Natural and Logical Consequences

One way to discipline children is to reward them when they obey us and punish them when they disobey. However this has disadvantages, particularly in the case of older children and adolescents.

- It makes parents responsible for their children's behaviour.
- It prevents children from learning to make their own decisions and, consequently, from adopting rules for effective behaviour.
- It suggests that acceptable behaviour is expected only in the presence of authority figures.
- It invites resistance by attempting to force children to conform.

An alternative method is called 'natural and logical consequences' and this has certain advantages over reward and punishment.

- It holds children, not their parents, responsible for their behaviour.
- It allows children to make their own decisions about what behaviour is appropriate.
- It permits children to learn from the natural or social order of events, rather than forcing them to comply with the wishes of other persons. For example, the child who refuses to eat goes hungry, the child who dawdles in the morning will be late for school.

In situations where there is no natural consequence or where it may be dangerous to allow it to occur, then logical consequences may be substituted. For the consequences to be effective, the child must see them as logically related to their misbehaviour - they must "fit" the behaviour in a logical way.

BASIC PRINCIPLES
Several principles guide the use of natural and logical consequences:

Be both firm and kind
Your tone of voice indicates your desire to be kind, while your follow-through with appropriate action indicates your firmness.

Don't try to be a "good" parent
Refrain from overprotecting. Allow the child to experience the consequences of his or her own decisions. Avoid taking responsibilities which are logically the child's.

Become more consistent in your actions
No parent is totally consistent! However, increasing your consistency will let your children know what to expect and they will be able to make decisions accordingly.

Separate the deed from the doer
Your tone of voice should indicate that you respect the child even when her or his behaviour is not socially acceptable.

Encourage independence
Your children will be better prepared for responsible, happy adulthood if you let them become independent. Avoid doing for children what they can do for themselves.

Refuse to become over concerned about what other people think.
It is easy to become intimidated by the possibility of disapproval from parents and friends. However your long-term goal is to raise a responsible child and this is your business!

Recognize who owns the problem.
Parents assume ownership of many problems which are actually their children's.

Talk less, act more.
A child easily becomes "parent deaf", particularly if they suspect you are going to be critical of them. Do most of your talking when you are on friendly terms and keep talk to a minimum as you follow through with logical consequences.

Refuse to fight or give in.
Set limits and allow the child to decide how to respond to them. Be willing to accept the child's decision. You do not have to win, because you are not in a contest. Your goal is to help the child become responsible for his or her own behaviour.

Example: On Friday, nine-year-old Bill was invited to a Saturday matinee. He was to be at his friend's house for a ride at one o'clock. Bill's mother told him that he could go if his chores were finished first. Bill agreed; but he wasted most of Saturday morning. His chores were not finished by the time he was to leave. When Bill came to his mother for money for the movie, she said "I'm sorry, Bill, but your chores are not done, so you'll have to miss the movie."
"Aww, Mum!" begged Bill. "Can't I do them when I get home?"
"No, our agreement was that they would be finished before you went" answered Mum.

"Oh, please, Mum!" cried Bill. "I've been waiting a long time to see this movie. Please let me go."
At this point Mum left the room, so that Bill could not engage her in an argument. She then called the other parent to inform him that Bill would not be going.

Wisely, Mum did not fight or give in. She had let Bill decide how to respond to the limits. Kindly and firmly, she followed through with the logical consequences of his decision.

Let all the children share responsibility
When an incident occurs in a group of children, don't try to find the guilty party. Fault-finding only increases rivalry among children. Let all share the responsibility. Have the children decide how to handle the problem. Do not listen to tattling.

Differences between logical consequences and punishment

1. *Punishment expresses the power of personal authority:*
   Dad: "Tom, turn off that TV! Mum and I are trying to sleep!"

   In contrast, logical consequences express the reality of the social order. Logical consequences acknowledge mutual rights and mutual respect.
   Dad: (TV is blaring) "Tom, I realize it's Saturday morning and you enjoy your cartoons, but Mum and I are trying to sleep. So, either turn the TV down or play outside. You decide which you'd rather do."
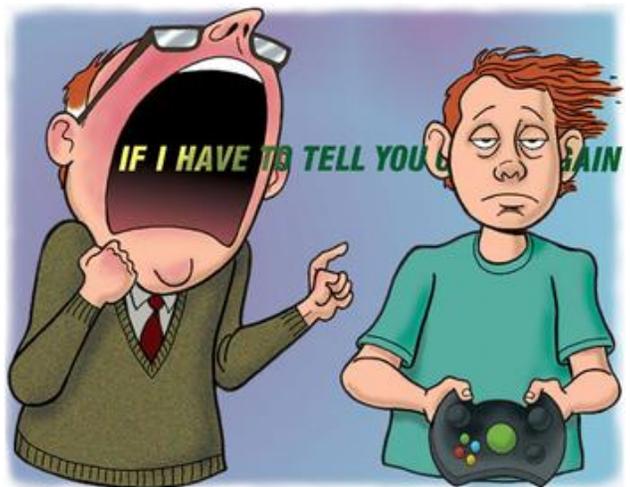
2. *Punishment is arbitrary or barely related to the logic of the situation:*
   Mum: (angrily) "Susan! I've told you a thousand times to keep your room tidy! I can't vacuum the carpets with all that mess on the floor, so you can forget about going out on Saturday night."

