

Using Logical Consequences to Teach & Guide

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As a parent, how many times have you wished you had a tool kit to deal with your children's misbehavior? Logical consequences can be a powerful tool to add to your tool kit.

Benefits of consequences

Logical consequences are a powerful tool for parents to help them influence children's behaviors in certain situations. Consequences often may seem like punishment to the child, but the purpose of a consequence is to teach and motivate appropriate behavior. A common barrier to effective use of consequences is a parent's concern about the child's feelings of anger or sadness. It can help to keep in mind that a child's anger or sadness due to a consequence is temporary, whereas the benefits of effective parental limit setting are important and long-lasting. These benefits include improved child behavior, less family stress, closer parent-child relationships, and children's stronger sense of security and competence.

When to use consequences

Some child misbehaviors do not respond to consequences, such as those that arise from individual and developmental needs or limitations. Such behaviors should be handled using alternate methods that take these needs into account. Alternate methods might include:

- Examining the cause of the behavior
- Providing extra parental attention
- Adjusting the physical environment
- Distracting and redirecting the child
- Using gentle physical management
- Problem solving with the child

If using a consequence is not working, the parent should consider using an alternate method.

The table below lists common misbehaviors and some possible consequences related to them.

Examples of Possible Consequences

Child refuses to be buckled into car seat.	The car doesn't go anywhere, and the parent won't play or talk until child is buckled in.
Child starts throwing toys.	Child is distracted and redirected to a different space and activity (parent lifts and moves child, if necessary).
Child handles things inappropriately in the store.	Child must hold parent's hand or ride in the basket until parent thinks child is ready to try behaving appropriately again.
Child won't cooperate with toothbrushing.	Child does not get any sticky, sweet, or favorite foods the next day unless she decides to cooperate with appropriate toothbrushing.
Child plays outside in an unsafe manner	Child loses privilege of playing outside without a parent or other adult to supervise (until parent thinks child is ready to try playing without supervision again).
Child makes loud fuss because parent said "no."	Parent stays calm and points out that now there is no possibility of changing her mind because loud fusses cannot be rewarded.
Child keeps misbehaving in a restaurant or other public place.	Child must sit with parent outside or in car without entertainment, until child decides he is ready to try going back into the public place and behaving appropriately.

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Characteristics of good consequences

The most effective consequences are:

- *Related* to the behavior, either in content or timing.
- *Reasonable* and appropriate to the child's age or developmental stage.
- *Respectful* and do not shame, hurt, or embarrass the child.
- *Enforced* consistently by a parent who monitors the child's behavior.

Generic consequences

When a parent can't think of a good consequence right away, she or he can tell the child that there will be a consequence for the misbehavior – to be decided later. Children can often help come up with very good ideas for consequences for their own misbehaviors. Involving a child in this way is especially valuable after a child has been honest in admitting to a misbehavior.

More Examples of Consequences

Child fails to get ready for day care/school on time.	Child must start getting ready 15 minutes earlier the next morning for each time she is late (with each 15 minutes adding to the previous 15, and a fresh start the next week). Distractions such as TV programs or certain toys must be put away earlier.
Child or youth regularly fails to get to bed on time.	Each time the child goes to bed late, he is required to start getting ready for bed 15 minutes earlier the next night. (The 15-minute periods add up, with a fresh start the next week).
Child or youth starts yelling at parent about an issue.	Parent refuses to talk any more until the child cools down and can talk calmly. (If necessary, parent takes any young children and leaves the room until the tantruming child has calmed down.)
Child or youth rides bike without proper caution.	Child loses privilege of riding bike for 1 day to 1 week, depending on child's age.
Child or youth uses rude language at home.	Parent consistently interrupts and demands that the child reword the rude comment. Until the child rewords the rude language, the parent refuses to cooperate.
Child or youth neglects chores.	Parent invokes the "when...then..." rule: chores must be completed by a specific time or the youth does not receive a specific desired privilege, such as an allowance payment.
Child or youth repeatedly neglects to complete homework.	Parent designates specific time, place, and minimum length of time youth must spend doing homework every school night, whether he has homework due the next day or not. Parent helps, monitors, and checks assignments for completion and quality.
Youth repeatedly comes home late without calling.	Parent warns youth (orally and in writing) that she will lose the privilege of going out for 1 week each time she comes home more than 30 minutes later than planned, unless she calls and receives permission for a later time based on a specific need.

Resources: Crary, E. (1990). Pick up your socks. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, Inc.

Faber, A., & Mazlish, E. (1999). How to talk so kids will listen & listen so kids will talk. New York: Avon Books.