

Using natural and logical consequences

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What Are Natural and Logical Consequences?

A consequence is a result of something a person does. Letting children experience the natural or logical consequences of their actions is one way to teach responsibility.

Natural consequences are the inevitable result of a child's own actions. For example, despite Dad's urging him to put on his coat, Tommy goes outside when it's cold without wearing a coat. The natural result is that Tommy gets cold. This result is a consequence of a choice Tommy made. In this example, natural consequences are:

- The responsibility of the child — Tommy decided not to wear his coat.
- Not administered by the parent — Dad didn't send him outside without a coat on.

Logical consequences happen as a result of a child's action, but are imposed by the parent or caregiver. For example, 5-year-old Sandy rides her bike into the street after she was told not to. The logical consequence for Sandy's mother to impose on Sandy is to take her bike away for the rest of the morning. Logical consequences are most useful when a child's action could result in harm to the child. It is important to make sure that logical consequences are reasonable and related to the problem, and to let both the child and the parent keep their self-respect.

Natural and logical consequences result from choices children make about their behavior. In effect, they choose the consequence they experience.

Sometimes the consequence which naturally or logically follows the child's behavior is unpleasant. By allowing children to experience the pleasant or unpleasant consequence of their behavior, parents and caregivers help children learn what happens because of the behavior choices they made. Using consequences can be an effective discipline tool with children three years old and older.

Do Natural and Logical Consequences Work?

Natural and logical consequences can be an effective strategy to use because:

- The consequence is closely tied to the behavior, and gives the child a chance to learn what happens when he doesn't behave in the way you expect him to behave.
- It separates the deed from the doer, it does not shame or punish the child.
- It is concerned with present and future behavior and helps children learn to be responsible for their own actions.
- It is done in a calm environment.
- It lets children make a choice.

While they can be an effective:

- The parent must be able to think ahead and come up with a proper response.
- The parent must not step in and “save” the child.
- The child must be allowed to experience the consequence.
- The consequence takes time to put into action and often does not work the first time.

Following the steps and guidelines outlined below can help parents avoid these issues.

Steps for Using Logical and Natural Consequences

1. Identify reasons.

When your child misbehaves, find out what he or she is doing and try to figure out why. Children usually misbehave for these reasons:

- To get your attention.
- To get power.
- To get even.
- Because they feel inadequate.

It's important to try to understand why the child is misbehaving so you can take the correct action.

Sam, age 4, was playing in the yard with his truck. It was almost time to go to preschool. Mom called to Sam that he had five minutes to finish with his play and put the toys away. Sam kept on playing because he was having fun. “One minute left,” warned Mom. The toys were still all over the yard and it was time to go.

Paying no attention to his Mother is a great way for Sam to gain power and get attention.

2. Decide whose problem it is.

Some problems are the child's alone. When this is the case, it's often best simply to let whatever will happen, happen. As long as the consequences are not dangerous, don't interfere. This is a natural consequence. For example, if Sam were playing out in the yard when it began to rain and he would not come in, he would get wet. The natural consequence would be the discomfort of being drenched.

When Sam will not put his toys away, his mother has the problem. Mom really needs Sam to put his trucks away before going to preschool. They live in an apartment complex where there are many other children and the toys might not be there when they return. Mom has been working to help Sam be more responsible for his toys. In this case it's time to use a logical consequence.

3. Offer choices.

When you want your child to do something or behave in a certain way, the best way is to offer a few choices. Make sure any choice you offer is one you can live with and does not harm the child.

"Sam, I need you to pick up the toys right now. If you don't they will have to be put away until tomorrow. I know you will want to play truck when we come home. That won't be possible unless you put them back in the house now. It's your choice."

It's important to keep in mind that a logical consequence comes from the child's decision.

4. Stand firm.

If the child chooses a consequence, follow through and don't waver. This is very important when you begin using this technique. A child used to getting his or her way through misbehavior may try to do the same thing when choosing a logical consequence.

Sam looked at Mom and continued playing. Mom said "All right, I can see you have decided not to play with your truck this afternoon." Mom then removed the truck and put it in an out-of-reach place that Sam could see. Sam began to cry and throw dirt. Mom remained calm (it was not easy to do) and simply reminded Sam that he had made a choice.

5. Talk to your child about choices in a positive way.

A choice given as a way to get something is far more appealing to a child than a warning. The actual consequence is probably the same, but a power struggle is avoided because the parent is positive rather than threatening.

Sam's Mom might want to rephrase her words. She might have better luck if she said, "Sam, I want you to be able to play with your truck later. Let's bring it into the house right now so you can play with it when we come home from preschool. I know you really like this truck, but if we leave it out here, it might disappear like the blue one did."

