

## POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

### USING POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

While in the vocabulary of most people all consequences are referred to as punishment, it is important to make some distinctions which are made by many child psychologists when talking about consequences. The following definitions may help.

**Discipline:** Training which teaches us to obey rules and control our own behavior

**Natural Consequences:** Things which happen as a result of an action. If we do not put gas in the car, the natural consequence is that it will run out of gas. If we touch a hot stove, the natural consequence is that we will get burned. No one has to do anything to make these consequences happen. Many psychologists and family therapists feel that the best way to discipline children is using natural consequences whenever possible, however there are many times when allowing natural consequences is not an acceptable means of discipline.

It is not usually a good idea to allow natural consequences when the natural consequence is not an immediate problem for the child.

Examples: Failure to clean the room. Failure to brush ones teeth. Early dating.

It is not a good idea to allow natural consequences when the results are dangerous.  
Examples: Playing with cleansers. Walking in the street. Driving irresponsibly.

**Logical Consequences:** Results which can be created but which are closely related to the behavior and which "make sense." There is usually some human involvement, such as a highway patrolman, an insurance company, a teacher, or a parent. For example, a natural consequence of speeding would be having an accident. The logical consequence would be getting a ticket, having insurance rates raised, or losing your driver's license.

A Logical Consequence should be:

**Related** to the misbehavior

**Respectful** to the person involved

**Reasonable** in amount

Example: A six-year-old spills milk on the floor during dinner. Possible responses:

"John, look at this mess. You'll have to scrub and wax the entire floor."

"John, look at what you've done. NO TV for the rest of the day."

"John, you're the biggest klutz."

"John, I would appreciate it if you would wipe up that milk that spilled. What do you think you could do to keep that from happening again? Are you willing to do that?"

Which response may not be **reasonable**?

Which response may not be **related**?

Which response may not be **respectful**?

Which response fills all the criteria by being **related, respectful** and **reasonable** in amount?

**Punishment:** Doing something negative or painful (yelling, hitting, insulting, etc.) to a child, spouse, or other person in an attempt to control his or her behavior.

Children develop the ability to control themselves when they are very young through the methods which we chose to discipline them. While children do need clear limits, punishment as defined above is usually not as effective as discipline through the use of natural and logical consequences.

According to Dr. Stephen Glenn, punishment can control others' behavior to some degree. But there are costs or risks when using punishment:

Punishment teaches children to be more clever at not getting caught.

Physical punishment is very hard to deliver consistently and fairly.

Punishment teaches children to punish others.

The punisher gets punished.

Punishment sets up negative cycles.

Punishment makes parents responsible for children's behavior.

### **MYTHS & REALITIES RELATING TO PUNISHMENT**

**Myth:** Children continue to misbehave because the punishment did not produce enough suffering.

**Reality:** Increased severity of punishment produces a revenge cycle that becomes explosive in the teen years.

**Myth:** Children, while being punished, are feeling sorry and planning to change their behavior.

**Reality:** Most of the time children are vowing not to get caught next time and/or how they will get even.

**Myth:** I must win power struggles outright in order to stay in control.

**Reality:** Children have power that teachers and parents cannot touch (and shouldn't even if they could). They have the power to choose their behavior. Normal children choose behaviors they perceive will meet their needs for belonging and importance. What teachers and parents must do to have long term success with children is to recognize that power and show children there are positive ways to meet their needs. Adults in power struggles lose track of the primary objective of changing the child's behavior from negative to positive and simply try to get even with the child.

**Myth:** Parents and teachers dislike using punishment.

**Reality:** While parents and teachers often feel guilty about using punishment, they also find the feeling of power very rewarding.

**Myth:** The child must feel worse before he or she will perform better.

**Reality:** A misbehaving child is often a discouraged child whose basic needs are not being met. Further pain and neglect (i.e., punishment) will decrease problems over the short term but increase them over the long term. (Jane Nelson *Positive Discipline*)

**Consequences** work best when they are set up in advance and agreed to by both parents and children. While it is always not possible, many problems such as broken curfews, fights with brothers and sisters, uncompleted chores, etc. occur regularly and the consequences can be planned and agreed to in advance.

While it is not necessary to remember the technical differences between natural consequences, logical consequences, discipline and punishment, it is important to remember that discipline should be done with an attitude of love and teaching children to make good choices, accepting responsibility for their actions and the consequences that follow.

### **Activities:**

Make a list of the five or six ongoing problem events that happen in your family on a regular basis. Then write a consequence for each of the problems you listed that is **related**, **respectful**, and **reasonable** in amount.

Think back to the last time you gave consequences to your own children. What type was generally used? How did it make you feel? Did it accomplish its purpose? How? How might using the natural and logical consequences listed above have helped?

### **RECOMMENDED READING**

*Developing Responsible Children Parenting Program* by Stephen Glenn

*Love and Logic Parenting Program* by Jim Fay

*Parenting Teens With Love and Logic* by Foster Cline and Jim Fay

*Positive Discipline* by Jane Nelson

*Positive Discipline for Teenagers*, by Jane Nelson and Lynn Lott