



EXTENSION

Parenting with Natural and Logical Consequences

December 2019

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One of the primary goals of parenting is to raise children to be fully functioning adults. However, it can be tiring for parents to repeatedly tell their children exactly what to do and how to live their lives. Not only can this become overwhelming, but also research shows it is less effective than allowing children to simply learn from their own mistakes. Allowing children to experience the natural or logical consequences of their actions teaches them how to make choices and be responsible for them. A natural consequence is a result of something the child does. On the other hand, a logical consequence is predetermined by the parents, explained to the child and is still an outcome of the child's choice. Natural and logical consequences come after the choices children make and are a product of their decisions.

Natural Consequences

Natural consequences are the naturally occurring result of a child's actions. It is important that the child knows they are responsible for their own choices and the natural consequences that could follow. The following are some examples of natural consequences:

- Against mom's warnings, Tim left his favorite toy out where his new puppy would be able to get to it. The puppy found the toy and chewed it up.
The child's choice: Tim chose not to put away his toy.
Natural consequence: Mom did not put Tim's toy away for him, therefore the puppy destroyed it.
- Despite dad's urging, Susan did not bring her favorite shirt to the laundry room to be washed.
The child's choice: Susan chose not to bring her shirt to the laundry room.
Natural consequence: Susan can't wear her favorite shirt to school because it is still dirty.
- Mom has repeatedly suggested Johnny take his rain jacket to school because there was a chance of rain.
The child's choice: Johnny chose not to bring a rain jacket to school

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Natural consequence: Mom did not force Johnny to take his jacket, therefore he got wet when it rained.

Logical Consequences

Logical consequences occur as a result of a child's actions, and are carried out by the parent or caregiver as a follow-up. In this scenario, the parent discusses the consequences of an action with the child, before applying the consequence. The following are examples of how logical consequences can be used:

- In Jessica's family, there is a rule that in order to have dessert you must first eat all of your vegetables.
The child's choice: Jessica chose not to eat her vegetables.
Logical consequence: Jessica was unable to have dessert because of her decision.
- Sammy's family has a rule that she can only ride her bike on the sidewalk.
The child's choice: Sammy chose to ride her bike into the street after her mom told her to stay on the sidewalk.
Logical consequence: Sammy's mom takes her bike away for the rest of the day.
- Paul's parents allow him to borrow their car to drive to pre-approved activities.
The child's choice: Paul drives his parents' car to the football game without asking his parents' permission to use the car.
Logical consequence: Paul is not allowed to drive his parents' car for the rest of the weekend.

The following are ideas specific to using logical consequences:

1. Children need to understand that their consequence is related to the misbehavior. Clearly connecting the child's actions to the outcome is important to helping them understand that they have a choice in their behavior.
2. Make sure consequences are age appropriate. Using a time out for example, should follow the rule of approximately one minute per year of age. Other options should follow a rule that allows the child to have something back that was removed in a timely manner so the consequence can be enforced again—especially if it had the desired outcome (e.g., don't take away a favorite toy for a month). Research recommends using mild consequences, especially for young children.
3. When possible, allow your child to help choose the consequences of their choices. For example, if a child is not completing their homework, then the parent could explain why they are concerned about the homework not being completed and then ask their child what they think would be an appropriate consequence if they did not complete their homework in the future. However, the parent ultimately always has the final say in this process.

When using natural and logical consequences it is important to keep the following in mind:

1. **Does the situation need parent intervention?** For example, if the natural consequence is not safe for the child to experience, it is the parent's responsibility to protect their child. Also, parents should determine if they are willing to allow the consequence to occur. When parents are not willing to allow a natural consequence to occur, then a logical consequence will be more effective. In Tim's example, if the mom did not want the toy to be destroyed, a logical consequence would be that Tim is not allowed to play with his toy the next day since he did not put it away.
2. **Offer choices.** Providing choices to a child helps them feel in control of the situation and places the responsibility of the situation on them. Examples: "Would you like to wear your blue or red shirt?" or "You can finish your homework and then play with your friends or you can choose to not play with your friends today"

3. **Use Empathy.** For parents, empathy is the ability to put themselves in their child's shoes and then respond accordingly. Using empathy includes: being aware of your child's emotion, recognizing the emotion as teaching opportunity, listening to and validating your child's feelings and helping your child label their emotion. Parent warmth allows for connection with their child's emotions, but the clear boundaries help clarify the rules that need to be followed.
4. **Help your child problem solve and set limits.** Take time to explain the consequences of your child's choice and help them think of options for how they can best solve the current situation or approach it differently in the future.

Using natural and logical consequences can be very effective in helping children learn how to make good choices and take ownership of their decisions. Furthermore, using consequences has been linked to positively influencing children's emotional well-being. The price your child pays today to learn commitment, decision making, responsibility and relationships is the cheapest it will ever be. Research has shown natural and logical consequences are related to healthier child development. Today is the time to help your child learn through their experiences before the consequences of their decisions cost too much!

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President for Agricultural Programs and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. 1219 GH.