

POWER

Power is often defined as the capacity to influence others' behaviour, to get others to do what we want, rather than what they themselves might want. Power is a relationship between people as expressed through making people change, influencing their thinking and behaviour.

It is important to note that power focused on bring about change can be directed inward as well. We can make ourselves change or we can discover our own inner power (empowerment). Turning the Tide is particularly interested in working with the energy generated when inner power (empowerment) is combined with organised and strategic nonviolent efforts of people working together (power with) to create social change.

TTT focuses mainly on 'power over' (domination, threats, oppression) and 'power-with' (participatory collaboration, cooperation and group-working) and 'power within' (empowerment).

Power-over sees the world as an object, made up of many separate, isolated parts that have no intrinsic life, awareness or value. Human beings have no inherent worth; value must be earned or granted. Power-over motivates by fear, violence or threat of violence.

Power-with sees the world as a pattern of relationships, but its interest is in how that pattern can be shaped moulded, shifted. It values beings, forces, and people according to how they affect others and according to a history based on experience.

Power-within is an acknowledgement of the power we all possess in the wealth of our knowledge and capacity to change and grow and our abilities. Power within is about releasing and taking action based on self-initiated decisions. It is a growth process and continuous throughout life. Power-within helps us overcome obstacles in life and ultimately, helps us develop ourselves and society.

Sources of power

The sources of power are the reasons why some people obey others, and can be summarised as:

- legitimacy (democratically elected government/ divine right of kings)
- habit/social traditions (close to legitimacy)
- control of information and ideas
- skills and knowledge
- physical strength/size (or weapons) - the ability to threaten
- money, material resources
- 'hench people', or agents who carry out the power-holders' orders (police, army)
- incentives (money, status)
- sanctions (fines, prison, death)
- There is also charisma, which may give power to someone who otherwise does not have it, or strengthen the power of someone who has other sources. A very important source of power is the ability to define reality, to be able to say what the world is like and what people are like.

D-I-Y. Try it yourself.

Think of an organisation you belong to: your work place, club, faith, campaigning or community group, at school, your family. Ask yourself who has power in the group or organisation. Then think about where does our (or their) power comes from and why do others in the organisation obey them (or me)?. How many of the sources of power listed above can be identified in your group or organisation?

Power is a relationship, not a possession. Active nonviolence can enable apparently powerless groups to find power together. It is a means of changing uneven power relationships in order to bring about just changes.

Power holder	Source of power
The Head	Social tradition, the law, controls money, gives rewards and punishments, has information, interface with the outside world.
Teachers	Length of experience, knowledge, socially recognised position, the law, (sometimes), charisma.
Pupils	Numbers, nuisance value, they are the reason for the school's existence.
Prefects	Position in the system.
Governors	Can hire, fire and expel, vested authority, control of budget.
Older classes	Size and strength.
The caretaker	The key, controls the environment, knows how things work, (in relation to the children) is a grown up.
School secretary	Controls information and is a channel of communication.
Bullies	Size, cunning, intellect, physical strength.
Parents	Can raise money, can remove children (the law), co-operation, can become governors.
Secretary of State	law, inspection, ultimately controls resources, civil service apparatus.