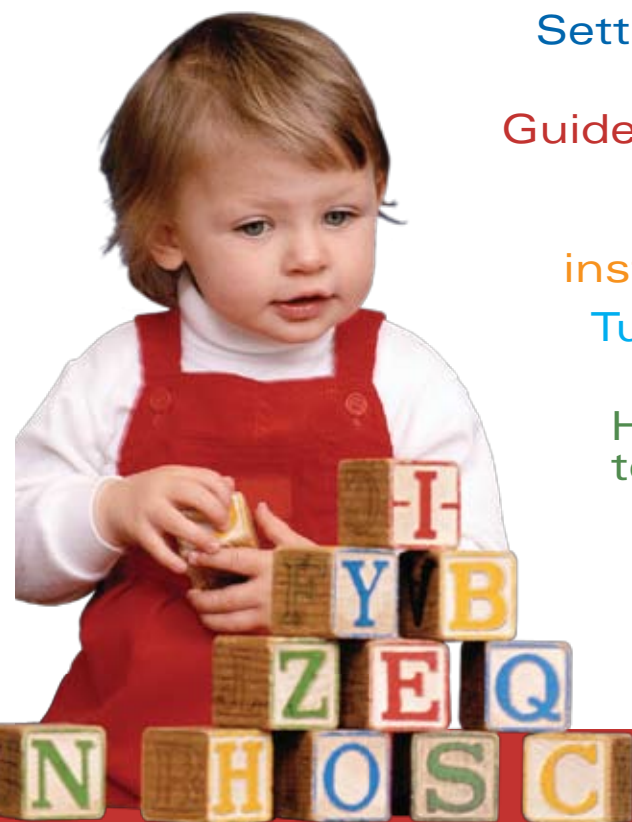


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# Common Sense PARENTING® OF TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS



Setting reasonable expectations

Guidelines for using consequences

How to teach instead of punish

Turning routines into traditions

How and when to use time-out

Planning to stay calm

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# CHAPTER 5

## Cause and Effect Using Consequences to Change Behavior

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**E**ffective parents use consequences to help change their children's behaviors. **Consequences can be defined as events that follow a behavior and affect whether that behavior happens again.** They can happen naturally or they can be "applied." An example of a natural consequence is the sunburn you get when you stay out in the sun too long. An example of an applied consequence is giving some form of correction when your child misbehaves.

There are two types of consequences – positive and negative. Positive consequences, such as spending time with your child, reading together, or playing, tend to *increase* any behavior they follow. Positive consequences are things children want, and children usually are willing to do what is expected to get them.

Negative consequences tend to *decrease* any behavior they follow. Examples of negative consequences are time-out or loss of privileges. Children usually are willing to do what is expected to avoid negative consequences.

When our teaching includes using consequences, we help our children learn what happens as a result of their behaviors.

## **Using Consequences**

Consequences are most effective and meaningful to your children when they meet the following requirements:

*A consequence should be important to the child.*

Children show us each day what is important to them. For example, if a child asks to have the same story read nearly every day, you know that reading that story is important to the child, and the storybook can be used effectively as a consequence. Pay close attention to your child's likes and dislikes because they change as children get older.

*A consequence should be immediate.*

Consequences that happen right after a behavior are most effective. Immediately taking a toy truck away from

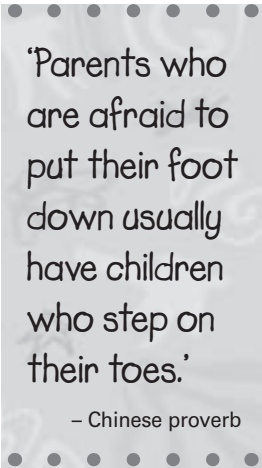
two brothers who are fighting over it is a more effective consequence than threatening to take the toy away and then not doing it.

A consequence should be appropriate in size.

