

discipline for young children

lesson 2

Discipline and Punishment: What is the Difference?



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Lesson 2: Discipline and Punishment: What is the Difference?

Effective discipline helps children learn to control their behavior so that they act according to their ideas of what is right and wrong, not because they fear punishment. For example, they are honest because they think it is wrong to be dishonest, not because they are afraid of getting caught.

The purpose of punishment is to stop a child from doing what you don't want—and using a painful or unpleasant method to stop him.

There are basically four kinds of punishment

- physical punishment - slapping, spanking, switching, paddling, and using a belt or hair brush.
- verbal punishment - shaming, ridiculing, using cruel words, saying “I don't love you.”
- withholding rewards - “You can't watch TV if you don't do your homework.”
- penalties - “You broke the window so you will have to pay for it with money from your allowance.”

The first two kinds of punishment, physical and verbal, are not considered to be effective discipline methods. The other two, withholding rewards and giving penalties, can be used either as effective discipline methods or as punishment—depending on how parents administer them.

Mild or Harsh?

It is important to look at the way parents administer physical punishments.

A swat on the bottom is a mild physical punishment. While it may do no permanent physical harm, it does not help the child develop a conscience. Instead, it teaches him that physical violence is an acceptable way of dealing with problems. Parents should avoid physical punishment. If they find themselves using it, then something is wrong and their method of discipline is not working. They may as well admit that spanking is more effective in relieving the parents' frustration than in teaching the child self-control. More effective methods are needed.

Harsh physical punishment and verbal abuse can never be justified as ways to discipline children. Parents usually spank when they are angry; a parent may not realize how hard he is striking the child. Verbal abuse hurts the child's self concept.

Why Punishment Doesn't Work

Physical punishment usually doesn't work for several reasons. First, it makes the child hate himself and others. Physical punishment makes the child think that there must be something awfully wrong with him to be treated so badly. If children think they are “bad,” then they will act “bad.” A vicious cycle is formed. The child who has been treated harshly has no reason to be good. Or he may be good just to keep from being punished and not learn to be good because he thinks it is the right thing to do.

Children who have been spanked feel that they have paid for their misbehavior and are free to misbehave again. In other words, spanking frees the child from feelings of remorse which are needed to prevent future misbehavior.



Note: Since it is awkward to refer to the child as “he/she,” all references in these lessons to the child as “he” refer to both boys and girls.

Parents who use physical punishment are setting an example of using violence to settle problems or solve conflicts, Children imitate their parents' behavior. When parents use physical punishment, children are more likely to use violent acts to settle their conflicts with others.

Another disadvantage of using physical punishment is that parents have to find other discipline methods when the child becomes as tall and as strong as the parent! Why not start using effective discipline methods when the child is young?

Where reward and punishment focus on the child, encouragement and reality discipline target the act. Reward and punishment teaches the child to be "good" as long as we are looking.

When rewards are our chief way of motivating children we run the risk of creating "carrot seekers": children who are always looking for and expecting a reward every time they do something good or right. If we give a child money for making his bed this week, he'll wonder where his money is next week. Instead of being self-motivated by a desire to cooperate or help other family members, we have taught the child to look to us for his source of motivation.

Effective Discipline . . .

- Helps the child learn self-control
- Can be used with teenagers
- Builds the child's self-esteem
- Sets a good example of effective ways to solve problems.

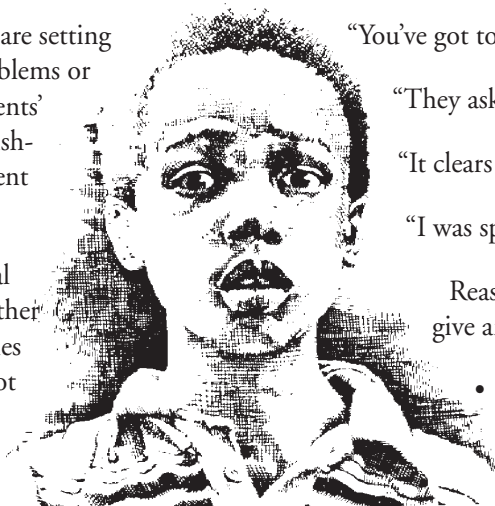
Harsh Punishment . . .

- Teaches the child to deceive parents
- Won't work with teenagers
- Tears down self-esteem
- Teaches the child that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems.

Why do Parents Spank?

Parents who spank their children rather than using other discipline methods usually say:

"Nothing else works."



"You've got to let kids know who is boss."

"They asked for it."

"It clears the air."

"I was spanked and I turned out OK."

Reasons for spanking which parents seldom give are:

- They are mad at their husband or wife and take it out on the child.
- They are angry and don't stop to think of better ways to discipline.
- They don't know how to discipline more effectively.
- It relieves their feelings of frustration.
- It is easier, quicker, and requires less thinking than other discipline methods.

