

"I Broke the Rules and All I Got Was Hollered at!"

Do you ever wonder what makes a consequence effective?

How many times have you sent your child to his room for misbehaving- only to check on him 20 minutes later as he's completing level four of his favorite "shoot 'em up" video game? Or how often have you told your youngest daughter that she has lost her chance to go on a planned family outing- only to change your mind later because getting a babysitter was too expensive?

As parents, we don't always put a lot of thought into the decisions we make with regards to discipline, especially when it comes to choosing effective rewards or consequences. We too often choose a consequence based on convenience, not logic. As a result, our process of administering consequences winds up being every bit as impulsive as the very behavior that warranted our child's consequence.

How can this be avoided? Simply put, it's called *planning*.

Think about your child's common misbehaviors and develop a plan for dealing with them. Develop a logical plan, one that relates to the misbehavior.

For example,

- If your child is playing video games instead of studying = restrict video games for 24-48 hours.
- If your daughter refuses to wear her seatbelt = she doesn't get rides to the places she wants to go.
- If your son is teasing or hurting the dog = he can pick up the little "doggie bombs" in the yard.
- If your child purposely destroys property = he or she must earn the money needed to pay for it.
- and so on

Effective consequences share the following qualities:

1. **They are given immediately after the misbehavior.** This is especially true for younger children.
2. **They are given in a calm yet assertive manner.** Avoid being too passive or too harsh.
3. **They relate to the misbehavior.** See the examples above.
4. **They are fair.** Serious misbehavior deserves a serious consequence, but remember to keep things in perspective.
5. **They are given consistently.** Inconsistency tends to cause more confusion and more problems.
6. **They are used to TEACH the child, not to "get even" with the child.** "Getting even" will only cause resentment and can undermine the whole discipline process.

Without proper planning, parents might find themselves administering consequences that are ineffective and/or counterproductive. Some examples of ineffective consequences (if you even want to call them consequences) are:

Yelling or Nagging: Children have an innate ability to tune these out and usually wind up going about their business with little or no concern.

Shaming or Criticizing: Not only is this ineffective, but it creates resentment, humiliation, and a damaged self-esteem.

Vague Threats: "If you do that again, I'm going to take your computer privileges away," is a lot more effective

than "Knock it off or you're gonna be in big trouble!"

Overwhelming Consequences: OK, so you were really upset when you grounded your child for three months because he was fifteen minutes past curfew on a school night. Is that really fair? Be realistic. If you have to wait until the next day to determine a fair consequence- then do so. Don't give consequences when you aren't emotionally prepared to.

Consequences should be unpleasant, but never harmful or demeaning. Your child should come away with two things after a consequence is given: his or her dignity & a new perspective.