other members of your family are abusing power

## Kindness Rules

When asked what qualities men and women find most attractive in a partner, both sexes choose kindness as number 1. Kindness, however, can be hard to display if you are cynical and/or nursing emotional wounds or someone in your family is abusing power.

You are not being kind by allowing people to insult or exploit you. The truth is standing up for yourself will help, not only yourself, but may help the power abuser as well.

The most precious commodity on this planet right now must be innocence. Innocence listens and innocence cares and innocence is highly attractive. Life can be tough, however, and most of us will have our innocence robbed from us when we are still quite young.

Unfortunately a person with their hopes and dreams still intact will often become the target of those who have given up on life and become bitter. Cynical people may even pretend they are doing an innocent person a favor to 'toughen them up' by crushing their dreams.

For this reason it is important not to share your hopes and dreams with everyone. It is also important to set real boundaries (including limits) and then forgive. Protecting yourself and then forgiving will help bring innocence back to your life experience.

## Building Your Repertoire

This is not a repertoire of songs, instead it is your own collection of ideas of how to effectively handle disrespect. This exercise is about you collecting real life ideas for situations you regularly encounter and practicing them until they come easily and naturally.

Can you remembering situations where you were hurt or left feeling embarrassed in the past—without the words or actions to defend yourself? It is important you remember these situations and work on scripts to be better prepared next time.

Thinking you will magically know how to handle the same situation better in future simply won't work. Practicing new scripts ahead of time is the only way you will stop these situations arising.

Whether it is a British "Good Day Sir!" an Australian "Fair Go Mate," a Hollywood "Make my day" or perhaps these more common and useful lines: "I won't give you a hard time if you don't give me one," "I do not wish to discuss this, as I really don't see this conversation going anywhere", "I don't know how to deal with you when you are like this so I am going out for a while", or another favorite of mine; "I am cheap but not free and my prices are going up so you better ask for what you want respectfully,". learning your own style of showing displeasure while keeping your cool—while also showing you mean business, is essential if you wish to be respected and effective.

You will learn this easiest by watching examples. Clint Eastwood, Jimmy Stewart ("Now look here!") or perhaps that formidable (and sexy) librarian looking over her glasses when someone is making too much noise in the library. Supernanny is simply the best at this. Her ideas work brilliantly for kids but also with adults. I wish I could call Supernanny in to help with some adults we see behaving badly towards their families. It is the immature part of an adult which usually acts up, so even if you can't put your partner in 'the naughty corner', you will see the kind of resolve you are going to need to end tantrums with children and adults alike.

Watch Supernanny's TV shows (you can get them on DVD) and think of some other good role models you like too.

## Get Hold of That Fear!

Most parents are scared of the anger their children (or partner) will direct at them when they first attempt to limit other family members abuse of power. *Many feel they will lose their family's love if they do not give in to all of their wishes.* This fear is understandable, but one that you must get a grip on!

Watching Supernanny will not only show you the resolve you will need, it will also show you how much happier kids are once their abuse of power in their home has been limited and they discover the adults are now confident in holding firm in their roles of authority.

Adults will also become happier once when their partner learns to effectively stand up to what can amount to adult tantrums.

I like to advise people to start seeing the bad behavior in their partner as the child in them playing up. This can really help get the situation in perspective. Are you going to let the 8-year-old in your partner get the better of the adult in you?

If you didn't learn to stand up for yourself as a child you were probably pushed around, worked too hard to please people and became emotionally manipulative. Don't worry, it is never too late to learn the vital self defense skills we are teaching here! Collect your favorites, write them down in your workbook exercise manual notes and then practice them!

*Are you going to let the 8-year-old in your partner get the better of the adult in you?"*

This repertoire is not about responding to violence - you should employ these skills early, when someone first offends your better judgement. The sooner you learn to respond, with as few words as possible (and the right body language) as well as having back-up on hand (more on that in a moment), the less likely it is that you will be involved in arguments, let alone violence.

Having a good repertoire is about protecting your innocence. Having good comeback lines to deal with people who push your boundaries will protect you from becoming resentful and bitter.

We can't always be as stylish as the movies, so try to take your examples from what you think will work in real life. If you are dealing with a child you need no better examples than Supernanny's numerous and entertaining programs. If, instead, you are dealing with an unpleasant and immature adult, I will offer a script here that you can adapt to your circumstances.