The size of the consequence should “fit” the size of the child’s behavior. A good rule is to start with the smallest consequence that you think will change the behavior. For example, if your child cleans his room, he might earn a special sweet snack like a cupcake. But you wouldn’t let him have eight cupcakes for cleaning his room.

A consequence should relate to your child’s behavior.

If you use this type of consequence, children learn that their behaviors affect what happens to them in the future. A consequence should be tied to the behavior that earned the consequence. For example, if two children are arguing over a toy, you might take the toy away from both of them and let them know that when they can play nicely together, they can have the toy back.



‘Parents who are afraid to put their foot down usually have children who step on their toes.’

– Chinese proverb

A consequence should be appropriate to your child's development level.

Make sure you choose a consequence that your child can understand. A 2-year-old won't understand a lengthy time-out, for example.

## **Categories of Consequences**

Using the same consequences repeatedly with young children may eventually make the consequence ineffective. It is a good idea to vary the consequences you give, but still consistently use them in response to positive and negative behaviors. Here are some of the categories of consequences available to you as a parent. Remember to use the smallest consequence necessary to change the behavior.

### **Positive Consequence Categories**

**Activities:** Fun things kids like to do, such as watching videos, helping bake cookies, running through the sprinkler, playing board games, being read stories, etc.

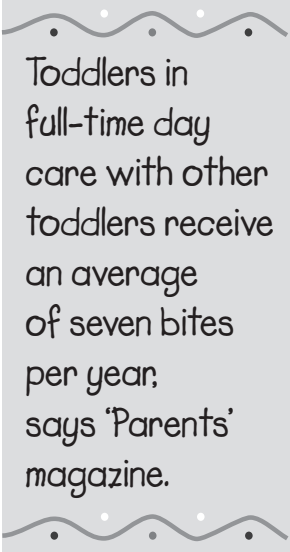
**Possessions:** A child's possessions are very important. A special toy, bicycle, or article of clothing could be turned into a motivator to encourage positive behaviors.

**Special Foods or Snacks:** Special foods are the "fun foods" that we all like to eat between meals. They can be treats like fruits, nuts, cookies, ice cream, candy, veggies,

salty snacks, etc. Another way to use foods as a consequence is to allow a child to choose what to have for dinner (within reason, of course!), or to let the child prepare part of the family meal, choose next week's breakfast cereal at the store, etc.

**People and Attention:** Children love to spend time with the people who care for them. Spending one-on-one time with a child, even just a few minutes, can make a big difference in his or her behavior. Use hugs, smiles, pats on the back, and high-fives. Charts and stickers are another way of giving positive attention to children for their good behavior.

We can't emphasize enough the importance of giving your attention to your child. Your time together need not involve elaborate plans or activities. And it need not cost money. One woman we know fondly remembers going to the airport with her father to watch planes take off and land. You can lie on your back and look at the clouds to see what kinds of pictures you can find. You can sit on the back porch on a rainy afternoon and color. You can visit a public library and read some books together.



Toddlers in full-time day care with other toddlers receive an average of seven bites per year, says 'Parents' magazine.

Studies show that kids will own literally hundreds of toys during their childhood, but none of those toys will mean as much as time spent with a parent.

## **Negative Consequence Categories**

**Redo/Overlearn:** Having your child appropriately repeat an action or statement they have just done incorrectly. For instance, if your daughter is running in the house, have her walk back through the room she has run through. You might refer to the repetition as “practice,” saying something like *“Now, let’s practice how to walk the right way in the house.”*

**Redirect:** Using gentle physical guidance or verbal instruction to change a young child’s point of interest. In other words, a parent redirects a child toward appropriate behavior and away from inappropriate behavior. If your daughter was playing with some of your CDs, you would redirect her to the toy box, where the two of you could find a toy to play with.

**Undo:** Having your child appropriately undo some behavior he or she has done wrong. A good example is when a child colors on the wall. Having the child help you clean the wall is a way to “undo” the bad behavior.

**Time-Out:** Removing a child from the fun things in life for a short period of time. Time-out is a very effective discipline tool because children can’t participate

or receive attention or reinforcement for the duration of the time-out. (For more information about time-out, see Chapter 10.)

