



Teaching Children Responsibility and Self-Confidence: Choices and Consequences

Joy Smith Ed.D.
Licensed Professional Counselor

(These topics are addressed more fully in the **Getting Kids Ready for the Real World** classes.)

Important Definitions

1. Choice: the opportunity or privilege of choosing freely
2. Reward: something given in return for appropriate behavior or good work, etc.
3. Consequence: an inconvenient result of a particular action or situation
 - o Natural consequence: A natural event following naturally from the event or misbehavior
 - o Logical consequence: An consequence that has a logical connection to the event or misbehavior
4. PP (Parental Prerogative): Because the parent is the adult, he or she (not the child) makes the final determination about the appropriateness of a specific behavior. The parent also determines an appropriate consequence and can change it if the situation warrants.

Choices and Consequences Guidelines

- ★ Remember that you are the adult and the parent. You are in charge. This is an important concept. When the family is afraid to upset a child and revolves around his or her desires, the child runs the family and has inappropriate power. When this is the case, children are less secure, more anxious and have a false sense of how the real world operates. If you set appropriate boundaries for your child, he or she will not always appreciate it and may become angry and upset. Your child needs you more as a parent than a friend.
- ★ Frame the problematic situation in terms of choices and consequences. Do not let the child blame you for his or her behavior or consequence.
 - Example: “You can pick up the clothes on the floor of your room or I will put them up for two weeks and you will not be able to wear them. The choice is yours.” If the child fails to pick up the clothes, tell him or her: “Since you have chosen not to pick up your clothes, I can only assume that you did want to wear them.”
- ★ Make the consequence natural and logical to the offense.
 - Example: “I’m sorry you forgot your homework but I’m at work now. You may remember that I asked you this morning at breakfast to check and make sure you had all of your assignments. I’m sure you will remember it next time.” If the child

says (cries) he will get a zero if it is not turned in today, respond by saying, “I will let you work that out with your teacher. I’m sure you will remember it next time.”

- Example: “Since you have acted so irresponsibly here at home, I can only assume that you will act irresponsibly in other places including when you are in the car, so you will not be allowed to drive the car until you can be consistently responsible both at home and at school.”
- ★ Describe in advance what behaviors are inappropriate and the consequences that will be used. Let the child know that even if an inappropriate behavior occurs that has not been discussed, you may still address it with a consequence due to PP-Parental Prerogative.
- ★ Consistency is paramount when delivering consequences. Don’t tell the child you will deliver a consequence unless you intend to follow through. Intermittent (occasional) discipline is usually ineffective and increases the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated.
- ★ When delivering a consequence, don’t argue or debate with the child. When faced with discipline, children usually become argumentative in order to sidetrack the parent or get him or her to back off of the consequence. Tell the child that you will discuss the situation at another time. Never discuss a consequence when a child is raging. Tell the child firmly and calmly that you will discuss the situation only when they are appropriate.
- ★ Consequences should be:
 - Immediate
 - Consistent
 - Logical to the misbehavior
 - Example: Destructive behavior - child must repair, replace or pay for the damaged item
 - Example: Failure to complete chores or homework – fun activities are withheld until completion of the task
 - Natural, following naturally from the event or misbehavior
 - Example: Failure to bring books home or complete assignments- consequence is poor grade
- ★ Avoid long-term consequences. The child will give up and figure he has nothing to lose by continuing to act out and the parent has little left to use at that point. Consequences should be immediate and short-term. They would be non-punitive and followed by a clean slate.
 - Examples of long-term consequences: Withdrawing TV or cell phone privileges for six weeks; grounding for a month.
- ★ Circle the airport only once. Explain the reason for the consequence only once prior to its delivery. Don’t argue to try to discuss the situation with the child when delivering consequences. Tell the child that you will have a discussion after the consequence. At that time, discuss with the child alternative, more appropriate ways they could have behaved. Help the child label appropriate and inappropriate behavior and develop strategies for the next time they are faced with a similar decision.
- ★ Reframe if the child tries to blame you or others for his behavior. Point out that no matter what others do, he alone is responsible for his behavior. Identify the variety of choices he had and the choice that was made.

- Example: Your child did not clean his room as you asked and he is not allowed to play ball with his friends. The child becomes angry with you and blames you for missing his after school play time. An appropriate parental response: “I can only assume that you didn’t really want to play ball since you choose not to clean your room knowing there would be a consequence.”
- ★ Reward appropriate behaviors. With challenging children, reward approximations to the goal. The most effective behavior management programs use both reward and consequences. It is important to affirm children for who they are—their very being, not just their accomplishments or performance. Take the time to compliment a child on their beautiful smile, their good heart and other internal qualities. This goes a long way in fostering positive self-image.
- ★ Privileges are earned—they are not birthrights. This includes:
 - Telephone/cell phone
 - Car
 - Electronic games and devices
 - Allowance
 - Computer
 - Sports/dance and other extracurricular activities