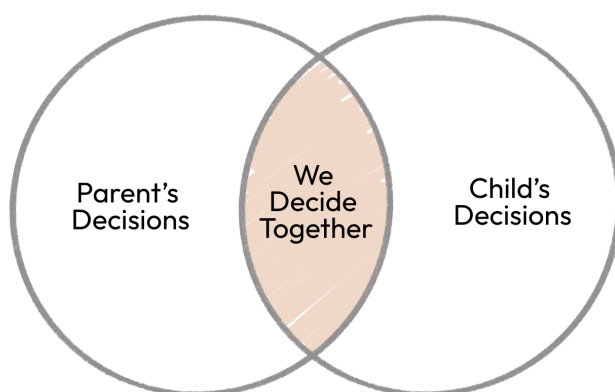


Who Decides?

My friend, Peter Cook, is a devoted dad who cares deeply about parenting. During a discussion he shared a simple tool he uses when working on solutions to problems with his children.

Pulling out a pen and paper he drew two circles side by side, overlapping slightly: a Venn diagram. In one circle, he wrote the words, *parent's decisions*. In the other circle, he wrote the words, *child's decisions*.

Peter described how after enduring too many power-struggles with a tired pre-schooler, he sat the child down, gave them something delicious to eat, and created this illustration.



Peter explained to his child that there are some decisions that parents make for their children regardless of what they think. And there are also some decisions that children get to make with no input from their parents. Then, together, they brainstormed and made a long list of different decisions each person was able to make. (The fact that your child cannot read or write doesn't diminish the power of this activity!)

Once those two lists were complete, Peter drew a line from the overlapping component of the circles and wrote, *We Decide Together*. He explained that some decisions are made by negotiation. And once more, they discussed some of those decisions.

I tried it. And it was powerful.

Once you've made it clear that you are the parent and that you are responsible for certain decisions, power struggles shift, particularly with younger children. They need to know someone is in control, providing structure and direction. It feels safe for them. Although, just like a person on a rollercoaster who pushes against the restraints, they'll do that. Not so they can be free, but so they can check that they're there and they'll keep them safe.

When there's a bit of pushback you can smile and say, "This is a decision that's in the parent circle." That's the end of the story. Sometimes your child will sulk. There will still be occasional screaming and arguing. But the line has been drawn. The expectation is set. And as a result, many power struggles will be defused. So long as we don't abuse the power we have as parents, our children can feel secure with us calling the shots we need to call and either negotiating with - or deferring to - our children for other decisions.

One more important point: as your child matures and develops, your circles will change size and change in the extent to which they overlap. Negotiations will become increasingly common. This is healthy and normal. We start to focus far more on exploring their world and empowering them to develop decisions and solutions themselves.

And... At some point a major shift will occur. The circles will almost entirely separate. And your circle will shrink while theirs enlarges. You will push increasingly large amounts of responsibility onto your child, making yourself redundant. And you will have raised an adult.



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