In contrast, a logical consequence is related to the misbehaviour.
Mum: "Susan, I'm going to vacuum the carpets today. I can't vacuum in your room if there are books and clothes lying around on the floor. So I'll place them in bags and put them in the garage if you decide not to pick them up."

3. *Punishment is personalized and implies moral judgment.*
Dad: (angrily) "You took my hammer without permission! Don't you know that's like stealing? You know stealing is wrong! And now you've lost it! Your pocket money is cut off until the hammer is paid for!"

Logical consequences are impersonal; they imply no element of personal moral judgment.
Dad: "How will you replace the hammer Hugh?"

4. *Punishment is concerned with past behaviour*
Ralph made an agreement to be home at five o'clock, but did   not arrive until six o'clock.
Mum: (angrily) "Ralph! It's six o'clock. You're always late! How many times have we gone through this? You never seem to care. You can just stay home for a week, and you can just forget about that bike we talked about."

Logical consequences are concerned with present and future behaviour.
Mum: (the next time Ralph asks to go out) "I'm sorry, but you're not ready to take responsibility for coming home on   time. We'll try again tomorrow"

5. *Punishment threatens the "offender" with disrespect or loss of love; it is a put down.*
Mum: (moralistically) "You didn't feed the dog so you can't play with him today. Maybe this will teach you the value of being responsible for your pet."

When logical consequences are invoked, the parent's voice is friendly and implies good will.
Mum: No, Tom; you haven't taken time to give him his food and water today. We'll try again tomorrow.

6. *Punishment demands obedience.*
Susan and Sally are disturbing the meal by kicking each other under the table.
Dad: "You two knock it off right now or you'll go to bed without supper!"

Logical consequences permit choice.
Dad: "You may settle down or leave the table until you're ready to join us."

In addition to these major differences between punishments and consequences there are important subtle differences. Anger, warnings, threats and reminders may turn a consequence into a punishment.

STEPS IN APPLYING LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES.

1. **Provide choices**
Choice is essential in the use of logical consequences. Alternatives are proposed by the parent and the parent accepts the child's decision. Then the child makes a choice without external pressure. The parent's tone of voice is crucial. It must reflect an attitude of respect, acceptance and goodwill.
Examples: "Michelle, we're trying to watch TV. You may settle down and watch the programme with us or leave the room. You decide which you'd rather do."
"If you plan to go outside after school you'll need to change your clothes."
"I'm willing to wash only what is in the washing basket."

2. **As you follow through with a consequence, give assurance that there will be an opportunity to change the decision later.**
"I see that you didn't clean up after your snack.. You may not use the kitchen tomorrow. Ask if you can use it again in a few days' time."

3. **If the misbehaviour is repeated, extend the time that must elapse before the child may try again.**
If children continue to misbehave, they are saying they aren't ready to be responsible.
"I see that you're still not ready to settle down and have decided to leave the room. You may try again tomorrow night."
If you have difficulty applying consequences, check the steps involved to see if you clearly understand the principles. To make sure your action is not punishment, but an expression of logical consequences;

1.   Show an 'open' attitude; give the child a choice and accept the child's decision.
2.   Use a friendly tone of voice which expresses goodwill.
3.   Make sure the consequence is logically related to the misbehaviour.

