

The Truth About Consequences



Mistakes are opportunities to learn

When children make mistakes, we need to seize the errors as opportunities to train, teach, and redirect. The power is not in selecting the perfect consequence, but in consistently leading them toward successful adulthood.

More often than not, parents are searching for the **right** consequence that will teach the child to never do the behavior again.

We must first realize that the child always has the power to ignore consequences and do the behavior again. Just look at how ineffective jails are at rehabilitating adults. Human beings are not lab rats that consistently respond to rewards and punishments.

So what can we do? Say what you mean and follow through. Make every effort to never bribe, repeat, or threaten. A threat sounds like, “Put that down or I’m going to send you to your room.” Having a strong, authoritative relationship with your child sounds like, “Johnny, put that down.” Say it in a voice that sounds like you assume he will follow through. When he doesn’t, the object is immediately removed from his hand and he receives the usual consequence for disobeying. He should be expecting that.

When searching for consequences, keep in mind the four R’s. They should be *related* to the misbehavior, *respectful* toward the child, *reasonable* given the circumstances, and *revealed* in advance in most circumstances.

Also, replace lectures and warnings with enforceable statements:

Ineffective: Quit playing with your food.

Effective: Feel free to come back to the table when you can eat like the rest of us.

Ineffective: You can’t go play until you have finished your homework.

Effective: Feel free to go play when your homework is finished.

Ineffective: Stop bothering your sister.

Effective: You are welcome to stay with us as long as you are not bothering your sister.

Ineffective: Do your chores on time or you’ll be grounded.

Effective: I’d be happy to let you go with your friends as soon as your chores are done.

Positive Practice Works!

Have kids *practice* those things they are having trouble doing on their own. They must need more practice if they need to be frequently reminded. This can include: making a bed, putting a back pack away, clearing a plate, putting a bike in the right spot, etc. Have the child complete the activity 7-10 times. The mood should be light-hearted, but also expect serious results.



Tickets Beat Time-outs Almost Every Time

Give the 3 ticket method a try!

When seeking to eliminate a specific behavior from your child's daily routine, the ticket method can work wonders. It must be a behavior that CAN be eliminated. Do not choose arguing with siblings, but you can choose hitting siblings or name-calling of siblings. Choose a behavior that you have consistently been dealing with daily, but the child continues to do.

Explain to the child that you will **help** them stop _____ because he hasn't been able to accomplish it on his own. The three tickets (colored scrap paper) will be given each morning to help him keep track of what he is doing. (Put on the refrigerator or in a private spot if other siblings need not be involved.)

His habit will take time to eliminate, but it can be done. Take a ticket each time the behavior is done by the child. Keep it positive, "Oops, you shouted at me again. You still have two tickets left." One ticket at the end of the day is considered a success. The child can exchange the ticket for special time with Mom or Dad. If the behavior is really excessive, track how long he was able to keep

the tickets on a certain day and set a goal to stretch it longer the next day.

Once the tickets are gone, the child can then be sent to his room for all subsequent offenses. Still remain positive, "I bet tomorrow you will be able to keep your tickets longer."

Once the behavior is 95% eliminated, you can announce a success and tell your child that he no longer needs tickets. (At least for that behavior.)

If the behavior rears its head in the future, "I would think we should be able to take care of this without tickets." But start again if you have to.

Be Creative with Consequences.

There is usually no one magical solution to a specific problem. Brainstorm with your spouse about how to specifically address a given behavior that is challenging you repeatedly. Then stick to the plan.

Search for consequences that are logical, relevant, and easy to carry out. Here are some of ours that have worked:

For a 4 year-old excessive crier--"The doctor says you should only be crying about 7 minutes a day. If you cry more than that, it is probably caused from too much sugar."

When the child cried, I would look at my watch and say, "Let me know when you are finished."

After seven total minutes for the day, all sweet food was eliminated.

For failure to obey a simple request like picking up the toys, "Are you going to pick easy way or hard way?" If the child does not comply, firmly place their hand on the toys and "help" them pick them up.

For frequent reminders to make a bed, empty laundry hamper, etc. I explain that I will do the job if it is not completed, but I will charge an extra chore that week for each time I have to do it.

For items not put away after reminders, remove the item to a spot for unappreciated toys and clothes. Often these things get shipped to Brazil if they are unloved or they can be earned back.

For chaos in the house, I send kids to their rooms for a break with a comment of, "You're not being punished." This is a mood breaker and no one is mad because no one *got in trouble*.

For sibling squabbles that you cannot ignore because someone got you involved, comfort the hurt child and ignore the other. "I'm so sorry you got hurt. Your brother usually does not do things like that." Do not always try to figure out what happened. It might drive you insane!

A Few Tid-Bits For Now or Later

- Say, “Do you understand?” rather than “OK?” when you ask someone to do something.
- “We’re not a family that....”
- What’s your plan for getting _____ done?”
- No repeating, threatening, or bribing
- “You’ll figure it out.”
- “When I look at you, I see...”
- Confident expectations
- Teach kids to reply, “OK” or “Got it” or “I’m on it” when you ask them to do something.
- “In this family we...”
- “I love you too much to argue about that.”
- PERSEVERE
- Teach futility.
- Make financial decisions out loud while children are present:
“How much is that? Well we won’t get that now. Check and see the price of the others like it. Which is the best value? Teach that money matters.
- Children need to understand “enough” before they can appreciate abundance.
- Structure the child’s environment or develop routines that will support respectful and responsible behavior.
- Change scenery during moments of chaos: give a bath, go outside, jump in the car and run errands.
- Use empathy rather than fixing or criticizing a situation.
- You are the expert in raising your child.

A Few Words from the Experts:



“What I emphasize is point of view, not method. I think the disciplinary problem in America is that we don't have the right point of view. We believe methods are going to solve the problem. People think that if they manipulate, punish and reward, they'll raise the perfect child. We were led to believe that behavior modification worked with humans. It works on dogs, but not human children. There have to be consequences, but proper consequences do not

guarantee proper behavior.” -John Rosemond

“What the vast majority of American children need is to stop being pampered, stop being indulged, stop being chauffeured, stop being catered to. In the final analysis it is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful as human beings.” -Ann Landers

“If our focus is primarily on manipulating our child's behavior effectively, it's possible we'll only succeed in teaching them that behaving in a certain way is nothing more than a *ticket* to whatever it is they wanted in the first place, even if it's just the good will of Mom and Dad. We must instead focus on shaping their hearts for good. We must teach them to want to do what's right because that is who they are.” -Betsy Hart, It Takes A Parent

Recommended Reading List

1. Boundries for Kids (Cloud and Townsend)
 2. Respectful Kids (Cartmell)
 3. Different Children, Different Needs (Boyd)
 4. How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk (Faber and Malish)
 5. Keep the Siblings, Lose the Rivalry (Cartmell)
 6. It Takes a Parent (Hart)
 7. The Price of Privilege (Levine)
 8. Hold on to Your Kids (Neufeld)
 9. Raising Money Savvy Kids (Albrektson)
 10. Mitten Strings for God (Kenison)
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