

Natural, Positive, and Negative Consequences

Natural consequences are automatically part of positive and effective discipline. They occur without your intervention. For example, if your children do not eat breakfast they will be hungry before lunch. If they refuse to wear a heavy coat when it is cold outside, they will be cold. If children run in flip-flops, they might fall and get hurt. These are considered natural consequences because the consequence happens on its own without you having to give a consequence.

This form of consequence is truly the most effective way of learning it happens all on its own. You however, are there to be the hero who reflects on the situation with your child to give plenty of praise for a job well done or to plan for a different outcome in the future. This is an example of a perfect system.

But what do you do when it is not perfect? Is that even possible when using natural consequences? It all seems to make sense and flow easily. However, we know that learning doesn't only consist of natural consequences. You will need to use positive and negative consequences as the basis to your family's behavior plans and as a compliment to the natural consequences that occur.

Positive consequences result from your children obeying your requests, rules and expectations.

Creating and using positive consequences are fun for everyone. You and your children should sit down together in order to talk about their interests and to decide what they would like to work toward. Including them in this process gives them motivation to do well since earning the chosen rewards will contain many of their ideas.

Your children may ask for tangible things like toys or other items, these are fine things to work toward. However, if you choose to have other options available, I encourage you to think outside of the box and offer things like an extra snack, a sleep over with a friend, extra television or video game time, no chores for two days and so on.

Write the agreed upon rewards down in a behavior plan that includes what expectations need to be met in order to earn the rewards. You can use a charting system, a journal, or whatever works best for your children. Whatever you two decide, they need to be able to refer back to what they are working toward and what they need to do in order to earn their positive consequences.

Negative consequences occur in response to your children misbehaving. Just as was the case with positive consequences, you need to have negative consequences pre-established within your children's plan prior to using them when possible. Make the negative consequence fit the misbehavior. In other words, use a consequence that is related to the behavior that you are trying to change.

For example, if your child knows that they will serve a time-out and write an apology letter for pushing a sibling, they will be less likely to push given that they know what the consequences will be. This will be true ONLY if you follow through on the consequences every time the

pushing occurs. As an added bonus, serving a time-out allows your child to be removed from the situation in order to make a plan with you for better behavior choices in the future.

Never, ever give a negative consequence that includes you hitting or name calling. These behaviors serve as an unintended teaching tool. Unfortunately, this teaching is the opposite of what we are going for here. Let me explain: if you use hitting, yelling, or name calling to solve the problem of misbehavior, your children will likely follow your example to hit, yell and call others names to solve their problems. Your children learn that these are acceptable behaviors because they are following your example.

Tying it all together

Ok, so you have this knowledge of the types of consequences available and why they are effective, but now what? Here are a few things to remember as you strive to improve your children's behavior.

- Knowing ahead of time what will naturally happen, what positive things will happen, and what undesirable things will happen gives your children a good sense of their boundaries and what to expect from daily life. The best way to accomplish this is through open, regular discussion with your children.
- When a negative consequence is used, you and your children should plan to start over again with a clean slate after the consequence is served. Be ready to move on and be done with the misbehavior after the consequence is done. We all make mistakes and everyone deserves a fresh start!
- Consistency must be in place. Testing to see if the consequences are here to stay or if they will occur each time is common; especially in the beginning of a new plan. You must be consistent in order to gain the most positive results for your family, yourself included. This consistency will help to decrease the amount your children will test and, before you know it, testing the limits will begin to occur less frequently.

Of special note: Children who act out for the purpose of receiving attention will test the limits and the consequences even more so than others. This is due to their overwhelming need to gain attention. In their minds, negative attention is better than no attention at all. If they can ruffle your feathers and get further consequences, their testing behavior has just paid off (in the form of your attention being given to them) and they will be likely to do it again in the future.