

Natural and Logical Consequences

Using Natural Consequences

Children need to learn that when they do not follow rules, something uncomfortable happens. This discovery will help them to learn skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Natural consequences allow discomfort to occur naturally, rather than a parent creating a consequence to “teach a lesson.”

Here are some examples of natural consequences:

1. If a child does not eat at dinner time, and insists on continuing to play video games through family dinner, a parent might allow the child to miss the meal, not making special provisions or fixing him another meal when they get hungry. A child learns that when they do not eat, they go hungry.
2. If a child cheats at a board game and the parent does not correct the behavior, soon the child’s friends and siblings will not want to play games with them. The child learns that if they cheat at games they will soon have no one to play with.
3. If a teenager does not do their laundry, they may wake up one morning for school and realize that they do not have any clean clothes to wear.



How using natural consequences can help:

- Natural consequences provide a way for children and teens to learn from their own experiences.
- Parents that use natural consequences reduce threatening, arguing with, and giving in to their children. Natural consequences are imposed on the child because of the child’s actions, and the parents do not have to impose a consequence that they thought of. Therefore, the child has no reason to be upset with his or her parents, because the parent did not create the consequence.
- Parents who use natural consequences allow their children to discover the advantages of respect for order and following rules.
- Children who experience natural consequences develop self-discipline and internal motivation. These children learn to respect order because they learn that following rules is necessary for effective living.
- Children who experience natural consequences lie, blame, and hide less because they do not live in fear of punishment, instead they learn to take responsibility for their actions and focus on solutions.
- Natural consequences reduce rebellion and low self esteem because children are allowed to learn what is right and wrong without the judgment of their parents.

When natural consequences shouldn't be used:

- If the consequence in question is dangerous or harmful.
 - For instance, letting a child play in the street has a natural consequence and it is too severe to allow your child to be hit by a car to learn that it is dangerous to play in the street. Also, allowing a pet to become sick or die because a child has forgotten to feed and care for it is certainly inappropriate.
- If the consequence does not occur immediately after the behavior.
 - Chronic failure to do homework does not always have an immediate consequence. It may not be until years later that a young person regrets the decision to not focus on school and homework.
- If the consequence is really what the child wants.
 - If a child does not do chores around the house, who does it bother more, the child or the parents? If the child doesn't do their own laundry, it's fine to let the natural consequences happen, but if the child doesn't do the dishes, this affects other family members in the household and a logical consequence is more appropriate (see below).



Using Logical Consequences

Logical consequences are created by parents when there are no natural consequences, or when natural consequences are dangerous or inappropriate. While natural consequences happen as a direct result of a child's behavior, without a parent or caregiver having to do anything, logical consequences are created by the parent and should relate to the negative behavior.

Here are some examples of logical consequences:

1. A three year old who continues to stray into the street while playing is given the logical consequence of having to play indoors all day.
2. The teen that comes in past curfew must come in earlier for a few nights or may lose the privilege of using the car to go out with friends.
3. The child who ignores homework has a "homework distraction," like a video game, confiscated until homework is completed and turned in regularly for a week.



How to use logical consequences effectively:

- **Do not decide upon logical consequences out of anger.** There is a thin line between logical consequences and punishment. Often if you are handing out logical consequences when you are angry, or in a harsh, angry tone of voice, your child may perceive it as a punishment rather than a consequence.

- **Approach giving out logical consequences the right way.** Teach your children and teens that they have a right to make decisions regarding their behaviors and that they should understand that those decisions ALWAYS have consequences. Good decisions generally have positive consequences and bad decisions have negative consequences.
- **Be aware of good timing.** It is difficult for parents to remain calm when a child's behavior is upsetting. Always wait until you and your child are both calm and able to speak respectfully.
- **Be communicative.** If you are too upset to speak to your child right away you can say something like, "I'm pretty upset right now. We will talk after dinner about the consequence." Or, if you need time to think about what consequence best fits the action, it is okay to let your child know you need time to think.
 - When you give out consequences be clear as to what your expectation and the logical connection is, "You have not been doing your homework and I think that your video games are distracting you from your homework. You will not be allowed to play your video games on school nights temporarily. When your homework is turned in on time for two weeks, and you find a good homework routine, you can have your video games back."
- **Decide on a consequence and follow through.** Consistency is important in every form of discipline. It is necessary for your child or teenager to know that when they participate in a specific behavior it will always have the same outcome. They also need to learn that when you give them a consequence, that you will stick to it. This means, if you ground your child for a week, do not let them out a few days early because they beg, whine, behave cutely or are on good behavior. Letting them out early, or giving back what you took away early, teaches your child that when you tell them they'll be grounded for a week if they don't stop doing something, what you really mean is that they'll be grounded for two days. They may weigh the two days (versus the week you threatened) and decide that the consequence is worth it, and therefore continue the negative behavior until they're ready to stop.



- **Remember your role.** Be careful when disciplining your teenagers. Remember that a teenager's job is to become gradually more self-sufficient and independent from their parents. It is more important for your teenager to learn to make good decisions than for you to make good decisions for them. Work together with your teens and pre-teens to solve problems.