

About Deborah Hage:

Drawing on 50 years of experience, both as a parent of 14 foster and adopted children and as a reactive attachment disorder therapist, working with emotionally and behaviorally impacted children (resulting from early childhood abuse and neglect), Deborah specializes in coaching parents help their children adjust and heal from past traumas, overcome their fears, and effectively integrate into their new families and environments. As a lecturer, author, therapist and coach, Deborah has helped thousands of families overcome the impacts of past neglect, abuse and other traumas; providing the support and tools they need to create for themselves a happier and more connected life.

The ideas and interventions presented here have not been developed solely by Deborah. She has worked with numerous other therapists and parents over the years, notably Nancy Thomas, whose continued partnership and collaboration she appreciates.

To learn more about Deborah, her practice and her family, please visit deborahhage.com

A Brief Introduction to the Art of Consequencing **Deborah Hage, MSW**

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Consequencing as a parenting tool has been dealt with in great detail and depth in other places. The best book on consequencing is Parenting With Love and Logic by Foster Cline and Jim Fay. Including information here on when to consequence and how to consequence is done only to provide an overview in order to put the concepts in the proper constellation of techniques that need to be part of a parent's and therapist's repertoire.

Basics

There are numerous basic underpinnings of effective consequencing. Most of them also apply to parenting attitudes in general.

1. It will never be easier to enforce limits or establish a friendly relationship with the child than it is now. The child will not get more amenable to learning the concepts of cause of effect thinking as time goes on, rather the child will get less.
2. The more conflict that is avoided in the present the more conflict that will ultimately have to be dealt with. The longer the child becomes accustomed to engaging in a particular destructive behavior, the harder it will be for the child to adapt to changing it and the more anger there will be infused into the process.
3. Rewiring the brain around new behavior patterns learned as the result of effective consequencing takes time. Sometimes it takes one to two months for every year of life for the child to internalize the change.
4. Consistency in parenting means there will always be a response to the child's behavior and that during that response the child will always be safe. It does not mean that it will always be the same response. With children whose lack of trust makes keeping control essential, one of the goals in creating appropriate parental and therapeutic responses is to remind and re-remind the child in numerous experiential ways that he can trust people even when he can't control them. Therefore, consequencing must be "inconsistent" in the sense that it must not be predictable. If the child can predict the consequence then he will base his determination of whether or not to engage in a particular negative behavior on whether or not the consequence is acceptable to him, not whether or not the behavior is appropriate. Keeping the consequences unpredictable is therefore a critical component of building trust.
5. Just because a child doesn't like something doesn't mean it shouldn't happen. Sometimes unhappiness is not only the best form of therapy but also the only form possible.
6. Any time a parent pits her will against the will of her child she needs to make absolutely certain that the outcome will be either neutral or in her favor. Part of letting go of control for a child with trust issues is determining that the person who is going to be in control is stronger, smarter, and more powerful than he is. A child is not going to relinquish control to someone he considers weaker or dumber than he is. This is true of life in general. No one wears the football jersey of the man sitting on the bench. Sports enthusiasts want to wear the jersey, take on the persona, of the man calling the plays and that oftentimes is the quarterback. This being the case parents must not order their child around lightly. Serious consideration must be given first of all to whether or not the control hassle is worth winning. Then it must be determined that the control hassle is winnable. That means the issue over which control and trust are going to be fought must be chosen very carefully. Never tell a child to do something without first knowing what the consequence will be if the child does not comply.

Goals of Consequencing – Development of Self Control and Acceptance of Responsibility

