

Consequences Might Be Keeping Your Child Stuck

Misbehaving

Posted on May 8, 2018 by Ariadne Brill • [9 Comments](#)



Inside: Consequences can keep children feeling discouraged and stuck on misbehaving. Discover positive alternatives that help children behave well.

Late in the afternoon, on the way home from school, my son took hold of my hand and started talking softly. He spoke so quietly, I could tell something unusual was going on.

“I got kicked in the back at recess mom. It hurt.” he said looking to the ground.

That’s when my mind started racing.

“Oh my! did the teachers see this...he’s walking ok,I guess it’s not serious...?! Maybe it’s bruised...Ugh...why did this happen in the first place...”

Realizing this wasn’t helpful at all, I quieted my mind just in time to hear “actually it started because I pushed him away mom.”

As I took in my son’s words, I noticed he was smiling. It wasn’t a mischievous or a nervous smile. Rather a sweet, trusting and hopeful smile.

Our eyes met and instantly **my son’s smile was replaced with teary eyes**. His voice was shaky as he shared that he had felt angry, scared and confused.

You might be thinking that my son should have some sort of **consequence for this kind of behavior**. Clearly it's not acceptable to just let this kind of thing slide. In that moment though, I didn't talk to my son about consequences.

Not Using Consequences Doesn't mean Your Child "Gets Away" with misbehaving.

Many parents believe it's necessary to make children feel badly about their behaviors. That without consequences children can't learn responsibility.



Dr. Laura Markham, author of *Peaceful Parent Happy Kids*, explains that we often think when we blame that we're doing something positive—holding someone accountable, teaching responsibility. But when kids grow up in a household where blame is a way of life, they're more defensive, more inclined to watch their back, and more inclined to blame and attack than to take responsibility.

How often do you use consequences with the well-meaning intent to teach responsibility? To encourage your child to understand mistakes, misbehavior and shortcomings? If you think this is necessary, you are not alone.

Many parents believe that punitive consequences are not just good but a necessary teaching tool.

Research on child development doesn't really show that to be the case.

When children are misbehaving or struggling, positive interactions, ones based on trust and safety are what can help your child learn.



When children sense a parent is making an effort to understand them, instead of blame them, they are more likely to want to change their behavior.

Kindness and respect are not rewards for bad behavior, but necessary in order to create a strong connection with your child and encourage change.

My child had just openly admitted to hurting someone, so this approach can't possibly be good right?

Well, positive parenting is not about finding the fastest tools for raising flawless kids. There is no single solution to misbehavior that makes children perfect. This approach keeps long-term parenting goals in mind.

As children grow, they make mistakes, misbehave, hurt, test limits and push boundaries.

This is exactly why children must have loving, respectful guidance so they can trust themselves to be capable of doing better and better.

On that day, feeling hurt and scared my son made a regrettable choice, but he also recognized it and came to me for guidance. Many children that experience punitive consequences don't dare to speak up when they make mistakes.

Consequences might keep your child stuck misbehaving



Traditional punishment and “discipline” techniques often focus on making a child feel badly about themselves. A lecture about how hitting is wrong, grounding my son or taking away his screen time might tick off the boxes on a traditional approach to what happened that day.

What does your child truly learn by sitting all alone after being reprimanded for hitting a classmate?

- Not using a computer for the afternoon can't teach your child how to step away from a conflict.
- Not watching TV does not teach self-regulation skills.
- Skipping baseball practice doesn't teach a child how to make amends for a mistake.

Doesn't it make more sense to guide children towards solutions?

Dr. Haim Ginott explains in his book, *Between Parent and Child* that most of the time, consequences are punitive and keep a child feeling upset and resentful towards you. **Instead of thinking about how to solve a problem or change their behavior, your child now feels incapable and badly about themselves.** Such feelings do not create opportunity for reflection and learning.

While dealing with defiance or lack of cooperation is difficult, children most often misbehave when they are already feeling disconnected, bad, tired or overwhelmed.

On that day, my son already knew that what he did was wrong. He was so certain it was wrong, he made sure to tell me about it as soon as he saw me. There was no lying or hoping I would never find out. There was honesty and an attempt at taking responsibility for his actions.

After I listened to my son and offered him a hug he finally said “I shouldn’t have pushed mom...I shouldn’t have, but I did. I’m going to apologize tomorrow morning. Can I have some paper to write a note?”

Discipline that is effective helps your child find their way back to feeling well so they can behave well.



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. – Valya Telep, Child Development, Virginia State University

Replacing Consequences with Positive Discipline

- Help your child feel safe coming to you, no matter what they have done.

- Remember that growing up and behaving well takes practice and patience.
 - Set clear expectations and follow through with what you say.
 - Use discipline strategies that are respectful and that promote learning.
 - Substitute punishments with solutions that help your child feel and choose better.
- Replacing consequences with respectful guidance is a process and it takes time.

Your child needs help, boundaries and clear expectations to know how and when to take responsibility for their actions.

If you are wondering how to substitute consequences, begin with the end in mind. Model respect and kindness, offer guidance and take time to connect with your child each day. Most of all trust that your child is ready and able to do better with your loving guidance.