

INSIGHTS

Let consequences do the talking



Behavioural consequences are a parent's best friends. When consistently applied, behavioural consequences will improve kids' behaviour and increase personal responsibility.

Too often parents will over talk or repeat themselves to get cooperation from their kids. Too much talk and most kids tune out. Alternatively, parents who protect their kids from the consequences of poor or selfish behaviour aren't doing them any favours as they are robbing them of terrific learning opportunities.

I love the notion of behavioural consequences as they teach kids to take responsibility for their lives and to make smarter choices. They are also a non-punitive discipline measure, enabling kids to keep their dignity and ensuring that learning is maximised.

Parents can use two types of behavioural consequences: natural and logical.

Natural consequences

A natural consequence involves no adult interference. For instance, a child who leaves an excursion note at home will miss the excursion; a child who spends all his pocket money on the first day will have nothing for the weekend and a child who oversleeps and misses the bus walks to school. In these examples, children learn from the direct consequences of their own decisions and thus they are not protected from negative outcomes by their parents.

"It's your fault, mum!"

Some kids are experts at manipulating their parents to rescue them from experiencing the consequences of their poor choices. They'll blame their parents for not getting them out of bed on time, or for not reminding them about their responsibilities. It's best to stand back and let the consequences work their magic!

You shouldn't use natural consequences when safety is an issue. Act decisively to ensure your child is safe.

Logical consequences

A logical consequence is used more frequently in family situations as it is the type of consequence that requires some form of adult intervention. A logical consequence is used when a child's behaviour disturbs other people, infringes on others' rights or is unsafe. A child who makes a noise in the family room is asked to leave; children who refuse to clean up their toys lose them for a period of time; a child who comes home late from a friend's house loses the right to go out next time.

The 3 Rs of logical consequences

Consequences often involve the withdrawal of a privilege or a right. For example, a teenager who spends more time than agreed on Facebook may lose access to technology for a day or two.

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Restitution, or making up to someone for unfair treatment or for loss of a possession, is another form of consequence. A child who wilfully breaks his sister's toy may make full or part payment for a replacement. In both these examples the consequences are *related* to the child's misdemeanours, are *reasonable* and are *respectful* of their dignity.

Here are four simple tips to help make sure your consequences are effective:

Set consequences “like whatever?”

Much of your success with the use of consequences lies in the manner with which they are issued. Issue a consequence using sarcasm or anger and your kids will be angry at you. Issue it free from emotion and without being heavy handed and your kids are more likely to be mad at themselves.

When possible, negotiate consequences

If a child is going to friend's house for the first time at night, talk about their behaviour and home time. Also discuss the likely consequences if they don't stick to the agreement. As a rule, kids are more likely to abide by consequences when they've had a say in deciding them.

Avoid life sentences

Ban a child from a going out for a few days rather than leaving the duration open ended. Set a time frame for the consequences and remember the second of the 3 Rs – reasonable – means that parents shouldn't go overboard with consequences.

Don't acquiesce to terrorism, or guilt

If your child issues a threat saying something like, “There's no way you can make me come home at six o'clock,” don't rise to the bait. Deflect it by saying, “We'll talk about this tomorrow.” Don't give in to threats of running away or non-cooperation. “I hope you don't run away. It's great having you at home. I want what is best for you.” Avoid stating what you would love to say, which may be something like, “Yeah, try running away. You wouldn't last outside two days before you are back here begging for a good feed and comfortable bed!” Bite your tongue instead, and let the consequences do the teaching!

Kids in the early stages of adolescence draw strength from each other and rarely make parental challenges individually, or at least not without some back-up. “Everyone else is going...” “Bonnie's mum is letting her go...” are the catch-cries for this age group as they battle to get into the headspace of their parents. That's why they gang up on parents. Not only is it more effective but working together gives them false bravado.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.