Self control training is excellent for children. It is also essential for parents and therapists. The ability to control the visual cues to one's mood, body language, facial language and tone of voice are critical to demonstrating that the parent and therapist are not puppets on the child's strings. Parents must continually demonstrate that they are in control of the situation and of themselves in order to demonstrate to the child that they are strong enough to keep him safe. The acquisition of a "poker face" that can be drawn upon at will is an important tool for parents to have. As soon as a parent raises

her voice, becomes sarcastic, or takes a threatening stance the child stops paying attention to the consequence and his attention is diverted to personal safety issues. Consequencing in anger is not viewed by the child as a promoter of cause and effect thinking, it is viewed by the child as terrorizing and punitive so loses all ability to create thoughtfulness or change in the child. Rather than creating new pathways in the brain it reinforces old ones. Rather than leading to a sense of understanding on the part of the child consequencing in anger leads to resentment and a need to get even and exact revenge on what they perceive to be unfair. The child's thought patterns tend to spin around on how unfair the situation is and what can they do to get back at the adult. As attention is diverted from the child's behavior to the parent's anger the child has a natural tendency to blame others for his behavior and unhappy choices. Parental anger makes it more difficult, therefore, for a child to take responsibility for his own actions. Unless the child takes responsibility for his mistakes he cannot learn from them. If it is always someone else's fault then there is nothing for him to learn. If, in his view, it is up to everyone else to change and the sooner they do so the sooner he and everyone else will be happy, then there is no incentive for him to look inside of himself and see what changes in his behavior and emotional states he needs to make in order to be happy. Since he cannot control and shape his world so people and events work together to make him happy, happiness will always be elusive as he will be looking for forces outside of himself and outside of his control to make him happy, rather than looking at what he can do to make himself happy. Happiness needs to come from within as that is the only source people have control of. Anytime a parent's emotions or behaviors divert the child's attention away himself and what he has done to cause the situation, they both lose.

On the other hand, consequencing with kind firmness is less likely to arouse the anger circuits in the brain. If they are aroused the child is more apt to accept the fact that he is primarily angry at himself for what he has done, not at his parents for imposing a fair and reasonable consequence to bad behavior. Because his anger circuits are not aroused he is more able to access his prefrontal cortex and so open up the channels to an inner voice that is calming and accepting. That calm acceptance is going to allow the child to learn from his mistakes and so give the child an opportunity to change his behavior in the future. Even voice tones when applying a consequence protects the child's self image as it is clear the parent is addressing the behavior, not attacking the worthiness of the child. The real world changes behavior through consequences, not anger or punishment.

Consequencing is Doing!

Consequencing is not talking! Thoughtful parents want to share their wisdom with their children so their children are able to avoid the pitfalls of the parent's experience. They want their children to learn from their parent's mistakes without going through the pain of experiencing it themselves. Oh, if only it were so easy! If children could learn appropriate behavior from lectures then the world's problems would be solved! Unfortunately discussing a problem in order to more fully understand it does not eliminate it. Alcoholics understand completely the whys and wherefores of their drinking and still drink. They do not stop drinking until the painful consequences of their behavior override the pleasure they get from it. In the same way, it is great for a child to understand why they behave the way they do, but imparting that insight takes very little time and needs to be done only once, maybe twice. Explanations can be gone over once by the parents and once by the therapist. Unless the child has some form of mental retardation that is adequate. After that there is no need to go there again. To keep repeating the same thing over and over gives the child the subliminal message that they are too dumb to learn. If insight into the behavior was sufficient to stop it then the child would have stopped it after the first lecture. Once the child has insight and the behavior continues then the parents must quickly go to Plan B. No more talking. Only doing! Consequences are in order.

What To Consequence and What Not To Consequence

After parents develop an appropriate positive attitude regarding consequencing, the next step to incorporating consequencing into the parenting response repertoire is learning what issues are worth

hassling. In order to determine that the parents need to decide whose problem the behavior is. If it is the child's problem, such as grades at school, or practicing a musical instrument, then the parent does not need to impose any consequence at all. The world will take care of it by failing the child or not advancing in skill. In these instances it is sufficient for the parent to be empathetic and listen to the child's dismay when the natural consequence falls upon them, accept their hurt feelings, give them the "good luck next time" message, and let it go at that.

