

HOW TO GIVE CHILDREN CONSEQUENCES THAT WORK

By: <https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/how-to-give-kids-consequences-that-work/>



1. Use Consequences, Not Punishments

A consequence is something that follows naturally from a person's action, inaction, or poor decision. A consequence is intended to teach or modify behavior in a positive way. It differs from a punishment in that a punishment is retribution. A punishment "gets back" at someone for something they did, with the goal of hurting that person. It's very tempting to deliver a harsh punishment when your child has broken a rule. If for no other reason, you might feel compelled to send the message: "I'm your parent. You need to listen to me." Unfortunately, punishments are not an effective way to change behavior, nor are they a constructive way to reassert your parental authority.

2. Make Consequences Task-Oriented

A task-oriented consequence is related to the offense and defines a learning objective. For example, if your child stayed out past curfew then the next time she goes out she has to come in an hour earlier to show you that she can do it. When she shows you she can do it, you can go back to her normal curfew time. In contrast, grounding her for a month is not a task that will teach her to observe curfew. It just puts you and your family through the grief and the child learns nothing.

You can't punish your child into better behavior. Forget about over-the-top punishments or ineffective rules because you'll just end up in a power struggle. The right consequences actually motivate your child to good behavior. They put you back in control and teach your child how to problem-solve, giving your child the skills needed to be a successful adult.

3. Make Consequences Time-Specific

Time-specific means that your child has a certain length of time by which she needs to accomplish these tasks. The length of time should be long enough that your child has to stretch, but not so long that she loses interest or gives up. For instance, no swearing for three days is just long enough that she has to work at it, but not so long that it feels impossible. And if her reward for a successful three days is getting to use her phone again, you've also got her attention by placing "currency" that she values within her grasp. It's just not effective to remove privileges for vague or long stretches of time. If you take something away for three months, that is an eternity in the life of your child. She'll feel like the whole thing is pointless.

4. Make Consequences Related to the Original Behavior

Related to the original behavior means that the consequence is connected to the behavior you want to see your child change or improve. For example, if he's been breaking curfew, he needs to show that he can come in at an earlier time for seven days in a row before you raise the curfew back to a later time.

5. Consequences Are About Learning

The best consequences are those from which the child learns something. If your son is disrespectful to his sister, a good consequence is to tell him he can't use the phone until he writes her a letter of apology. In the letter, he has to tell her what he'll do differently the next time he's in conflict with her. Writing the letter of apology is a learning experience for him that wins him back his phone.

6. What to Do When Consequences Don't Work

What if your child doesn't seem to get the message? Doesn't the consequence need to be harsh in order to get them to take it seriously? Not at all. Remember, this isn't about punishing your child. This is about encouraging improved behavior. It may take time for your child to learn how to behave appropriately, but consistent and effective consequences are the best route.

Think of consequences like speeding tickets. For some drivers, a single ticket gets them to slow down. For others, it takes four tickets and several insurance rate increases before they finally learn. Some may even need to have their license revoked for a period of time. But they eventually learn as long as consistent and effective consequences are used. Consequences don't happen in a vacuum. They have to fit in with an overall style of parenting that is designed to produce children who can respond to limits, meet responsibilities, and demonstrate age-appropriate behavior.