

Consequences That Teach

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There is a disturbing new parenting trend for "creative consequences." Surely you've heard of the dad who shot his daughter's laptop, or the "Ohio Mom" who posted an X on her daughter's face and shamed her on Facebook, or most recently the step-mom who made her daughter wear embarrassing clothing to school so that she would be bullied.

What is truly shocking is the number of people supporting public humiliation by parents as a punishment or discipline tactic!

But is shaming children really the way to go? Is it effective?

Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW has spent the last 12 years researching shame, guilt, and vulnerability. She states: "Shame, blame, disrespect, betrayal, and the withholding of affection damage the roots from which love grows." and very importantly "Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change."

Giving consequences with the intention of shaming, hurting, or humiliating your child is damaging. Sure, they may "work," but at what cost?

The purposes of consequences, however, should not be to make us famous or earn us a pat on the back from other parents, but to teach the child in a constructive way.

Shame and humiliation create fear, and research indicates that the brain operates differently under fear. Under this threat, the brain reacts with increased blood flow to the survival centers of the brain and decreased blood flow to the higher thought centers. When the brain goes into this "survival mode," it becomes less capable of planning, receiving information, classifying data, and problem solving.

Becky Bailey wrote this in her book *Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline*:
"Children under threat make choices that are biologically driven. Over time, this approach creates impulsive children who resist change and lack the ability to solve problems constructively."

GUIDE TO GIVING CONSEQUENCES THAT TEACH:

1. Give consequences with the intention of teaching, not the intention of punishing or making the child feel bad. Intention is important because the intention you have in your mind will influence the language and tone you use when you deliver the consequence. Be sure to be empathetic when delivering the consequence. Empathy calms the brain, removes the threat, and allows a person to take responsibility for this own behavior.

2. Let natural consequences happen where appropriate. Often we try to either rescue our child from the natural consequences of their actions OR we compound it by adding additional punishments on top of it. Let's say your child left her toy in the driveway and it got ran over. Rescuing would be buying her a new toy immediately. Adding additional punishment would be grounding her for leaving it outside. The natural consequence, however, is simply that now her toy is broken. If she wants to replace it, she can earn the money to do so by doing extra chores.

3. Imposed consequences should be related to the offense. If your child hits his brother, then taking away his iPad for a period of time doesn't teach what he should do when he hurts his brother. A related (or logical) consequence would be to have him problem solve a way to repair the relationship with his brother (write him a note, make him a card, etc) and to talk about ways of handling his frustration or anger so that he has tools besides hitting (deep breaths, walking away, clapping, hitting a pillow).

4. Problem-solving is a great way to teach children how to be accountable and responsible. The more involved they are in the process, the more they learn. Most times, problem-solving is the best way to go. Teach your child the process of righting wrongs and repairing rifts in relationships. These skills will serve your child all of his life.

5. Don't bring it up. After the consequence has been given or the problem has been solved, it's over. Don't rehash the incident, but get on with a pleasant day.

6. Connect. Make sure your child knows it was her behavior you didn't approve of, not HER. Find ways to reconnect. This models for your child what you were just teaching; how to repair relationships.

For more on consequences, visit [What's the Deal With Consequences](#).

Ultimately, our goal is to raise responsible children. Teaching through natural or logical consequences or problem solving isn't going to get you any media coverage, but it will get you a responsible child who doesn't resent you for years to come.

<http://www.positive-parents.org/2013/05/consequences-that-teach.html?m=1>