**Remove a Possession or Activity:** Removing an object from the child and placing it in time-out for a short period of time, or taking away an opportunity to participate in something the child wants to do. An example of removing a possession would be taking a toy away from two children who are fighting over it and placing the toy in time-out for several minutes. An example of removing an activity would be withdrawing permission for a child to go to the park following inappropriate behavior.

**Ignore:** Another way to deal with negative behaviors is to simply ignore them. But use ignoring only if you can safely let the child's behavior continue until he or she stops. As soon as the child makes any attempt toward positive behaviors, quickly focus attention on the positive behavior by praising the child.

## **Putting It All Together**

Here's an easy formula to follow when using consequences with your children.

1. Was your child's behavior positive or negative?
2. If the behavior was positive, the child earns a positive consequence. If the behavior was negative, the child earns a negative consequence.

3. Determine how you can make a connection between the behavior and the consequence so the child can learn from the experience. For example, if the child's behavior involved not following instructions, then choose a consequence that requires your child to follow a set of instructions. Or if your child's behavior involved squabbling with his sister, pick a consequence where your child has to work cooperatively with her.
4. Choose a category of **positive** consequences that will motivate your child. A fun activity, such as helping bake cookies, might be a positive consequence for one child, but another child might prefer reading a story.
5. Choose a category of **negative** consequences that is meaningful to your child. You might want to use redirection to steer a young child away from a negative behavior, but you may choose time-out as a negative consequence for an older child. Because you know your child's personality, you'll be able to choose the category that is most motivating for him or her.

## **Helpful Hints**

When giving a consequence, remember the following:

**Be clear.**

Make sure your child knows what the consequence is and what he or she did to earn it.

**Follow through.**

If your child does something to earn a positive consequence, be sure you give it to him or her. Likewise, if you give a negative consequence, don't let your child talk you out of it. If you later feel that the consequence you gave was unreasonable or given out of anger, apologize and adjust the consequence accordingly.

A 2-year-old is unable to understand the concept of an accident. No matter how you try to explain it, he will take the 'assault' as a personal affront.

**Use a variety of consequences.**

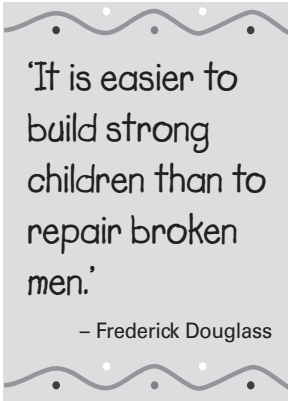
If you use the same consequence all the time, it will gradually lose its effectiveness. Try to use a variety of consequences and tie them to the behavior you are trying to reinforce or reduce.

**Don't lecture.**

Briefer is better; young children have short attention spans and will either stop listening or not understand what you are saying if you go on and on.

## Avoid warnings.

Warnings mean you are merely threatening to give consequences. For example, if you tell children, *“The next time you two argue, you’re both going to time-out,”*



then you’re warning them; you’re telling them what you’ll do the next time they argue. When you warn or threaten to give consequences, you and your consequences lose effectiveness. Instead of warning, give a consequence right away. Then your kids will know that you mean what you say.

## Watch your behavior when you give the consequence.

Be pleasant and enthusiastic when giving positive consequences. Be calm and matter-of-fact when giving negative consequences. Yelling and screaming are not effective when giving negative consequences. Kids won’t hear your words if they can only hear your anger.

## Summing Up

Consequences are the part of teaching that really helps change children’s behaviors. Positive consequences

increase the chances that a behavior will occur again. Negative consequences decrease the chances that a behavior will happen in the future.

Keep these ideas in mind when you choose a consequence and explain it to your child: The consequence should be important to the child, be given immediately, and be appropriate in size for the behavior and for your child's developmental level. A good rule is to start with the smallest consequence that you think will change the behavior. These are the keys to using consequences that are effective.