

FAMILY WELLNESS

Considering Productive Consequences

- Effective consequences
- Tips to consider
- Resources for support



Consequences are an inevitable part of parenting. How can we give effective consequences?

The logic is sound: when a child misbehaves, then the child experiences a consequence, otherwise known as a punishment. This mirrors what we experience in "real life" as adults and provides an opportunity for children to learn how their choices and actions affect themselves and others. In practice, however, many parents find that their consequences "don't work" and they get locked in an endless battle of the wills. Consequences are doled out but the behavior never changes. Something has gone wrong.

If the goal of a consequence is to teach a child the

effects of their actions, then the consequence must be a natural extension of that action. You hit your sister → then you'll need to play by yourself. You throw your sippy cup → then I'll need to put it back in the fridge. You need to scream → then we'll step outside where it's okay to scream.

Often as parents we get caught up in contrived consequences--like time out, losing screen time, or even physical punishments--however research shows us that when the consequence is a natural and logical extension of the behavior, it is more effective in the long run.



Tips for productive consequences

What to do to make it effective

Start with learning.

If this idea feels foreign to you, it might be because it wasn't what you experienced as a child. Start with some learning at the links to the right to understand why and how these strategies can work better to stop unwanted behavior while also supporting a healthy relationship between parent and child.

Practice the skill.

Thinking of logical and natural consequences on the spot--and often when you yourself are feeling frustrated--is a difficult skill to hone. Practice by asking yourself "what's the natural consequence" when you see misbehavior from other children on television or out in public. Give yourself grace as you begin to use these strategies at home.

Consider what could happen if you didn't step in.

Some natural consequences are not safe--like what would happen if a child touches a hot stove, for example. We need to step in and protect children from unsafe natural consequences. However, considering what COULD happen can be a helpful way to find a natural consequence. The natural consequence of not being kind to a sibling is that the sibling doesn't want to play anymore. A natural consequence of throwing toys is that they will break and need to be put away. We can help children understand natural consequences by talking through them when giving a consequence: "Throwing toys breaks them. You are throwing toys, so I need to put them away so they don't break".

Ask your child.

When we begin to view consequences as tools to help our children do better, rather than a punishment to make them feel bad about their mistakes, we can partner with our children to figure out what kinds of tools they need. When they are old enough, try asking, "what can we do to help you remember?" or "looks like it's hard for you to not throw/hit/etc. How can I make that easier for you?"

"Where did we ever get the idea that in order to make a child DO BETTER, we must first make them FEEL WORSE?"

– SARAH OCKWELL SMITH

Resources

For continued support

- What are [Natural and Logical Consequences](#)? Article with more information and strategies
- [Gentle Discipline](#): Using Emotional Connection--Not Punishment--to Raise Confident, Capable Kids book by Sarah Ockwell Smith
- [Truths about Consequences](#): a podcast episode with parenting expert Janet Landsbury
- Learn more about natural consequences and other strategies by taking a [Common Sense Parenting class through Boystown](#)
- [Conscious Discipline](#) webinar for parents