Major Differences Between Punishment and Logical Consequences

PUNISHMENT			LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES		
CHARACTERISTICS	**UNDERLYING MESSAGE**	**LIKELY RESULTS**	**CHARACTERISTICS**	**UNDERLYING MESSAGE**	**LIKELY RESULTS**
1. EMPHASIZES POWER OR PERSONAL AUTHORITY; MAKES A DEMAND.	DO WHAT I SAY BECAUSE I SAY SO! I'M THE BOSS!	REBELLION. REVENGE. LACK OF SELF DISCIPLINE. SNEAKINESS. IRRESPONSIBLY.	1. EXPRESS REALITY OF SOCIAL ORDER; RECOGNIZE MUTUAL RESPECT AND RIGHTS.	I TRUST YOU TO LEARN TO RESPECT YOURSELF AND THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS.	SELF-DISCIPLINE. COOPERATION. RESPECT FOR SELF AND OTHERS. RELIABILITY.
2. ARBITRARY; BARELY RELATED TO ACT.	I'LL SHOW YOU! YOU DESERVE WHAT YOU'RE GETTING!	RESENTMENT. REVENGE. FEAR. CONFUSION. REBELLION.	2. ARE DIRECTLY RELATED TO MISBEHAVIOR; MAKE SENSE.	I TRUST YOU TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE CHOICES.	LEARNS FROM EXPERIENCE.
3. IMPLIES MORAL JUDGMENT; EQUATES DEED WITH DOER.	THIS SHOULD TEACH YOU! YOU'RE NO GOOD!	FEELING OF HURT; RESENTMENT, GUILT. DESIRE FOR REVENGE.	3. IMPLY NO MORAL JUDGMENT; SEPARATE DEED FROM DOER.	YOU ARE A WORTHWHILE PERSON!	LEARNS BEHAVIOR MAY BE OBJECTIONABLE, BUT NOT SELF.
4. IS CONCERNED WITH PAST BEHAVIOR.	THIS IS FOR WHAT YOU DID- I'M NOT FORGETTING! YOU'LL NEVER LEARN!	FEELS UNABLE TO MAKE GOOD DECISIONS. FEELS UNACCEPTABLE IN EYES OF PARENT.	4. ARE CONCERNED WITH PRESENT AND FUTURE BEHAVIOR.	YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN CHOICES AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.	BECOMES SELF-DIRECTED AND SELF-EVALUATING.
5. THREATENS DISRESPECT, IS A PUT-DOWN.	YOU'D BETTER SHAPE UP! NO SON OF MINE ACTS LIKE THAT!	DESIRE TO GET EVEN. FEAR. REBELLION. GUILT FEELINGS.	5. ARE INVOKED IN FRIENDLY MANNER AFTER PARENT AND TEEN HAVE CALMED, IMPLY GOOD WILL.	I DON'T LIKE YOUR BEHAVIOR, BUT I STILL LOVE YOU!	FEELS SECURE ABOUT PARENT'S RESPECT, LOVE, AND SUPPORT.
6. DEMANDS OBEDIENCE.	YOUR PREFERENCES DON'T MATTER! YOU CAN'T BE TRUSTED TO MAKE WISE DECISIONS!	"DEFIANT COMPLIANCE." DESIRE TO GET EVEN ANOTHER TIME. DESTRUCTION OF TRUST AND EQUALITY.	6. PERMIT CHOICE.	YOU ARE CAPABLE OF DECIDING.	MAKES RESPONSIBLE DECISIONS. SHOWS INCREASED RESOURCEFULNESS.

PRINCIPLES OF NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

1. Reward and punishment deny children the opportunity to make their own decisions and to be responsible for their own behavior.

2. Natural and logical consequences require children to be responsible for their own behavior.

3. Natural consequences are those which permit children to learn from the natural order of the physical world – for example, that not eating is followed by hunger.

4. Logical consequences are those which permit children to learn from the reality of the social order – for example, children who do not get up on time may be late to school and have to make up work.

5. For consequences to be effective, the children involved must see them as logical.

6. The purpose of using natural and logical consequences is to motivate children to make responsible decisions, not to force their submission. Consequences are effective only if you avoid having hidden motives of winning and controlling.

7. Be both firm and kind. Firmness refers to your follow-through behavior. Kindness refers to the manner in which you present the choice.

8. Talk less; act more.

9. When you do things for children that they can do for themselves, you are robbing them of self-respects and responsibility.

10. Differences between punishment and logical consequences:

    a. Punishment expresses the power of personal authority. Logical consequences express the impersonal reality of the social order.

    b. Punishment is rarely related to misbehavior. Logical consequences are logically related to misbehavior.

    c. Punishment tells the child she or he is bad. Logical consequences imply no element of moral judgment.

    d. Punishment focuses on what is past. Logical consequences are concerned with present and future behavior.

    e. Punishment is associated with a threat, either open or concealed. Logical consequences are based on good will, not on retaliation.

    f. Punishment demands obedience. Logical consequences permit choice.

11. Avoid fights: they indicate lack of respect for the other person. Do not give in: that indicates lack of respect for yourself.

12. Steps in applying logical consequences:

    a. Provide choices and accepts the child's decision. Use a friendly tone of voice that communicates your good will.

    b. As you follow through with a consequence, assure children that they may try again later.

    c. If the misbehavior is repeated, extend the time that must elapse before the child tries again.

13. Be patient. It will take time for natural and logical consequences to be effective.

APPLYING NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES; ACTING – NOT REACTING; AND SELECTING THE APPROPRIATE APPROACH

1. Parents' typical reactions often reinforce the children's goals of attention, power, revenge, or display of inadequacy. To remedy this, do the unexpected; practice the principle of "Acting – Not Reacting."

2. When using natural or logical consequences, remember to remain calm, show good will, give choices and be willing to accept the child's decision.

3. Three effective approaches to problems in parent-child relations are:
    a. Reflective listening and exploring alternatives.
    b. I-messages.
    c. Natural and logical consequences.

4. The approach you select will primarily depend upon who owns the problem.

5. Your choice of approach will also depend on your estimate of the effectiveness of each approach with your own children.

6. Children will sometimes use and repeat problems to gain your attention or sympathy. If this occurs, discontinue reflective listening and exploring alternatives.

7. Overuse of I-message may cause children to become tired of hearing about your feelings. They may stop listening or "trap" you into using I-messages to give them attention or to engage you in a power struggle.

8. Some things children do should be ignored. Ignoring is a form of a logical consequence.

9. As mutual respect is established and the relationship improves, you may not have to use consequences as frequently.

10. Encouragement is implicit in all three approaches. Each approach expresses acceptance of the child, faith in his or her ability to solve problems, and respect for the child.

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