

Natural Consequences
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The terms “natural consequences” or “logical consequences” are often used in discussions regarding parenting. They generally refer to the logical result of behavior. For example, when we are nice to other people, as a result, they are nice to us. When we share our candy or toys with someone else they are more likely to share with us in return. When we study adequately for a test, the result is a good grade. These are examples of positive results derived from positive behavior.

Conversely, negative behavior usually produces negative results. When we leave our bicycle out in the rain, it rusts. When we misbehave in class, the teacher calls our parent. If we talk back to our parents we get punished.

In order for children to receive natural or logical consequences it is important to relate the consequence as closely as possible to the behavior. For example if your two sons are fighting over the television remote control because they disagree on what to watch, the “logical” consequence would be a television restriction. If a child is sleepy every morning and has difficulty awakening on time for school, a logical consequence would be an earlier bedtime.

Consequences that are not logical may confuse the child and be less likely to curb the intended behavior. If, for example, a child rides their bike into the street instead of on the sidewalk as you have instructed, withholding television privileges would not be a logical consequence. This “illogical” consequence may confuse the child and make them feel that your response is arbitrary and unpredictable. This does not help to create a consistent environment.

When imposing consequences on children, one way to emphasize their responsibility is to say “*You need* a ten minute time out in your room” versus “*I want* you to take a ten minute time out in your room” or “*I think* you need a time out.” “*You need*” gives the child the message that *she* is responsible for her actions and she has demonstrated, by her actions, that she requires a time out. “*I think*” or “*I want*” give the message that this is a matter of opinion, or that you want a break from her, and for *your* benefit you want her to take a time out. Place the responsibility for consequences directly upon them.

You should inform them in a calm and rational manner, not in an angry or frustrated manner. This helps to remove the emotional factor from the equation. The child is more likely to realize that the consequence is a result of her behavior and not a result of your being in a bad mood.

Responding calmly can be extremely difficult. We have a tremendous emotional investment in our kids. We love our children so much and we want them to behave properly. We spend hours shaping, teaching, explaining and encouraging them to do the right thing. Our time, effort, energy and finances are valuable resources that we invest unselfishly in our children. Therefore it is no wonder that we become emotionally upset when our kids defy us.

Try to remember this- the more we can give natural consequences, without an emotionally charged response, the more effective we will be and the more the child’s

acting out will decrease. By providing them with natural consequences we also help them to live with the consequences of their decisions.

The message to the child is: Acting appropriately earns privileges and acting inappropriately loses them. This will help them to make better decisions in the present and the future.