

Escalation – A Game for All to Play

This simple game can transform tiny tasks, such as getting dressed or eating a meal, into the sort of story that your family tells for decades to come, that has the adult hanging their head in shame and may even be immortalised on social media channels such as YouTube.

How to Play

You need two players: A child who can say “no” and knows how to argue (basic technique is enough, plus a dose of sass or attitude). An adult – works best if the adult is tired, stressed (and/ or poorly), even better if played at the end of one’s tether.

Play is generally initiated by the child, however, the game only truly begins when the adult responds by disagreeing to assert control or dominance. *Example:* The adult asks the child to do something simple, e.g. brush their teeth, put clothes on, eat breakfast, stop pulling your hair. The child responds by emphatically saying “**No**” or “**Won’t**”.

Possible responses from the adult that indicate that the game has begun:

- **Yes/ Will** – simple, elegant and yet a sure fire invitation to an argument your child will struggle to resist
- **Oh yes you will** (adding “young man” or “young lady” scores 1 for the child as the adult is escalating too quickly, ditto any aggressive stance, hands on hips or finger wagging also scores 1 for the child)

Adult forfeits at this stage if they remain calm, refuse to be drawn into an argument, walks out of the room to calm down or attempts any self-regulatory techniques (breathing, humming, standing still, closing their eyes, listening to a favourite song). **If this happens the Escalation Game is Over.**

How to Start “Escalation”

The simplest way to start the game is by arguing (oh no, it isn’t). To start, one player disagrees with the other player. E.g. They say **No**, you say **Yes**/ They say **Will**, you say **Won’t**. Clearly you might clarify the argument using additional words or descriptors (such as “*No I won’t wear a coat even if it’s snowing*”, “*Yes you bloody well will, it’s freezing out there and you will catch your death of cold*”) but overall impact is one of extended, pointless, going nowhere, exhausting argument.

Should anyone agree with the other person (“*Yes I know that brushing your teeth is unfair/ you did it already today/ is a pain worse than death*”) **then the Escalation Game is Over.**

How to Play Escalation

Escalation involves verbal and physical ramping up of the situation, until both players are in a clear state of emotional dysregulation, shouting loudly and at its worst/ best spouting all sorts of nonsense (see Advanced Play below). As a player, your aim is to wrestle control of the situation from the other person and have a clear upper hand.

Things you can do to escalate the situation include:

- **Increasing volume** – your aim is to go that little bit louder or shoutier than your opponent at every volley. Do not jump to ear-splitting volume too quickly or you will lose 1 point.
- **Physical escalation** – for adults this includes finger wagging, towering over your opponent in a threatening manner, hands on hips stance. For children this included stomping of feet, wild shaking of arms, angry bobbing of heads.
- **Hysteria or Melodrama** – this involves spitting, head spinning, lying on the ground spinning, lying on the ground stamping arms and legs, rolling of eyes until only the whites show etc. This is Advanced Escalation and is best reserved for trips to busy supermarkets on Saturday lunchtimes.

If either player fails to get louder, or respond in due time, gives up in sheer exhaustion, or sits down in the middle of Sainsburys for a little cry, they forfeit the game.

Advanced Play

Assuming (and it’s pretty much a given here) that being really loud, argumentative and shouty has not resolved the situation such that your child stops, thinks for a moment (with or without stroking their chin) and then responds “You win Mummy/ Dadda. You’re so right. I don’t know why I just didn’t do it in the first place,” then you may end up in Advanced Play.

It’s time to pull out the big guns and start telling them just how you are going to make their life more miserable than this epic row in Asda has already made it. Such that you spout nonsense like:

- ***Wait until I tell your dad/ the vicar/ Nanna/ your teacher/ the dog***
- ***That’s IT!! You are banned from your favourite TV show/ tablet/ ipad/ hugging your teddy for the rest of today***
- As above, but longer duration such as ***the rest of the weekend/ month/ year/ your lifetime/ until the end of the world as we know it***

Since these threats have absolutely no impact whatsoever on your child, who is currently not really listening to you anyway as their amygdala is in charge (as is yours or you wouldn’t really be punishing yourself by taking away the only sane 30 minutes of each day when your child is on their tablet or watching Scooby Doo), things may well go mental at this point.

If you are still in rant mode, then you may even end up in the Annihilation Phase. When you say things like you will hang, drawer and quarter their favourite teddy they were given on the day of their birth/ adoption. Or you will smash their favourite toy/ tablet/ tech into a billion pieces using a coconut. All angry raging nonsense that will only increase your guilt should you not have calmed down in time to avert such a actually-following-through-on-a-ridiculous-threat when you get home.

If you get to this level of escalation, you lose. In fact, you lost when you started to play this stupid game in the first place. Because ***NO-ONE EVER WINS THE GAME OF ESCALATION***