

GUIDELINES FOR USING *Consequences & Discipline*

“We change our behavior when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing. Consequences give us the pain that motivates us to change.” -Henry Cloud and John Townsend

Discipline is an important part of our job as parents. This is a complex topic but I will offer some guidelines which I hope are helpful.

When our kids are young, it is our job to provide for them and protect them. Our goal in the early years is to teach them obedience. (Which can literally save their life and help them grow up to understand obeying God!) This will be done through training and may include physical discipline as I outline on page 3. As kids grow up, we can use consequences to help them understand cause and effect. We want kids to know the blessings of obedience and the negative consequences of disobedience.

Here are a few guidelines to help implement appropriate consequences for your children.

Dr. Jane Nelsen, author of the Positive Discipline series, suggests applying consequences that are related, respectful, and reasonable.

- Related means the consequence must be related to the behavior. (If you do a sloppy job on your chores, you will have to return to complete the chores in a satisfactory manner.)
- Respectful means the consequence must not involve blame, shame, or pain and should be respectfully enforced. (We ought not beat or yell at our kids, but objectively offer a consequence and let that be enough.)
- Reasonable means the consequence must be reasonable from the child's point of view as well as from the adult's. (It would not be reasonable to ground a child for a week for doing less than stellar chores one time.)

Natural consequences happen automatically without any action on your part.

(The key is you do not step in to rescue your kids.)

- Put off doing a school project until late the night before? Bummer, you'll have to receive the grade that you earn. (Parents should not pull an all-nighter to rescue!)
- Leave your skateboard out in the rain and it gets damaged? Save up your own money to buy a new one.
- Be lazy and skip out on chores before school? They'll wait for you to return to as soon as you get out of school (and will be done before any other extra-curricular) activity.

Logical consequences happen when a parent connects a consequence to a related behavior.

- Play over the time limit on a video game: the game is put away for the rest of the week/weekend.
- Lie to parents about where you are/what you're doing. Lose freedom/opportunity to do next social event.
- Get bad grades: have to quit extracurricular activities until you raise your grades.

Creative consequences are ways to teach a lesson when there is not an obvious or easy connection to be made. Extra chores, for example, are great for teaching lessons and for getting dirty work done around the house: window cleaning, weeding or other yard work, deep cleaning a cupboard or closet, cleaning sliders on the sliding doors, or any project you may need to get done. Other creative consequences might be having child write a paragraph or essay on a value/character quality that is lacking, or doing any hands on project that might benefit the family and teach a lesson.

Loss of Privileges

When a serious rule has been broken or you have used natural or logical consequences, but the behavior is repeated, you may need to remove privileges to teach a more memorable lesson. This may be missing out on a favorite activity, losing a device/screen time for a period of time, cancelling some up-coming event or plans.

*We should not remove things that are our obligation as parents to provide, such as food, shelter, and love. However, we can remove things that fall under the category of privilege, such as special foods or desserts, entertainment, time with friends, and in some cases -- sports or extracurricular activities.

The most effective way to use loss of privileges is to identify what I call your child's "currency"—the thing that will sting the most. For some kids this would be taking away a device; for others it might be cancelling plans or time with a friend. The idea is that whatever they miss out on should be significant enough to make them think twice before crossing a line again. Henry Cloud and John Townsend said it like this: "We change our behavior when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing. Consequences give us the pain that motivates us to change."

Biblical training and Discipline

The Bible is very clear that parents are called to train and discipline their children. A few Scriptures that are helpful to keep in mind...

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Proverbs 13:26 “Whoever spares the rod hates his son but he who loves him is diligent to discipline.”

Proverbs 23:13-14 “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod he will not die. If you strike him with the rod you will save him from Sheol.”

*See Hebrews 12:5-11

v 7: “...God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?”
v. 11 “No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful. Later on, however it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Be prayerful and read the Bible in context as you approach discipline. It is also wise to talk to a trusted mentor or Pastor if you need help discerning God’s will for how to discipline your children.

Discipline should always be done in love and with self-control. Your goal is to provide and protect, teach kids obedience and honor, and to shape hearts.

A child who is disciplined may be frustrated but should never feel unloved or unsafe.

You can set up training sessions for young children offering a gentle flick with your “no.” As kids grow up, spankings (we used thin rubber plumber’s tubing) can be given on the backside or thigh as a consequence. As you do this, it is best to have a procedure that you follow...

For example: Talk to your child, give the consequence, pray for/with them...move on. Avoid lecturing and yelling.

Using the Bible and other stories to help them understand blessings for obedience and the damage of disobedience is wise and effective.