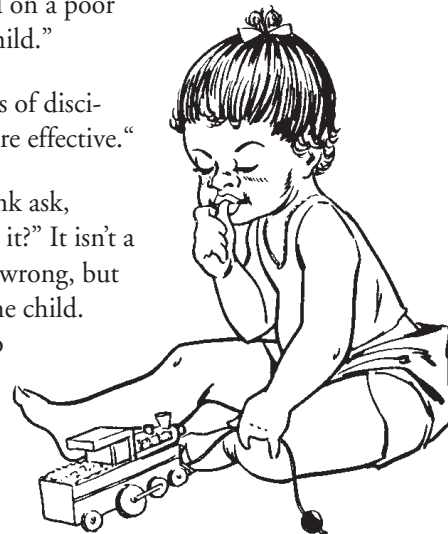
Some parents spank because they place a high value on obedience. Their whole aim is for the child to "mind," to do what he is told without question. There are times when a child needs to obey instantly, such as when he starts to run out in the street without looking.

When obedience is the parent's main objective, however, the child becomes passive and loses his zest for life.

The question of spanking is an emotional issue which parents feel very strongly about. They can be divided into one of three groups. They think either:

- (1) "Spare the rod and spoil the child."
- (2) "I can't imagine anyone laying a hand on a poor defenseless child."
- (3) "Other kinds of discipline are more effective."

Parents who spank ask, "What's wrong with it?" It isn't a question of right or wrong, but of what is best for the child. Perhaps parents who



spank frequently should ask themselves:

Why do I use spanking as the only way to discipline my child?

Does spanking work?

How did I feel when I was spanked as a child?

Did it make me stop doing what I was spanked for,
or—

Did I sneak around and try not to get caught doing it?

Often, attitudes toward physical punishment reflect religious beliefs and ideas about what children are like. Child development educators believe that the child is born neither good nor bad; they have the possibility of becoming good or bad according to how they are treated, the kind of experiences they have, and their reaction to their environment. Since these educators believe that children are not naturally bad, they think children need to be disciplined in ways which help them learn to do what is “right” rather than be punished.

Harsh discipline focuses anger on the parent.



Effective Discipline allows children to “hurt from the inside out” and focus on their actions.

Using Consequences as a Form of Discipline

Letting children experience the consequences of their decisions is a “hassle-free” way to discipline young people. Children learn from experiences, just like adults. We call it learning the “hard way.” The child learns that every act has a consequence for which he is responsible.

Parents can declare that the consequence of not coming to the dinner table in time to eat is that the child does not eat his dinner that evening. Hunger is a natural consequence of not eating. If the child complains, mother can say, “I’m sorry you feel hungry now. It’s too bad, but you’ll have to wait for breakfast.” The child who experiences the unpleasant consequences of his behavior will be less likely to act that way again.

Parents should tell the child, before it happens, what the consequences are for breaking a rule. If the child knows that the consequence of not getting to the dinner table in time to eat with the family is not eating, then he has a choice. He can choose to get home in time to eat, or he can choose to be late and not eat. He must understand that he has a choice and that he must accept the consequences of that choice.

The child also needs to know the reason for the consequence; for example, it is extra work to keep food warm and inconsiderate of other family members.

It is important, too, that parents be willing to accept the child’s decision; that is, they must be willing to allow the child to go without dinner if he chooses to miss the meal. A general rule of thumb is: always give a couple of choices, provided they are choices the parent can live with.

Natural Consequences

Natural consequences allow children to learn from the natural order of the world. For example, if the child doesn’t eat, he will get hungry. If he doesn’t do his homework, he will get a low grade. The parent allows unpleasant but natural consequences to happen when a child does not act in a desirable way.

Logical Consequences

Logical consequences are arranged by parents. The consequence must logically follow the child’s behavior. For example, not having clean clothes to wear is a logical consequence of not placing dirty clothes in the hamper.

Consequences Teach Responsibility

Kristin left her dirty clothes on the floor and never placed them in the dirty clothes bag as mother requested. Nagging, scolding, and threatening did no good. Kristin continued to leave her dirty clothes on the floor.

Mother decided to use logical consequences. She told Kristin, in a firm and friendly voice, that in the future she would wash only clothes that were placed in the bag. After five days, Kristin had no clean clothes to wear to school and she was very unhappy to have to wear dirty, rumpled clothes. After that, Kristin remembered to place her clothes in the bag.

Kristin's mother gave her the responsibility for placing her clothes in the proper place to be washed. If mother had relented and washed Kristin's clothes when she had not placed them in the bag, she would have deprived her of an opportunity to learn to take responsibility for herself. If parents protect children from the consequences of their behavior, they will not change their behavior.