### **An Example of Dealing with an Adult Tantrum;**

**Adult Brat:** "As if I can agree on a budget with you! You are the one who spends too much money. Like all that dough you wasted printing stuff for your business, as if that is going to see a return!"—Adult brat is making this fight because he has blown all their money on something he is ashamed of that he doesn't want to own up to. He is attempting to gaslight his wife by provoking her, so he can then blame the fight—and him blowing the money—on her being mad at him.

**Wife:** "I feel intimidated when you talk like this. I agree we need to work out our priorities for spending, please let's try to work this out together."

**Adult Brat:** "As if you're intimidated by me... you're the one who's always pushing people around!"

**Wife:** "I feel intimidated and also hurt when you talk this way.

How about we leave it for a half hour? I know I need to calm down. We can come back to it when you are ready to talk to me without being so aggressive." Gets up to walk away.

**Adult Brat:** "Yeah and why don't you just tell the truth about what you are so angry about, you stupid -----".

**Wife:** "I don't know how to handle you when you are like this and it scares me. I spoke to Sergeant Johns at the local police department yesterday and he said that I should report it when you try to intimidate me like this, every time I try and talk to you about money. If you can't be honest and fair about sorting out our finances, after we have both calmed down for a while, I am going to have to call him to come and talk to you and maybe get an accountant in to get our finances separated



I used to kid myself I was tough and no-nonsense, when really I was a complete pushover! This was partly because I had the idea that 'telling' on someone made you a bad person. Being a 'tattle tale' was something I was afraid of.

Once you get better at these skills, you won't need to 'tell' very often, but until you learn to diffuse hostility there are times you may need to call in outside help.

and better organized. What you are doing now isn't right. I don't want to involve other people in our private affairs but I don't know how to handle your intimidation and so if it doesn't stop you leave me no choice."

"I am cool calm and collected. I feel good about myself and I am supported by people in positions of authority where I live. I am calm and polite and can ask others for support and get it. I tackle anti-social and abusive behavior with action. I do NOT protect my loved ones from the results of their bad behavior."

### **Adult Brat: "YOU WHAT?!"**

Adult Brat does not stop, and his wife calls or visits the police immediately and tells the officer on duty about her conversation with Sergeant Johns and requests that someone explain to Adult Brat what the consequences will be if he continues intimidating her when she tries to discuss their shared finances. She also goes to the bank and separates their bank accounts and asks for printed statements. In time, it comes out that the fights have been about credit cards Adult Brat has been hiding.

As scared as Adult Brat is of his wife finding out about the hidden credit cards, by the time it comes out, he is actually relieved that his terrible secret is finally in the open and that she has been smart enough to figure out what he didn't have the nerve to tell her.

If you are living with someone who is physically intimidating, it WILL most likely be necessary that you make 'a friend at the local police station'. There is much more on this in [Back from the Looking Glass—www.kimandstevesbookshop.com](http://www.kimandstevesbookshop.com). Please get this advice first if you feel you need to bring the police in to talk to a family member. You will probably need to have the type of conversation outlined above more than once, but not usually more than three times. Do not wait until your partner has raised their voice to begin this conversation—start as soon as they speak to you with contempt or in any way that is intimidating.

This is very different than if you just don't like what is being said! If your partner says, "I am sorry to tell you that I have been having doubts about our relationship and have been contemplating divorce", and you treat this as an abuse of power, you will just look foolish! In this case you need to stay as calm as you can and discuss your feelings as honestly as you can taking advice from our conflict resolution process. This kind of conversation, if handled with an open heart (even if it feels like your heart is bleeding) and with honesty and no attempt to manipulate your partner, can actually be a beginning rather than an ending. When someone trusts you enough to share their doubts openly and you share yours, at least there is some place honest to start from. If they really had no feelings for you, they probably would not be talking to you in this way. Don't try and argue or convince them otherwise. The best thing might be to say "I understand and you are probably right but I am still sorry that you feel that way." By showing your openness to listen and not putting up resistance it will be more likely that their feelings will change.

