



Guiding Young Children: Encouraging Self-Control

Elaine Wilson, PhD
Parenting Specialist

Using Consequences as a Form of Discipline

Experience is the best teacher. Using consequences means letting children have the dignity of experiencing the results of their own acts. Just like adults, children learn from their experiences. They learn that all actions have consequences, and they learn to be responsible for their own behavior. Using consequences places parents in the role of an empathetic teacher.

Parents can say that leaving toys outside risks loss, theft, or damage by wind and weather. These are normal consequences of leaving something outside. If a child complains, the parent can say "I'm sorry your new toy is damaged. You knew that might happen." (Rather than I told you so!) Then the parent must not replace the toy but let the child experience the loss. The child who experiences the unpleasant consequences of behavior will be less likely to behave the same way again.

Parents should teach the child, before it happens, what the natural consequences might be. For example, the parent explains that running in the house or on a slippery surface can be dangerous. When the child slips and falls, the child has the experience of a natural consequence. The parent does not have to punish the child. Nature gave the consequences. The parent empathizes, "I am sorry you fell. Next time walk. That's the safe thing to do." Of course, you do not want your child to experience really dangerous consequences. That is why we change the setting. A fence keeps children from running into the street. We put soft cushioning under climbing equipment.

Family Rules

Rules will be different for different families according to the family values, lifestyle, and the ages of the family members.

The child needs to know the reasons for your rules. The reasons may be safety, convenience, courtesy, and/or honesty. The reasons for the rules show your values. Your rules show how you live out your values.

Once family members understand the rules and the consequences, they can choose to obey the rule or

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets
are also available on our website at:
<http://www.osuextra.com>



Consequences can be positive and negative.

experience the consequence. Children must understand they have choices and must accept the consequences of their choices.

An important part of the consequence method of discipline is for the parent to be willing to accept the child's choices. Consistency is the key. If the child chooses to break a rule, the parent must be willing to allow the child to experience the consequences. Protecting the child from the consequences or arguing about the rule undermines the learning.

Types of Consequences

Natural consequences allow children to learn from the natural order of the world. Drinking water quenches thirst. Not eating causes hunger. Water damages paper. If the child throws a toy on concrete, it may break.

Logical consequences are those arranged by the parent. A logical consequence must logically follow the child's behavior. For example, not having clean clothes to wear is a logical consequence of not placing dirty clothes in the hamper. Logical consequences are sensible results of not following a rule. It would not be logical to lose TV time for not putting clothes in the hamper. It would be logical to lose TV time for leaving the TV turned on all night.

Social consequences result from behavior with others. If the child fights with friends, the friendship may suffer. If the child scares others, they may stay away. The parent teaches the child correct social behavior. If the child chooses to act differently, the parent allows unpleasant social consequences to happen.

Consequences can be positive and negative. For example, if a child loans some clothes to a new friend, the child has the good feelings and friendship that comes with sharing. The child may also lose the clothes. Consequences teach us how to make decisions. Consequences help us estimate the risks involved in our behavior.

A child may do homework every night and see grades improve. Usually, the natural, positive consequences are enough. In this case, the good grades, the fun of learning, and the satisfaction of being responsible are powerful teachers. The parents do not have to add more rewards like money for good grades. Usually good behavior has its own rewards. Encouragement and praise from parents are always good additions to positive and negative consequences. Your attention and comments show you care.

Consider Age and Ability

Consequences are inappropriate for very young children who do not understand them. Remember that children do not think like adults. They may not yet understand our words and reasoning.

Changing the setting to prevent misbehavior and redirecting the child to appropriate, safe behavior works better than a consequence. For instance, if a preschooler broke a window while playing, redirect the child to a safe place to play. The child needs to learn the right place to play. If an older child broke a window, the child could pay for the repair from an allowance or earnings. The older child knows how to select a safe place to play and understands money concepts and making restitution.

Consequences Teach Responsibility

Kristin left her dirty clothes on the floor and never placed them in the dirty clothes bag as requested. Nagging, scolding, and threatening did not help. Kristin continued to leave her dirty clothes on the floor.

