

**Natural Consequences are Most Effective in Disciplining Children**  
**By**  
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In coping with children and adolescents, “consequences” has become a household word. There seems to be almost universal agreement that people, especially kids, should “experience” the consequences of their behavior.

If they behave well, it is believed that they should be rewarded. If they misbehave, it is believed that they should be punished.

Unfortunately, this approach to the rearing of kids is not working very well. Discipline is still the No. 1 concern among parents today. To make sure that they are not permissive, many parents are getting tougher.

Excluding matters of life or death, the prevailing belief today seems to be that kids should “suffer” the consequences of their behavior rather than just “experience” it. This could be very discouraging to kids as well as their parents and could result in considerable unfair punishment. There must be a better way to raise kids.

We all experience consequences. It is a natural and logical part of living.

Experiencing consequences can be a valuable learning experience. Much growth and becoming is the result of experiencing new situations created by mistakes and then learning from the consequences. However, for best results, such experiences need to be viewed as challenging and fair, rather than threatening and unfair. Thus, parents using consequences should proceed with caution.

Generally speaking, there are three categories of consequences:

■ **Random consequences:** The first category is probably the most prevalent today. It is closely related to the belief that kids should suffer the consequences of their behavior and that parents should get tough.

If they don't do what they are told to do, or don't stop what they shouldn't do, they should be punished. Regardless, the consequence is thought to be justified if the end result is accomplished. This type of consequences is part of the autocratic tradition in which people who practice it always know what is right for other people. Because they know what is right, they feel obligated to coerce kids to behave the way they want.

The problem with this use of consequences is that it is often considered unfair. If kids think it is fair and that they deserve it, parents can get away with it. However, if kids think it is unfair, as they often do, serious conflict is inevitable.

In this day of serious concern over child abuse, parents would be well advised to adopt the slogan, "People aren't for hitting-kids are people, too." What once was acceptable punishment is now often considered abuse, and rightfully so.

■ **Logical Consequences:** These are much more encouraging and fair. Every effort is made to relate the consequence to the misbehavior. If a privilege is abused, it may be taken away for a reasonable period of time but nothing more. There is no intent to punish, but merely to provide an experience in logical consequences.

For example, if kids misuse TV, the phone or the car, the privilege may be taken away. An agreement can be reached as to the time period. However, if kids view the logical consequence as punishment, wise parents will drop it and come up with a new one closer to a natural consequence.

There is a simple formula that can be followed called the four R's of a logical consequence. In order for the consequence to be logical it must meet these four criteria. It must be **reasonable**, **related**, **respectful**, and **responsible**. If the consequence falls outside the range of one of these four R's that most likely its not a logical consequence. Making the consequence both related and reasonable is very important. Most punishment is totally unrelated to the misbehavior.

■ **Natural Consequences:** These are by far the most effective and encouraging. The key is to have the consequence closely related to the natural and logical order of societal living with help from Mother Nature.

There is no use of punishment or reward. Kids should have these experiences with trust and support from parents but not interference.

For example, if kids don't eat, they will get hungry. If they eat at regular times, they will feel healthier. If they fight, they will get hurt. If they stop fighting, they will have more friends.

The goal is for kids to discover that they do or don't behave in certain ways because it is in their favor rather than just to obey or defy their parents with minimum interference, to give their kids the opportunity to learn from the natural consequences of their behavior. In addition, they can discover the wisdom of involving kids in as many family decisions as possible.

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