Back to limiting abuse; good examples of how to effectively voice disapproval are endless but they do all have these things in common;

### **Rules for Showing Disapproval**

- a. Use body language as much as words, and if possible show your disapproval with body language only. Sexy older women are great at this, wilting guys who make stupid, rude or ill-timed comments with one glance.
- b. When using words, keep your tone of voice low. "Make my day" would have no impact if said by a chipmunk.
- c. If you know that a confrontation is likely, have adequate back-up planned so that you do not lose your cool. Losing your cool never helps in limiting abusive behavior. Give one warning of what will happen if the situation escalates and then act.

d. Never use the threat of abandoning the relationship to limit abuse, instead give one warning of *what you will do* and then act. Likewise do not use ultimatums or threats as they will only damage your relationship and escalate the aggression. Ultimatums will make you look weak and be likely to come back and haunt you. For instance, if you say, “If you don’t apologize to me I will never speak to you again!” you will just challenge your partner to show up your weakness. Again, leave decisions and discussions of separation and divorce completely out of the process of limiting abuse.

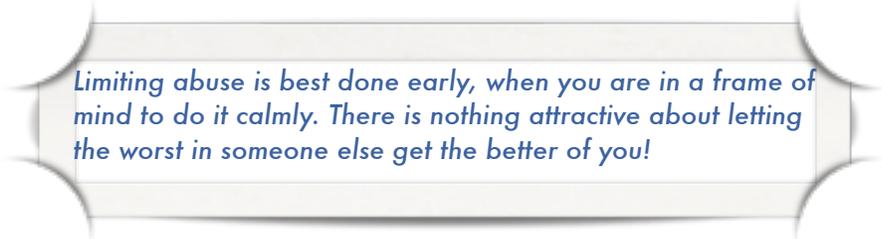
e. Have your statement planned in advance and act on it immediately if the abusive or insulting behavior continues.

E.g. “I hope I am not going to need to talk to John Green (your local Pastor) about your pornography addiction. I am really concerned about you and wish you could see that what you are doing is not healthy for any of us.”

This is a warning of what is to come if they do not take responsibility and become accountable for their behavior. It is a fair call at addressing a problem and shows concern for their well being not just your own. They may be terrified by the prospect of what you are suggesting, but there is still safe ground to explore.

“I am going to divorce you and tell everyone in town that you are a pervert”, on the other hand, is an insulting threat. Although others may understand the depth of your feelings on the matter, this type of comment shows no concern for your partner’s well being and suggests your marriage no longer has any value to you. The person hearing such a comment may feel incensed you have left them no where to turn except to plead your forgiveness and mercy. In the heat of the moment a feeling of ‘no way out’ and nothing left to lose can escalate these type of arguments to violence.

You *may* decide to leave your partner if you cannot live with their infidelity, pornography addiction or any other behavior you find unacceptable, but do not use the *threat* of you leaving to try to change their behavior. Do not make *yourself or the absence of yourself* into a punishment or a prize. Instead let them be scared of the police, or their pastor or boss’s disapproval. You are concerned and have the courage to inform others that they need help, but you are not a law unto yourself! If their behavior is a matter you feel *could* end the relationship, this conversation (outside of an argument and when things have cooled down for at least 2 to 3 days) may be more useful . . .



*Limiting abuse is best done early, when you are in a frame of mind to do it calmly. There is nothing attractive about letting the worst in someone else get the better of you!*

“I really cannot live with your pornography addiction any longer and I hope that Pastor Green (or Dr. Brown or whoever you decide on when you do Your Personal Bill of Rights exercise) can help you with this and that you will offer to let me put security software on your computer to show that you can be trusted. This will give you the chance to prove yourself. I really do believe that you can get over this, but I will need to see you less defensive with me about this by March (say three months away) or I will need to start looking for a new place to live. I love you but this is not something I want in my life.”

This is a warning and gives your partner plenty of safe ground to explore showing that you care for them and value your relationship as well as caring about your own self respect and values.

I have not chosen these examples haphazardly. Hidden credit cards and debt, pornography and extramarital affairs (as well as problems with in-laws) are the biggest causes of marriage breakdown and arguments. You will probably have strong feelings around these subjects and that is OK, just don’t let your feelings overwhelm you to the point where you make threats and ultimatums that might damage your relationship with your own conscience and with people who love you.

This means practicing emotional intelligence and not giving control of your emotions to your partner. You will find the information in *Back from the Looking Glass* ([www.kimandstevesbookshop.com](http://www.kimandstevesbookshop.com)) on ‘Magic Scissors’ as well as the next chapter on emotional intelligence very useful in this regard. Having a practiced repertoire of responses to your partner’s insults or bad behavior without allowing them to upset you so much that you are distracted from your own life and goals will make you stronger as a person and raise your status in their eyes.

