

Parenting the Preschooler

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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Natural and Logical Consequences

This fact sheet is about two time-tested techniques that can help children learn from the consequences of their actions. These techniques are known as natural and logical consequences.

They can be an effective tool with children who are three years old and older.

Natural Consequences

A natural consequence is a consequence that results from a child's own actions. For example, despite Dad's urging him to put on his coat, Tommy goes outside when it's cold out without a coat on. The logical result is that Tommy gets cold. This result is a consequence of a choice Tommy made.

Logical Consequences

Logical consequences happen as a result of a child's action, but are imposed by a parent or care-taker. For example, 5-year-old Sandy rides her bike into the street after she was told not to. The logical consequence for Sandy's mother to impose on her is to take her bike away for the rest of the morning.

How to Use Logical and Natural Consequences

1. Identify reasons. When your child misbehaves, find out what she is doing and try to figure out why. Children usually misbehave for these reasons:

- ▶ To get your attention.
- ▶ To get power.
- ▶ For revenge.
- ▶ Because they feel inadequate.

It's important to try to understand what is causing the misbehavior so you can take the correct action.

Sam, age 4, was playing in the yard with his truck. It was almost time to go to preschool. Mom called to Sam that he had five minutes to finish with his play and put the toys away. Sam kept on playing because he was having fun. "One minute left," warned Mom. Paying no attention to his Mother is a great way for Sam to gain power and get attention.

2. Decide whose problem it is. Some problems are the child's alone. As long as the consequences are not dangerous, don't interfere. This is a natural consequence. For example, if Sam is playing out in the yard when it begins to rain and he refuses come in, he will get wet. The natural consequence would be the discomfort of being drenched.

When Sam will not put his toys away, his mother has the problem. Mom really needs Sam to put his trucks away before going to preschool. They live in an apartment complex where there are many other children and the toys might not be there when they return. Mom has been working to help Sam be more responsible for his toys. In this case it's time to use a logical consequence.

3. Offer choices. When you want your child to do something or behave in a certain way, the best way is offer a few choices. Make sure you can live with any choice you offer and it does not harm the child. The consequence comes from the child's choice.

"Sam, I need you to pick up the toys right now. If you don't they will have to be put away until tomorrow. I know you will want to play truck when we come home. That won't be possible unless you put them back in the house now. It's your choice."

4. Stand firm. If the child chooses a consequence, follow through and don't waver. This is very important when you begin using this technique.

Sam looked at Mom and continued playing. Mom said "All right, I can see you have decided not to play with your truck this afternoon." Mom then removed the truck and put it in an out-of-reach place that Sam could see. Sam began to cry and throw dirt. Mom remained calm (it was not easy to do) and simply reminded Sam that he had made a choice.

5. Talk to your child about choices in a positive way. A choice given as a way to get something is far more appealing to a child than a warning.

Sam's Mom might want to rephrase her words. She might have better luck if she said, "Sam, I want you to be able to play with your truck later. Let's bring it into the house right now so you can play with it when we come home from preschool. I know you really like this truck, but if we leave it out here, it might disappear like the blue one did."

6. Let your child know when she or he has done something good. As soon as a child corrects his behavior, let him know you think it's great. All of us respond better to praise than to criticism. Sometimes it's the only way a child knows he has met your expectations.

Two days later Sam was playing with his truck again. Mom needed to go to the store and asked Sam to put the truck in the house. He ignored her for a minute, but when Mom reminded him that he was responsible for making sure the truck didn't disappear (either because he left it in the yard or because Mom put it away for a brief period of time) he picked it up and walked toward the door. Mom said, "Wow, I really like the way you're taking care of your truck. I'm proud of you!"

7. If possible, let the child help decide the consequence. Because the problem is the child's and he is in charge of the choices he makes, it's a good idea to ask him what he thinks a good consequence might be. This makes it more likely the child will do what you ask. And if he chooses not to do it, he was part of the team that decided what the consequence would be. Children often come up with better consequences than parents when given the chance.

Sam and Mom were talking about what might happen if he didn't bring in the truck. Sam understood the reason for needing to keep track of his toys and said that it might be taken away by another child if it were

left out. Mom talked about how it would be hard to buy Sam another truck right now because trucks cost a lot of money. Sam said that if the truck disappeared, he might be able to help buy a new one with some of the money he got for his birthday. They both agreed that the best solution was to bring the truck in when-ever Sam wasn't playing with it.

Advantages of Using Natural and Logical Consequences

- ▶ The consequence is closely tied to the behavior, and gives the child a chance to learn what happens when he doesn't behave in the way you expect him to behave.
- ▶ Because it separates the deed from the doer, it does not shame or punish the child.
- ▶ It is concerned with present and future behavior and helps children learn to be responsible for their own actions.
- ▶ It is done in a calm environment.
- ▶ It lets children make a choice.

Disadvantages of Using Natural and Logical Consequences

It can be difficult for parents to use natural and logical consequences because:

- ▶ The parent must be able to think ahead and come up with a proper response.
- ▶ The parent must not step in and "save" the child.
- ▶ The consequence takes time to put into action and often does not work the first time.

Some Guidelines

- ▶ Consequences work best when the parent and the child respect each other.
- ▶ Be kind, but firm. Know your rules.
- ▶ Be consistent.
- ▶ Separate the behavior from the child. When you give a consequence, always let the child know you love him or her, it's the behavior you don't like.
- ▶ Logical consequences must be tied directly to the behavior. For example, if Sam doesn't put away his truck, don't take away his television viewing as a consequence. Instead decide on a consequence that involves the truck.

Source: Rose Allen, *Positive Parenting*, Minnesota Extension Service, 1994