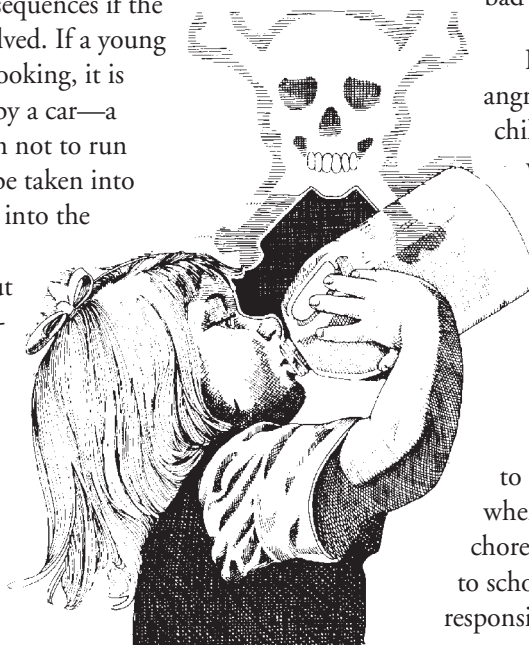
Some parents would not be willing for their child to go to school in dirty, rumpled clothes. Only they can decide if they want to offer the child that particular consequence.

Using consequences can help a child develop a sense of accountability. It leads to warmer relationships between parents and children and to fewer conflicts. The situation itself provides the lesson to the child.

Natural Consequences Cannot Be Used in all Situations

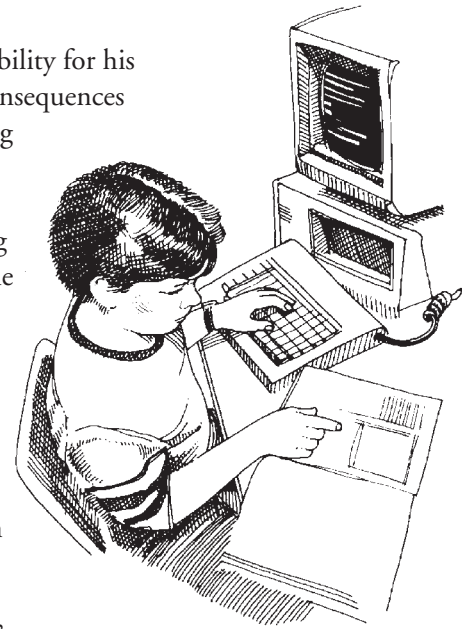
Parents cannot use natural consequences if the health or safety of the child is involved. If a young child runs into the street without looking, it is not possible to wait until he is hit by a car—a natural consequence—to teach him not to run into the street. Instead, he should be taken into the house and told, "Since you ran into the street without looking, you cannot play outside now. You can come out when you decide to look before going into the street."

This is a logical consequence. Because running into the street can harm the child, he cannot play outside until he learns to play safely in the yard. He has a choice; he can stay out of the street or he can go inside.



He is given responsibility for his behavior and any consequences he experiences (going inside) are the result of his own behavior. You can begin giving choices as soon as the child can experience the consequence of his behavior. For example, a very young child who plays with his food instead of eating can be lovingly removed from his highchair and told, "All done!"

It won't take long before he sees he has a choice: he can be up in the highchair eating and getting positive attention from the parent; or he can be hungry on the floor.



Consequences Are Learning Experiences

The purpose of using consequences is to help the child learn to make decisions and to be responsible for his own behavior. Consequences are learning experiences, not punishment. For example, if father yells angrily at his child, "Put up your toys or you can't watch TV," he is not encouraging the child to make a responsible decision. However, if he says calmly and in a friendly voice, "Stuart, feel free to watch TV as soon as your toys are picked up," he allows Stuart to make a choice. The secret of using consequences effectively is to stay calm and detached. Allow the consequences to be the "bad guy"—not you!

Parents cannot apply consequences if they are angry. They cannot conceal their anger from the child—their voices will give them away. Try to view the situation objectively—as though the child were a neighbor's child and not your own—and administer the consequences in a firm and kindly manner. Remember that giving a child a choice and allowing him to experience the consequences is one of the best ways that children learn.

