

# Using consequences to guide behaviour doesn't have to be confusing

Most people agree that children and teens need guidance and discipline to help them grow into responsible, caring adults. Yet, parents are sometimes unsure about the best ways to guide their children — whether to punish, ignore or even give up.

The best approach is to use respectful and kind discipline. Discipline with clear, firm limits can teach young people responsibility for their actions and helps them learn from their mistakes. Parents can use natural and logical consequences to guide their children.

What are natural consequences?

Natural consequences allow children or teens to learn from their own experiences. Their parents do not threaten, argue with or give in to the children. Instead, the parent allows the child to discover, without outside assistance, the advantages of having respect for order and following rules.

If a child breaks a family rule about being home for supper and comes home late, the parent could say, "I guess you decided you don't want supper tonight."

If his parent "rescues" him by fixing another meal,

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## PARENTING POINTS

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worrying that he might get hungry, he learns that it doesn't matter if he comes home late for a meal — Mom or Dad will take care of things.

On the other hand, punishment for misbehaviour can result in rebellion against parents, especially by teens. If this child receives a lecture and is told he loses the privilege of watching television, he may become angry and want to get even.

To learn skills that will last a lifetime, children need to discover that something uncomfortable happens when they don't follow the rules. Natural consequences allow the discomfort to happen naturally, rather than being

created by the parent to "teach a lesson."

In using natural consequences, parents find that nature helps. For example, a child who doesn't eat, gets hungry; one who cheats at games soon learns that no one likes to play with her; one who forgets homework has to face his teacher. The teen who leaves clothes on the floor finds that they don't get washed.

Parents should avoid using this method when:

- It is dangerous or harmful. The natural consequence of a three-year-old playing in the street is too severe to ignore. It is not appropriate to let a pet get sick because the child who has agreed to care for it forgets.

- It doesn't immediately follow the misbehaviour. The natural consequence of failing to do homework may not take place for years, when the young person is unable to get a good job.

- It is not uncomfortable or disagreeable to the child. Failure to finish household chores may not bother the young person as much as it bothers his parents.

What are logical

consequences?

When natural consequences don't work, the parent can devise a logical consequence. The parent arranges a consequence that fits the misbehaviour. Here are some examples of logical consequences:

- A three-year-old who continues to go into the street must stay indoors for the rest of the day.

- The teen who comes in past curfew must come in earlier for a few nights.

- The youngster who ignores homework must complete assignments before watching television.

- The child who carelessly breaks another child's game must use allowance money to replace the game.

There is often a fine line between using logical consequences and punishment. A logical consequence delivered with anger will be interpreted as punishment by the child. Anger can overwhelm even a parent's most logical actions.

When a parent punishes a child, the message conveyed is: "You better do what I say or else." With logical consequences, the parent

realizes the child or teen has responsibility for their own actions, and knows that breaking the rule carries a negative consequence. The child learns that things go much better when he or she decides to follow the rules.

Natural and logical consequences are not the only effective way to discipline children. In fact, they are not always possible or appropriate. If the behaviour has no uncomfortable consequence, or if you cannot

think of a reasonable consequence, you may need to find another solution to the problem.

The consequences should be related to the misbehaviour, not too harsh, and respectful of the child's feelings and right to ultimately choose how to behave.

If you follow these guidelines, you can help your child learn to make responsible decisions and become a capable, caring adult.