Mother decided to use logical consequences. She told Kristin in a firm and friendly voice, that "I will wash only clothes placed in the bag." After five days, Kristin had no clean clothes to wear to school. She was very unhappy to have to wear dirty, rumpled clothes. After that, Kristin remembered to place her clothes in the bag.

Kristin's mother gave her the responsibility for placing her clothes in the bag. Mother could relent and wash Kristin's clothes even though she had not placed them in the bag. This would not give Kristin the opportunity to take responsibility. If parents protect children from the consequences of their behavior, they will not change their behavior.

Parents need to decide ahead of time whether or not they are willing to accept the consequences. A parent not willing for the child to go to school in dirty, rumpled clothes would plan a different consequence. The consequence must relate to the behavior. Also dirty, smelly clothes can become a health problem and disturb others. The parent might be guilty of neglect. If you suspect that a consequence might lead to neglect of your responsibilities, select a logical example, helping with doing the laundry or no new clothes might be more appropriate.

Using Consequences Wisely

Plan Ahead. Consequences are learning experiences, **taught in advance**. The purpose of using consequences is to help the child learn to make decisions and to be responsible. If you use consequences as quick, last minute punishments, they will not work. For example, a dad yells angrily at his child, "Put away your toys or you cannot go to the park later." He is not encouraging the child to make a decision.

A more positive use of consequences might begin early in the day at breakfast. The father says calmly, "Marcus, I need to clean up the apartment this morning. Then, we can go to the park. Anything you do to help, like putting your toys away, gets the job done faster. Then we will have more time to play." Being calm and detached is the secret of using consequences effectively.

As with other forms of discipline, parents are most effective with consequences if they remain calm. An angry parent cannot apply consequences. Try to be objective in dealing with the child. Pretend the child is a neighbor's child, not yours. Remember to use a firm but kind voice, and to give the child a choice and a chance to experience consequences.

When to Use Consequences. Consequences work when a child is trying to get the parent's attention by misbehaving. Parents also use consequences when children fight, dawdle, or fail to do their assigned chores. Shawn learns that he will not get a snack until he washes his hands with soap. If he and his brother fight in the car, the car stops until calm resumes.

Be careful that consequences do not become ways children control the parent's behavior. If the child does not want to eat or ride in the car, experiencing the above consequences means the child avoids doing what the parent requires. This rewards the child and punishes the parent. Select logical consequences carefully.

Consequences are difficult to use. It is not easy to use consequences as a way to discipline children. It is hard work to think of consequences that are really logical. It requires patience and thought. It may be several weeks before a parent truly sees results, but you will if you stay with it! Parents feel more comfortable telling children what to do, not giving them choices. It is difficult for parents to let their children suffer the consequences of their actions, but this is necessary if the children are to learn from their choices.

Take a Time Out

A time out can be a good discipline method to use. A time out is **NOT** punishment. It is a chance for the children to calm down and regain control of their behavior. If the children are fighting, Mother says, "Sara, you go to your bedroom and Tyler you go to your bedroom for five minutes." You might tell the children to sit in separate, comfortable chairs to become calm. Some children need parents to suggest music, drawing, or outdoor play as ways to calm oneself.

Advantages of Time Out. Time out suits children between the ages of three and twelve. It is usually not fair to use time out with children younger than three. They may not be able to control or understand their misbehavior. Redirection works better. Older children, like adults, recognize when they should take time out to calm themselves. Holding, rocking, singing or reading may help younger children become calm. Be sure to explain that time out is to help your child become calm. A young child may need redirection afterwards to avoid the previous frustrating experience that led to the time out.

Plan Ahead. Before using a time out, sit down together with your child and discuss it. Talking about it when you both are calm is more effective than trying to talk when you and your child are angry. Tell your



Before using a time out, sit down together with your child and discuss it.

children, "The next time you fight with Andy about your toys, you will take a time out. I will send you each to your room for five minutes to calm yourself. I will tell you when five minutes have passed."