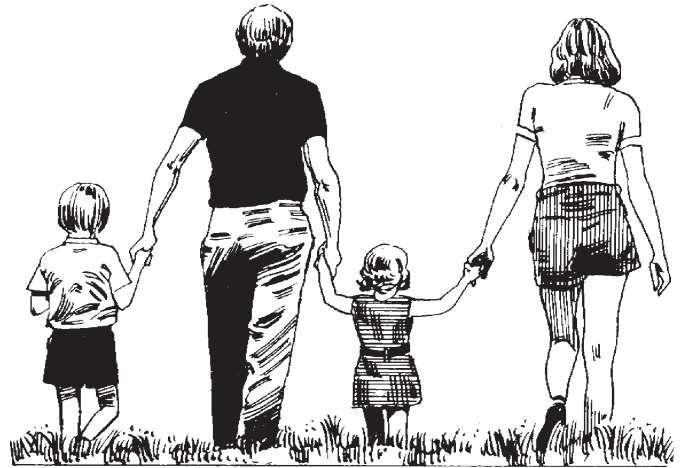
Consequences work when the child is trying to get the parent's attention by misbehaving and when children fight, dawdle, and fail to do their chores. Consequences can be used to get children to school on time, to meals on time, and to take responsibility for homework. The child learns that

if he doesn't pick up his toys, he can't go out and play; if he doesn't wash his hands before meals, he won't be served any food; and if he fights with his brother while in the car, the car will be stopped until calm resumes.

Using Consequences Takes Practice

It is not easy to use consequences as a way to discipline children. It is hard work to think of consequences that really are logical. And it requires lots of patience! Sometimes it takes several weeks to get results.

Parents are so used to telling children what to do that it is very difficult to sit back and let the child experience the consequences of his actions. The effort is well worth it, however, because you are sending a powerful message to the child that says, "you are capable of thinking for yourself."



The differences between consequences and punishment are:

Consequences

calm tone of voice

friendly but firm attitude

willing to accept the child's decision

Punishment

angry tone of voice

hostile attitude

unwilling to give a choice

DISCIPLINE VS PUNISHMENT

To Discipline Effectively,

Think About These Ideas:

1. Effective discipline methods work better than punishment in teaching children how to behave.
2. The more parents use effective discipline methods, the less children need punishment.
3. There is no excuse for using physical or verbal punishment to discipline a child.
4. Using consequences as a discipline method helps children learn to take responsibility for their behavior.
5. Consequences must be logically related to the misbehavior.
6. The child must see the relationship between his misbehavior and the consequences or it will not work.
7. The child must know he has a choice when consequences are used.
8. Use consequences in a firm, kind, friendly manner.

SEE HOW MUCH YOU HAVE LEARNED!

Place a check by the phrase which best completes the sentence.

1. Harsh punishment teaches a child

- _____ a. self-control.
- _____ b. to use violence to solve problems.
- _____ c. to respect his parents.

2. Effective discipline methods help children learn

- _____ a. to behave according to their ideas of right and wrong.
- _____ b. to be sneaky and not get caught misbehaving.
- _____ c. to fear their parents

3. Child development educators think that children are born

- _____ a. bad.
- _____ b. good.
- _____ c. with the possibility of becoming either good or bad.

4. A natural consequence of leaving dirty clothes on the floor is

- _____ a. having to wear dirty clothes.
- _____ b. not being able to watch TV.
- _____ c. having a parent pick up after you.

Practice Exercises

1. Take a good look at the way you discipline your children this week. Make a note below of each occurrence.

What the child did:

What I did:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Then, ask yourself: "Did the discipline work?" "Would I do the same again?" "Can I think of a better way to handle it next time?"

3. Try using logical consequences this week. Pick some behavior that doesn't get you "uptight." It is difficult to learn a new discipline method when you are upset.

- (a) What did the child do?
- (b) What consequences did you and the child decide on?
- (c) What happened? Did it work?

4. A
3. C
2. A
1. B

ANSWERS

A RECORD OF MY DISCIPLINE PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECTS*

Complete one week after studying Lesson 2.

Check the blanks that apply to you.

1. The way I usually discipline:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>_____ Yell and scream</p> <p>_____ Explain reasons calmly</p> <p>_____ Remove privileges</p> <p>_____ Give choices</p> <p>_____ Show disapproval</p> <p>_____ Ignore misbehavior</p> <p>_____ Scold</p> | <p>_____ Isolate</p> <p>_____ Spank</p> <p>_____ Let the child experience the consequences</p> <p>_____ Threaten, but don't follow through</p> <p>_____ Distract</p> |
|--|--|

2. During the past week, I:

	More	Less	About the same
Acted calmly	_____	_____	_____
Acted firmly and kindly	_____	_____	_____
Used kind words, not unkind words	_____	_____	_____
Gave choices and let the child learn from the consequences	_____	_____	_____

3. The atmosphere in our home has changed to one of:

	More	Less	About the same
Friendliness	_____	_____	_____
Cooperation	_____	_____	_____
Understanding	_____	_____	_____
Confusion	_____	_____	_____
Fun	_____	_____	_____
Hostility	_____	_____	_____
Tension	_____	_____	_____

*Adapted from Practical Education for Parenting by Kent G. Hamdorf, Extension Specialist, Human Relations Family Development, Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, 1978.