6. Let your child know when she or he has done something good.

As soon as a child corrects his behavior, let him know you think it's great. All of us respond better to praise than to criticism. Sometimes it's the only way a child knows he has met your expectations.

Two days later Sam was playing with his truck again. Now, Mom needed to go to the store and asked Sam to put the truck in the house. He ignored her for a minute, but when Mom reminded him that he was responsible for making sure the truck didn't disappear (either because he left it in the yard or because Mom put it away for a brief period of time) he picked it up and walked toward the door. Mom said, "Wow, I really like the way you're taking care of your truck. I'm proud of you!"

7. If possible, let the child help decide the consequence.

Because the problem is the child's and he is in charge of the choices he makes, it's a good idea to ask him what she thinks a good consequence might be. This makes it more likely that the child will do what you ask. And if he chooses not to do it, he was part of the team that decided what the consequence would be.

Sam and Mom were talking about what might happen if he didn't bring in the truck. Sam understood the reason for needing to keep track of his toys and said that it might be taken away by another child if it were left out. Mom talked about how it would be hard to buy Sam another truck right now because trucks cost a lot of money. Sam said that if the truck disappeared, he might be able to help buy a new one with some of the money he got for his birthday. They both agreed that the best solution was to bring the truck in whenever Sam wasn't playing with it.

Children can often come up with better consequences than their parents when given the chance.

Selecting Effective Logical Consequences

Logical consequences are arranged by an adult but must be experienced by the child as a direct result of his or her behavior. To be effective, the consequence needs to fit the behavior in a logical way so that the child associates the consequence with the behavior choice.

Logical consequences acknowledge mutual rights and mutual respect.

Mother (TV is blaring): "Susie, I realize you and Katie are enjoying your program, but your dad and I are trying to talk. Please turn down the volume or go outside. You decide which you'd rather do."

In contrast, punishment expresses the power of personal authority.

Mother: "Susie, turn that TV off this instant! I'm trying to talk to your father."

Logical consequences are related to the misbehavior.

Father: "John, I'm going to mow the lawn this morning, but I won't be able to mow until all your toys are picked up. Please pick them up. If you don't, I'll place them in a bag and put them out of reach in the garage."

In contrast, punishment is rarely related to the logic of the misbehavior or situation.

Father (angrily): "John, I've told you a dozen times to pick up your toys outside. I'm going to mow over them and you can just forget about going to the show this afternoon, too."

Logical consequences are not judgmental.

Son: "Dad, remember when I borrowed your pen without asking?"

Dad: "Yes, I do."

Son: "Well, I lost it. I've looked everywhere for it."

Dad: "Well, son, how are you going to replace the pen?"

In this example, Dad handled the situation by focusing on the impersonal fact that a pen was lost and must be replaced. In contrast, punishment implies wrong-doing and personal deficiencies, rather than a mistake or inappropriate behavior.

Dad (very angry): "Son, you took my pen without permission! Don't you know enough to ask? That's outright stealing. And you lost it. You'll never use anything else of mine again!"

Logical consequences are related to current and future behavior.

The Smith family recently got a dog. Little Billy agreed to feed it, but did not live up to his agreement. Billy is playing with the dog.

Father: "I'm sorry, Billy, but you're not ready for the responsibility of caring for a dog. You'll have to leave the dog alone for two days. Then you can take on your responsibility for feeding the dog again."

In contrast, punishment relates to past behavior.

Father (angrily): "Billy, you forgot to feed the dog. You don't care one bit about that poor animal. It's just like you to forget. You can't ever play with the dog again."

Logical consequences are done in a firm but kind manner with a pleasant, friendly voice.

Jim and Dave are kicking each other under the table.

Mother: "You boys may either settle down and eat your breakfast or leave the table until you're ready to join us!"

In contrast, punishment often is threatening and treats the offender with disrespect.

Mother (angrily): "You two knock it off right now or you'll go to school without any breakfast!"

Logical consequences give the child a choice.

Jane has just come home from school and wants to play outside.

Mother: "Jane, if you plan to play outside, you'll need to change into your play clothes."

In contrast, punishment demands obedience.

Mother: "Jane, change your clothes right now!"

Sometimes there is a thin line between logical consequences and punishment. The tone of voice, friendly attitude, and willingness to accept the child's decision are essential characteristics of logical consequences. No matter how logical an action may seem to you, if your words are threatening, the message conveyed to the child will be one of punishment. Then, your child will be resentful and angry at you for imposing the consequence, instead of taking responsibility for his or her actions and learning from the consequence.

Sources

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