Use time outs calmly. Time out will not work when used as punishment. Do not scream, "Mitchell, I've told you and Amanda a hundred times not to fight over your toys. You will just have to take a time out. How about that?"

Stopping undesirable behavior is the objective of time out. Mitchell and Amanda will stop fighting when they are in separate rooms. The time out gives them a chance to become calm. Time out is a good remedy for fighting and other negative behavior that is used to get the parent's attention. If the parent becomes involved and yells and punishes the children, they have gotten the parent's involvement and will continue to fight.

Time out keeps the parent from having to decide who started the fight and who is to blame. Placing blame on one child creates more jealousy and more fighting. The parent may not know the whole story or have seen how the fight developed.

After five minutes, tell the child "You have finished five minutes of time out." Do not give directions such as "You can come out of your room now." Let the child choose what to do next. After using 5 minutes to calm down and regain self control, most children know if they are ready to play peacefully.

Problems

If time out does not work, think about other factors. The children may need more attention when they are behaving well. Some parents have difficulty with this method because they have a hard time staying out of arguments with their children.

If a child refuses to go to the assigned place for time out, simply take the child by the hand. You may have to stay with your child and explain how to calm oneself. You may need to help the child find a way to become calm. Some children cry and talk to a doll or stuffed animal. Some write or look at picture books. The time out experience does not have to be unpleasant, just calming.

Children may view time out as a punishment at first. After a while, they accept this method. They may even call time out on themselves. This is a sign of self-control.

Encouraging Self Control

1. Using consequences as a discipline method helps children learn to take responsibility for their behavior.
2. Consequences must logically relate to the behavior.
3. The child must see the relationship between the behavior and the consequence, or it will not work.
4. The child must know there is a choice in logical consequences.
5. Use consequences in a firm, kind, and friendly manner.
6. Time outs work well when children quarrel and fight.
7. Call time outs in a firm, calm voice.
8. Calling for a time out instead of punishing gives your home a happier atmosphere.
9. A reverse time out means that the parent takes time out. The parents separate themselves from the children and the situation to calm themselves and to gain self control.
10. Avoid time-out and consequences with infants and toddlers. They may not be able to control or to understand their misbehavior. Redirect or guide them toward correct behavior.

Reverse Time Out

A reverse time out is when the parent leaves the situation to become calm. When the parent removes herself from the child's annoying behavior, the child will stop the behavior. It is not worth the child's time if there is no audience. Children enjoy the presence of the parent. When parents leave, children lose something they like to have. Children soon learn that if they behave a certain way, the parent will leave the room.

Explain to the child, "I am angry or upset. I need to take some time out to calm down. I will be back when I am calm." Then go to your room or the back yard for a few minutes. When you are calm, return to your child and talk about your feelings. You have set a good example of self-control.

This technique is really useful for parents who fear they may abuse their children. Leaving the child unattended for five minutes is better than saying cruel things or hitting your child. If the child is on the changing table or in the bathtub, you must remove the child to a safe place first. Some parents stay in the same room but move to a comfortable chair or couch to become calm.

The Future

With new, helpful ways to discipline your children, you can feel confident about the future. You know your child better than anyone else. You can choose the most effective way to discipline your child. When you choose the discipline methods described in these lessons, you will be helping your child. Both you and your child will be happy about the results.

Remember that misbehavior is a normal part of childhood. No child is good all the time. However, if your child has severe behavior problems, such as repeated acts of violence, cruelty to animals, or great difficulty paying attention, these discipline methods may not work. You may need to look for help from a professional.

Practice Exercises

1. Try calling a time out when your children fight or argue this week. Notice:
 - a) How did I feel?
 - b) How did the children respond?
2. Try using logical consequences this week. Pick some behavior that does not raise your temper at the moment. It is difficult to use a new discipline method when you are angry.
 - a) What did the child do?
 - b) What consequences did you and the child decide on?
 - c) What happened? Did it work?

Remember it may take several weeks for a new technique to work well.

