

## **Natural and Logical Consequences**

Healthy parents use “natural and logical consequences” to change and reinforce their children’s behaviors. What does this mean? *Natural and logical consequences are those things (behaviors, results, and actions) that naturally result from something a resident does.* Natural and logical consequences result in people taking responsibility for their own behavior. For example, if a child does not study for an exam, the natural result, or *natural consequence* of that action would likely be a low test score. Another example: if a child stays in bed 20 minutes after she needs to have been up to get ready for school on time, a *natural and logical* consequence would be that she be expected to go to bed 20 minutes before her usual bedtime that night.

In other words, natural and logical consequences should *make sense*. They should *match* the original behavior as closely as possible. When thinking of natural and logical consequences, use the sentence, “If THIS, then THIS”. In the preceding examples, the sentences would be: “*If the child does not study for the exam, then the child will likely have a low test score*”, and “*If the girl sleeps 20 minutes longer than she needs in order to be ready for school on time, then that girl will go to bed 20 minutes earlier than usual tonight*”.

One way to think about natural consequences is to remember that this type of consequence *helps a child learn* about the natural order of the physical world. For example, if you do not eat for a period of time, it is natural and logical that you become hungry. In the same way, if a child stays up past “lights out”, it is natural that he or she will be tired in the morning when it is time to get up, as they most likely did not get enough sleep.

Logical consequences *help kids to learn* from the reality of “social order”, or affecting the lives of others. For example, if a child is slow about getting dressed

in the morning, it is possible that everyone riding in the same car is late for school or work. Kids need to learn that their behavior affects other people.

In order for consequences to be effective, the people receiving them must see the consequences as being logical. In other words, the consequences have to *make sense* to the person receiving them. If a teenager takes advantage of his/her telephone privileges in some way, it would probably seem logical to that teen to have his or her telephone privileges taken away for a period of time (he or she may not *like* the consequence, but they likely *understand* it). However, if that same teenager were required to wash the family vehicle after abusing his phone privileges, it would probably *not* seem logical to him... because it isn't! There is no connection between washing a vehicle and having abused telephone privileges. There is a *very logical connection* between losing phone privileges after having abused phone privileges.

When we use natural and logical consequences, the purpose is to *motivate* the child to make responsible decisions for themselves. Consequences are not effective if there are hidden motives of “winning” or “controlling” involved. Similarly, consequences are not used to force children into submission. If the parents have the attitude that “I’ll show them”, or “They will do what I say *when I say so*” or similar negative attitudes, they are using “consequences” in an inappropriate manner. Natural and logical consequences are designed to *help the children to think about their behaviors in the future* by having experienced whatever has naturally and/or logically occurred as the results of their behaviors in the past.

### **Natural and Logical Consequences versus Punishment**

Natural and logical consequences are used because they are related to the original actions of a person. As previously stated, natural and logical consequences require children to be responsible for their own behavior and

motivate them to make responsible decisions. *Punishment, on the other hand, may or may not be related to the actions of the person.* Punishments usually indicate that the person giving the punishment is expressing their “power” over others. Punishment often gives a child the message that they are “bad” (natural and logical consequences imply no moral judgment). Punishment typically focuses on what is in the past (natural and logical consequences are concerned with the present and future behaviors). *Punishments are often associated with a threat and they demand obedience. Logical consequences permit, and promote, choice.*

For example, a child could be punished for not studying by having to wash dishes or rake leaves. However, washing dishes and raking leaves are not directly related to not having studied. For this reason, the person who did not study does not learn and understand that the direct consequences of not studying are a low test grade. The child may not like washing dishes or having to rake leaves, but they are not likely to relate either of these tasks to not having studied. A poor test grade, on the other hand, will be a sure reminder that they got the poor grade as a *direct result* of not having studied. Next time, when the child knows a test is coming up, he/she is more likely to remember that the low test score on the previous exam was due to not having adequately prepared.