

# Using Logical/Natural Consequences In Parenting

The use of natural and logical consequences may be appropriate when your child's behavior is unacceptable. The use of natural and logical consequences encourages your child to take responsibility for his or her own behavior and allows your child to learn from nature and society.

**Natural consequences** are those things that happen in response to your child's behavior without parental involvement. Nature, society, or another person imposes these. You do not actually deliver a natural consequence yourself. Instead, you allow nature or society to impose the consequence on your child by not interfering.

## Examples of Natural Consequences

Child's Behavior	Natural Consequences
Stays up late and is late for school	He feels tired the next day; the teacher is angry and makes him stay after school.
Refuses to wear mittens	His hands get cold.
Refuses to eat dinner	She feels hungry.
Smokes marijuana	He feels "high" and gains acceptance from peers; He may be suspended from school if caught.
Shoplifts clothes at store	She gets free clothes; she may be caught and arrested.
Plays with cigarette lighter	He burns his hand or possibly sets the house on fire.
Leaves toys out in the rain	The toys rust or are stolen.

Natural consequences are a very effective form of discipline. However, you can see from the examples above that natural consequences do not always deter behavior. Here are some examples of when natural consequences do not work:

- If you interfere with a natural consequence it will not work. For example, by fixing a later meal after your child refuses to eat dinner, you will stop the natural consequence of hunger. You are also encouraging the unacceptable behavior by responding with special attention. Similarly, by forcing your child to wear a coat, she will not experience the natural consequence of being cold.
- Your child's misbehavior can be encouraged by a natural consequence. For instance, shoplifting without being caught results in free clothes.
- Something you see as unpleasant, like cold hands, may not matter to your children.

- The natural consequence may be too dangerous. Never allow the natural consequence to endanger the health and safety of your child. For example, playing with matches may lead to a fire.

Natural consequences only work if they are undesirable to your child and you do not interfere. Carefully choose the conditions when you allow natural consequences to occur and they will be very effective.

**Logical Consequences** are options you suggest to your child. They are different from natural consequences because you present them, instead of nature or society. You should choose consequences directly related to the unacceptable behavior. For example, if your child skips a chore have her do an extra chore; don't take away TV. If she leaves a mess, have her clean two rooms; don't ground her for a week. Be consistent and follow through. And use the smallest consequence possible.

Other examples include:

- You may turn the volume down or use headphones or listen to the radio in your room.
- If your toys are not picked up before bedtime, they will be put in this box at the back of the basement.
- If you won't change out of your good clothes, stay in the house and find something to do inside.

In addition to natural and logical consequences, you can give positive and negative consequences.

**Positive consequences** are things your children like. This varies for different kids. Examples of positive consequences are:

- After you clean your room, we can go play catch.
- You may watch TV when you finish your homework.

**Negative consequences** are things your child does not like. Some examples are:

- If you are not home in time for dinner, you may not go to the movie.
- If you don't bring your bike into the garage, you will not be allowed to ride it tomorrow.
- If you will not honor my request for help then I will not honor your request for a ride to a friend's house.

**It is important to emphasize the positive.** Give more positive consequences than negative.

**How to set consequences...**

- **Give the consequence immediately** following the unacceptable behavior. Don't give the consequence tomorrow or next week.
- **Be clear.** Your child may have a different definition of the task. Say "Make your bed and pick up your clothes and toys" instead of "Clean your room."
- **Give brief choices.** Do not wander into a long discussion about irresponsibility. State the consequence in a sentence or two.
- **Be consistent.** Do not give a small consequence one time and then a big one the next time for the same behavior. For example, if the stereo is too loud, don't suggest putting on headphones the first time, the ground your child for two weeks the next time.
- **Follow through.** If your child earns a positive or negative consequence, always give it to him or her right away.

### **How to avoid problems while giving a consequence...**

- Never use a threat, such as "You're going to get it!" or "Do that again and I'll break your neck!" Threats have no teaching value. A previously abused child, or even one who has not been previously abused, may take you seriously and think you are going to harm him or her. A child acting out of fear will not be learning to problem-solve.
- Do not confuse a consequence with a bribe. A bribe is a reward given in advance. For example, "I'll let you go play if you'll clean up your room later." With a bribe your child is rewarded for inappropriate behavior, instead of earning the reward with positive behavior.
- Be careful of giving too many negative consequences and not enough positive ones.
- Do not let negative consequences snowball. Your child may taunt you by continuing to misbehave while you add consequence after consequence. You can find yourself in a position where you have promised more consequences than you can deliver. If you ground her for a year and take away her allowance, TV, and phone privileges, you have very few consequences left for the next problem. Your child may also feel she has nothing left to lose and continue to misbehave.
- Do not start with huge consequences. If you ground your child for a month right away, then what is next? If your child earns \$100 sneakers for cleaning her room, she will expect more for larger jobs. Use the **smallest** possible consequence. **Don't give up** after a few tries. Consequences must be repeated consistently over a long period of time to have a lasting effect on behavior.

### **How to understand the use of consequences as an effective form of discipline...**

- It helps your child develop responsibility and a positive self-concept.
- It helps your child learn to problem solve ways of getting more rewards for positive behavior.
- It promotes self-respect.
- It helps maintain a positive relationship between you and your child.

**Editor's Note:** This article appeared in Faith Steps: Journeying with Children in the Faith, Volume 9, Number 4, November 2002. Faith Steps is a publication of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. The article is adapted from The Foster Parent Scope Curriculum, copyright 1993, SUNY Research Foundation/Center for Development of Human Services, New York State Child Welfare Training Institute, State University College at Buffalo. It is used by permission. You are free to make copies of the article for your own use or for educational purposes only. Please give appropriate credits. Thanks.

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