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With Phil and Bev Haas

The truth about consequences

Q *We have a tendency to step in and "save" our children from the consequences of their behavior. We know this is a mistake but continue to run interference for our children anyway. How can we overcome this inclination?*

A Failure to allow or attach consequences to behavior is a common mistake many parents make; most are experienced runners in the race of interference for their children. Yet, one of the most effective tools for teaching right behavior and correcting wrong behavior is the use of consequences. By experiencing consequences children will make the connection between what they did, and what happens as a result. They will also understand that their behavior affects others as well as themselves. By understanding the value of consequences as learning opportunities, you will be able to concentrate on raising responsible children, not necessarily being their friends and rescuers.

Parents need to raise responsible children, not constantly be their rescuers.

Positive Consequences

Positive consequences, or rewards, can be a parent's best friend because they increase positive behavior. To some parents, the use of positive consequences means that kids are being bribed or paid off for doing what they're expected to do. However, rewards are a natural part of our daily lives, given for acceptable behavior we want to see again. Bribery occurs when inappropriate behaviors are rewarded (for example, giving a child a candy bar when he's crying and screaming in the grocery store in order to quiet him).

Give positive consequences only for positive behavior. Positive attention and

encouragement are some of the most effective consequences a parent has—and they cost nothing! Adults are rewarded with positive financial consequences at work; children need rewards too.

Negative Consequences

All kids misbehave, and they need to experience negative consequences. If the consequences are given in a firm, fair, and faithful manner, they will be effective. Negative consequences come in two forms: natural and logical.

1. *Natural consequences* follow naturally from what children choose to do or not do.

Resist the temptation to deny your child the opportunity to experience the natural consequences for his or her behavior—obviously not at the risk of life or safety.

For example, if a child forgets to put her lunch money into her school bag, she will have no lunch that day. (No one ever starved to death by missing one meal, but she will remember the next time to take the money.)

2. *Logical consequences* are what parents use to show a child what logically follows when he violates family values or social requirements. Use the "When-Then" approach. For example, if your child hasn't cleaned up his room but wants to go outside and play, tell him, "When your bed is made, then you may call a friend to play." Match the behavior with the consequence to reinforce the relationship between the two.

If your child is attentive and works to make up for the misbehavior, and you are pleased with the attempt, you can give some part of the consequence back. For example, if you took away television privileges because your son and daughter were arguing over which show to



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watch but later both of the children apologized and worked out a compromise, consider giving back a portion of the TV time. This allows you to give them a positive consequence for peacefully solving the problem.

Most kids won't learn the first time around. Keep your cool, remain calm, and continue giving positive consequences for good behavior and negative consequences for misbehavior. Since consequences will eventually change your children's behavior for the good, you should use them even when they don't seem to be working! By allowing your children to learn the biblical principle that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:8), you will help them do right, and become accountable for what they do wrong. ■

'Home' Work

Identify what your children enjoy (activities, possessions, events, food, people, attention) and write those preferences on a sheet of paper. Keep the list handy until you know which positive consequences work with your child. Concentrate on rewards that cost little or nothing. (You can't buy something every time your child behaves well.) Next make a list of your child's behaviors that you want to change, and for each misbehavior list possible natural and logical consequences. With your two lists in hand you'll be prepared to allow or attach a consequence that will change your child's behavior.

Send your questions about family life to Phil and Bev Haas in care of THE LOOKOUT, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231 (fax 513-931-0950), or by e-mail (HomeLifeQ@aol.com). Letters used for publication may be edited for the sake of space, clarity, or confidentiality. We regret that personal replies are not always possible.