



## Setting Logical Consequences to Reduce Unwanted Behaviors

Sometimes natural consequences don't work because they aren't seen as a meaningful consequence to your child, or parents just can't tolerate the consequence (e.g. failing school, getting kicked off a sports team, getting in trouble with the law, etc.)

When natural consequences aren't working or tolerable, parents need a different game plan. Logical consequences are another way to reduce unwanted behaviors. **Logical consequences are designed to directly relate to the inappropriate behavior; not to threaten or punish your child.** A logical consequence for your child's continued substance misuse might be losing access to the car for a week. Or if your child is an hour late for their curfew, a logical consequence could be to deduct an hour from their curfew for the next week.

### Examples of Logical Consequences that Other Parents Have Used

It takes a little forethought and creativity to come up with a logical consequence that might be helpful in reducing unwanted behaviors. Here are some examples that other parents have shared:

- **Assign Extra Chores:** If your child living with you is not completing the chores requested of them, request that they complete those chores and an extra added chore for a week. Some parents keep a JOB Jar that includes cleaning toilets, cleaning up after the dog outside, raking leaves, weeding the garden, cleaning out a closet, emptying all the waste baskets, etc.
- **Make Restitution:** When your child's actions hurt another person or damage property, parents have the perfect opportunity to require they make amends as a logical consequence. Restitution gives a person a chance to try and repair some of the damage that may have been done and promotes empathy and responsibility.

For example, if your child damages the car, they should work to pay for the repairs. Or, if your child takes money from you to buy drugs, they would work out a repayment plan with you.

- **Restricting Privileges:** One of the more common forms of consequences parents use is restricting privileges. There are a few guidelines for making this work:
  - **Types of Privileges to Restrict.** You must take something away from your teen or young adult that causes them some discomfort to lose, but not be out of proportion to the misbehavior. For example, you shouldn't make your child quit their favorite club or team because they missed curfew one night. Additionally, sometimes you must take away more than one item to really make an impact. For example, if you take away just their cell phone, your child may end up talking with friends on social media on their computer, so there was no pain. Driving with paraphernalia in the car might mean losing driving privileges for a week.

- **Explain Restriction Limits.** Parents need to specifically tell their teen or young adult when or how they can earn back those privileges. Sometimes it makes sense to take something away for a set amount of time, while other times it's more appropriate to have your child "earn" back the privileges. Whatever you decide, you need to be specific. Saying something like, "You can have your privileges back when you change your behavior" does not offer a timeline for when or how they can gain them back.

- **Two Types of Restrictions**

- **Time Limited Privileges.** This is when you take something away for a set amount of time. You tell them they cannot do or have something specific for 24 hours or a few days for a more serious or repeated offense. Taking something away for weeks or a month loses its effectiveness.

For example, if your child refuses to clean up their dishes, you might decide not to offer them dinner that night until they clean them up. The consequence is tied to the behavior and time limited.

- **Earning Back Privileges.** This is when you establish a clear guideline for how your teen or young adult can regain privileges. A good example of this type of restriction is if your child is late for their curfew, set a new curfew one hour earlier. Tell them they need to behave responsibly for a week by being home on time before they can earn back their later curfew. Then, leave it up to your child to take responsibility for earning privileges back. If your child is late during this time, deduct an additional hour from their curfew until they are on time for a week straight.

**Consider the following qualities for effective consequences:**

1. Consequences need to be related to the behavior, so they make sense. Taking your child's cell phone away every time they break a rule doesn't connect the behavior to the consequence. On the other hand, if your child damages something, a logical consequence would be replacing it using their own money.
2. Teach your teen or young adult how to express their emotions and needs in acceptable ways. For example, you can say, "Don't be aggressive with your mother just because you're angry with her; be assertive and respectfully express how you feel."
3. Consequences only work if you don't give in or give up just because your child whines, gets angry or promises to behave. You must see the consequence through in order to see behavior change. If you don't think you can follow through on taking their phone away for an entire day, don't threaten to do so.
4. Consequences should be helpful in changing the unwanted behavior. They need to be unpleasant enough that your child doesn't want to experience the consequence again.
5. Plan for behaviors you are concerned about, developing your response or consequences and sharing them with your child BEFORE anything occurs.

Remember, no matter how reasonable the rules are, it is normal for teens and young adults to challenge them. This means that you need to be prepared to impose consequences - and be consistent with it.



*Material adapted from: The Workshop for Parents & Caregivers Facilitator Training Guide. Partnership for Drug-Free Kids & CMC: Foundation for Change, September 2018, v1.3*