The emotional intelligence section will explain more fully how you being upset about their behavior will not change it. You being upset by the things they do allows them to control you. If you learn to use your magic scissors, stay calm and get on the phone and call in your support network when you need to, you will find they will have to start thinking twice about what they are doing.

Speaking of partners flirting and having affairs; this behavior needs to be limited, but the main problem here is that your partner feels inadequate and so you should also make gap work a priority. This is true for most bad behavior and is why it is so important to work on all four areas at once, while keeping track of your progress. When your partner feels more secure in themselves they will not be so desperate to look for outside affection and attention.

You need to give yourself time to find the courage and means to tackle the abuse you may be experiencing.

In the meantime, make sure you are safe and learn to de-escalate arguments and fights with our book: *Back from the Looking Glass* ([www.kimandstevesbookshop.com](http://www.kimandstevesbookshop.com)) and the free resource *Ending a Domestic Dispute in Progress*, which can be found online here <https://thelovesafetynet.com/resolving-a-domestic-fight-in-progress/>.

Finding the right strategy to take on a family member who is abusing power will take time and planning and particularly if this is someone who has distanced themselves from you already, may see them shut you out of their life completely. If they are close it may see them getting even angrier before the abuse ends. This is the reason that we suggest you read over all of the material in this workbook before you start and get an overview of where you are going with this. You need to take responsibility for keeping yourself safe.

It is important you learn to limit abuse and stand up for yourself - but it will be most effective if your new, stronger attitude develops alongside the other exercises in this workbook.

This does not mean you should be weak in setting limits, quite the opposite. Make sure that you have all your facts straight, your plan is in place and back-up at hand before you put a 100% no tolerance boundary in place.

Likewise, bluffs will not work and will only make you appear weak. Remember, no ultimatums, no threats and no bluffs. Instead just one warning and then you take action!

You have probably been in the situation where this person has made you feel scared or uncomfortable many times before, so you need to think about this and prepare better comeback lines and back-up for next time. You need to work on these ideas and take the time to learn to handle these situations, paying respect to your emotions, but without letting your emotions take control of you. This is an area we will deal with more in the next chapter on Emotional Intelligence. But first a bit more on limiting abuse . . .

## **Your Personal Bill of Rights**

In Part 2 of this workbook—the exercise manual—you will find the personal bill of rights exercise.

My guess is that if your partner is interfering with your rights, you may discover that people (who you thought only saw their good side) may have problems with them also. People who are being deceptive and abusing power put a lot of effort into keeping the people in their life apart and even playing them off against each other. They don't want you to know that other people don't always think as highly of them as you might think. I call this their 'House of Cards'.

Someone who is deceitful and/or abusive puts a lot of energy into maintaining this 'house of cards', keeping different people in their lives in different 'rooms'. When you contact people on the list and discuss your partner's concerning behavior, you are actually taking walls out of this structure, which is in fact their false pride. When you bring it down you will need to be ready to catch them. They feel very inadequate deep down and if you are going to expect that they drop their pride, you will need to be ready to show that you will be kind, forgiving and supportive if they 'drop the game', but that their old deceptive ways are not going to work anymore, because everyone is now onto them, or will be alerted if they continue.

The game of false pride requires an enormous amount of energy in trying to control everyone and everything around a person, so when the walls of this 'house of cards' come down, expect them to be very exhausted. You may need to be ready to come to their aid at this time and represent them well to others in areas of their life that might need to change. They may

not know how to deal with people without the old 'mask'. You may need to help them know what to do and say next, or even speak for them for until they get back on their feet.

E.g. "There is a family matter Steve needs to give attention to right now, so I am sorry that he won't be able to do the overtime you are asking of him."

In this exercise you are effectively saying that their bad behavior cannot continue but that if they drop 'the game' they will be safe with you and you will protect them while they learn new and more honest and responsible ways of handling themselves in the world.

### **The Real Enemy is Our Own Ignorance**

Putting in place a decision making process, roles and responsibilities, agreed standards, policies and limits (rules or code of conduct) in our family has taken us nearly 5 years. Please remember however that we did not have this guide to follow! In that time 2 of our children have moved out of home—yet still we continue improving. When some parents are feeling they may not see much of their children anymore, we are hard at work setting a foundation that will make life easier for our grandchildren and children when they become parents. The work you do here may likewise strengthen your family for generations.