

# CONSEQUENCES IF . . . THEN . . .

Every day is a new day. It is a new day for you to make choices, set priorities and handle responsibilities.

Do you know that each one of our actions has a consequence? Everything that we do has a consequence! Some consequences are small and have little effect on our lives, while other consequences will affect us for the rest of our lives.

A goal we want for our children is for them to eventually take responsibility for themselves. Our children must understand that each action they take has a consequence. We must teach them to take responsibility for their actions and the consequence of those actions. We must allow them to experience a consequence.

## ALLOWING CONSEQUENCES

Allowing your child to experience the consequences of his behavior can be more meaningful than any action you could take. Helping him learn from a particular misbehavior and the consequence will give him understanding.

Consequences may be natural—a child who refuses to eat may be hungry before the next meal.

Consequences may be logical – a toddler who repeatedly goes on the street will not be allowed to go outside for a period of time. Logical consequences are used when the natural consequence would compromise the child's health or safety.

In the consequence the child may learn from the inappropriate behavior. If your child writes on the wall with marker, she could also help to scrub the wall clean again. Sometimes it is difficult for parents to allow a child to experience consequences!

Be consistent in allowing the consequence to be experienced by your child. Make sure that the consequence is the same each time and that you always follow through. **Remember that a consequence is NOT a punishment; it is a way to teach kids that along with freedoms and privileges comes the responsibility for their actions.**

## GIVING CHOICES

When children are allowed to make small choices, they are learning the skill of decision making. They feel independent and important. You are preparing them for big decisions in the future. *"Which shirt do you want to wear today – the red one or the blue one?"* Choices become more important as your child moves towards independence starting at 12 – 15 months.

## PLANNING AHEAD

You make preparations or have structured the environment so that problem behavior is avoided. Identify some problem times during your day or week and look for ways to help your child behave.

## POTENTIAL PROBLEM TIMES

**Shopping trips**, especially to the grocery store, may be difficult to manage with children. Keep trips short. Involve your child in the looking process. Make sure your child is rested and well fed. Bring along small toys to entertain him.

**Talking on the telephone** may also be a problem time. Your child can see you right there next to him, but he is not getting your attention. He is confused and frustrated. He does not know how to wait! Keep your conversation short. Use the telephone while he is napping. Give him a play phone to use.

**Waiting for an appointment** may be another problem time. If possible, plan for other childcare arrangements for your appointments. Bring along toys, snacks or books for the wait. Understand how difficult it is for your child and be more tolerant during this time.

Children like to be told what will happen next. Letting a child know in advance what to expect eases transitions and reduces resistance. This will become more important as your child plays more independently. For example when he is busy at play, let him know it will soon be time to eat.

# OTHER TEACHING TOOLS

## ENCOURAGING

Many parents spend a lot of time correcting bad behavior. When children are behaving well, they deserve parental attention and appreciation. They will learn that good behavior is a way to be noticed.

From infancy on, spend time with your child even when he is happily playing by himself. Tell him, *"I like the tower you built."* Or simply sit quietly and watch him play.

## DIVERTING ATTENTION

This works well for infants and toddlers, as they are easily distracted. Diverting attention from an activity that you disapprove of and by substituting another plaything or leading the child to another activity is an easy way to avoid a meaningless struggle. This is especially helpful when the child is too young to understand and learn from other methods. For example, your baby has found your car keys and is happily teething on them. You need to use them or don't want her to have them. If you take them away, she may scream. Instead, offer another teething toy to take its place as you take away the keys.

## USING POSITIVE STATEMENTS

Tell your child what you want her to do rather than what you do not want her to do. Change "Don'ts" to "Do's."

**Instead of:** *"Don't pull the cat's tail."*

**Try:** *"The cat likes to be petted like this."*

Use **"NO"** sparingly. If your days are filled with many "no's" for your toddler's behavior, she is probably not going to respond. Your goal for using "No" is to get her to react by stopping and at least looking at you. Use it only a few times a day for the really big issues. Your tone of voice must say that **this is important and I mean what I am saying.**

## USING TIME OUTS

A time out may be used to separate fighting children or calm an over-excited child. It is a time to get oneself back in control. The parent calmly explains to the child that he must rest away from the stimulation environment. A child may need to be held in order to calm him down. The goal is not to punish the child, but to help and support him so he can get back in control.

A baby will "ask" for a time-out by fussing or crying when his environment becomes too stressful. As his mother picks him up, she senses his needs and turns to shield him from the stressful environment.

Over-stimulation or too much excitement for a toddler may be expressed by crying, acting out, hitting, biting or throwing toys. He has lost control of his behavior and may need help to regain it.

## ESTABLISHING STRUCTURE

Structure comes in the form of daily routines and an awareness of the limits that need to be set for your child. From infancy on, when she can anticipate and expect the same routine each day, she will feel secure and cared for.

As she develops and begins to explore an ever-widening world, she will feel confident and safe in this structure. She will still protest the limits, but you know she needs your guidance.