3. Keep track of the number of time outs used in one week; then, the next week. Try using less than 2 time outs each week until time outs are rarely used. Use redirection instead. Frequent use of time out may indicate that life is too stressful for your child. You may need to make some changes so your child can maintain self control. After a month answer:
 - a) Is my child's behavior improving?
 - b) Does misbehavior occur less often?
 - c) How do you feel about yourself as a parent?

A Record of my Discipline Practices

Check the blanks that apply to you.

1. Discipline practices I used this week were
 - ☐ Yell and scream
 - ☐ Explain reasons calmly
 - ☐ Remove privileges
 - ☐ Shame my child
 - ☐ Show disapproval
 - ☐ Ignore bad behavior
 - ☐ Scold
 - ☐ Praise
 - ☐ Compare one child with another
 - ☐ Isolate
 - ☐ Hit
 - ☐ Let the child make choices and experience consequences
 - ☐ Threaten but usually don't follow through
 - ☐ Distract and redirect interest
 - ☐ Prevent misbehavior before it occurs
 - ☐ Redirect child's attention

See How Much You Have Learned

Read the following situations and check an effective way to respond to them.

<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Consequences</i>	<i>Time out</i>	<i>Reverse Time Out</i>

1. Shiloh, age 5, left her toy in the driveway.
2. Thomas and Tameka are always leaving their toys strung all over the living area.
3. Todd, age 7, keeps pestering his mother for a cookie. Mother knows lunch will be ready in an hour. She tells Todd he may have some fruit or a carrot. Todd continues to beg, whine and argue and becomes upset.
4. Noah, age 5, is playing with his favorite red fire truck when Sarah, three, snatches it away from him. Noah is furious and tries to take the fire truck away from Sarah. Their quarreling is annoying you.

Answers: 1. A—Consequences 2. A—Consequences 3. B—Time Out 4. C—Reverse Time Out

Practice Exercises

1. Study the styles of discipline and decide what kind you use. Probably you use one style one time and another style on a different occasion, or perhaps you are half-way between two styles. Think about the kind of discipline styles you would like to have.
2. Observe your child for one week. Make a note of the styles of discipline you use when the child needs correction. Ask your self:

Misbehavior 1

Misbehavior 2

Misbehavior 3

What did my child do?

What did I do or say?

How did I feel afterward?

How did my child feel?

How did my child's behavior change?
(right away? during the week? long term?)

What style of discipline did I use?

Combining Discipline Techniques

Some parents like to use the 1-2-3 Method that combines three discipline techniques.

1. Tell the child exactly what is wrong about a specific behavior and teach the child the correct behavior, explaining why.
2. Redirect the child to an appropriate activity. Give the child a choice.
3. Let the child experience the consequence of the choice.

If You Want to Learn More:

Video:

VT 754 Responses to Misbehavior: Part II. Oklahoma State University Educational Television Services, 1997. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Videotape Library.

VT 349 No I Won't and You Can't Make Me! Boy's Town, 1987. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Videotape Library.

Paperback:

Crary, E. (1993). *Without spanking or spoiling*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, Inc.

Kersey, K. (1990). *Don't take it out on your kids*. Reston, VA: Acropolis Books, Ltd.

References:

Dreolirs, R. & Grey, L. (1968). *Logical consequences: A new approach to discipline*. NY: Meredith Press.

Shiff, E. [Ed.] (1987). *Experts advise parents: A guide to raising loving, responsible children*. NY: Delacorte Press.

Staff (1997, Winter). Guidelines for time-out. *Texas Child Care*, 21:3. Texas Parenting News insert.

For more information, visit our Web site

Parenting Made Easier...

[fcs.okstate.edu/
parenting](http://fcs.okstate.edu/parenting)



The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Bringing the University to You!

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

OSU extends credit to Betsy Schenck, Extension Specialist, Child Development. Virginia State University for initial development of this series and to Pat Tweedie, Debi Lawson, and Vicki Ehlers for content revisions.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Samuel E. Curl, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 42 cents per copy. 1102