Establishing the "units of concern" is an invaluable parental tool. When children are born the parents must pick up all of the "units of concern", that is be completely responsible, for all of the infant's needs. If the child is hungry, the parents feed him. When the infant is cold the parents wrap him up in warm blankets. As the child takes on mastery of more areas then the parents turn responsibility for that area over to the child. The child learns when it is cold and decides on his own to put on his own coat. The child recognizes when he is dirty so voluntarily takes a bath. The goal is that by the time a child is 16 or so he has assumed most of the units of concern for his own well being in preparation for emancipation. By 18, obviously, all of the units of concern must be the child's as he heads out into the world to make it on his own. The task for the parent is to assume no more units of concern then is good for the child. If the parent releases units of concern to the child prematurely it can be neglectful and create hazardous situations for the child as he does not have the maturity to handle them. If the parent releases units of concern too slowly, they retard their child's emotional and cognitive development, creating an unhealthy dependency on the parents and again, due to lack of practice, leaves the child with inadequate safety and decision making skills. Balance between letting go too soon and letting go too late is necessary and depends on the cognitive and developmental abilities of the child.

A caveat here is that when children have a strong relationship with their parents and follow their parents lead without rancor or problems then parents can successfully intervene in homework, grades, hygiene, friend selection, musical instrument issues, etc and be successful as the child wants to please the parents. We are not talking here about children who want to please their parents. The discussion here is about children who do not want to please their parents and so will sabotage even the best, most worthwhile activities, even if they enjoy them, to prove to their parents that they will do what they please and will bow to no one's leadership.

There are several common areas of concern where parents have a tendency to overstep their ability to affect the child's choices. One is school work. Obviously parents want their children to be successful in school. They know the value of a good education for the child's future acceptance into college and job opportunities throughout their lives. The problem occurs when the child who is rejecting of the wishes of the child reject even those things that are good for them, knowing it will disappoint or anger their parent. Homework is an excellent example. Parental involvement in homework can easily back fire. The child, knowing how important school achievement is to the parents, will fail to turn in the homework the parent lovingly and determinedly insisted the child complete the night before as a means of rejecting both the parent and the parent's values. Thus the end result of parental involvement is the exact opposite of what the parent was hoping to accomplish. Rather than the child feeling loved, he feels powerful and able to thwart his parent's wishes.

One of the boys continually missed one or two spelling words on the test each Friday. I decided that they were not so difficult that he could not consistently get 100%. One Monday I took the task of reinforcing the spelling words for the week very seriously and began drilling the words with him at every opportunity. One of the words was "peach". He knew every word perfectly except that one. I hounded him with the word day and night until there was no doubt in any one's mind that he could spell it correctly. On Friday I sent him off to school, confident he would ace the spelling test. The one word he missed? "Peach". He is now a cook in a restaurant and still can't spell the word.

Another area in which parents have a tendency to elicit the opposite affect of what they desire is in the area of a child's safety. **The more the parent assumes control over a child's safety the less**

safe the child is on his own! For young children, having parents who assume responsibility for their safety, increases their safety. For adolescents, having parents who assume responsibility for their safety, decreases their safety! The sooner children take up the units of concern for their own safety in areas where it is appropriate the more practice they have keeping themselves safe instead of relying on others to keep them safe. By the time children are adolescents they must be able to say to themselves, “I better not get in the car with that driver as it looks dangerous to me.” All too often, however, when children have had their safety micromanaged by well meaning but ill advised parents, the message the child gives himself is, “Mom and Dad will sure get angry when they find out I have gotten in the car with a driver who looks drunk.” The child is not thinking about how he will be affected by his dangerous behavior but about how his parents will be affected by his dangerous behavior. By putting himself in danger and willfully making a bad choice he communicates that he will demonstrate to them they no longer have control over him.

We live next door to a park and I frequently take my grand children there to play. There is a delightful array of swings, slides, climbing apparatus and a merry-go-round. The playground is geared to children under the age of 5. It has been designed with toddlers in mind. Nonetheless the number of parents shouting instructions to their children is mind-boggling. “Hang on!” (The underlying message is that unless the parent tells the child to hang on the child will let go. What child with normal intelligence will let go of the swing?) “Wait, don’t go down the slide until I have wiped the sand off the bottom of it.” “Stay where I can see you.” If a child has to keep track of the parent on the play ground it hampers their ability to play and explore freely. “Sit down on the merry-go-round or you will fall off.” As a child develops the ability to balance he needs to exercise that skill in order to expand it. To not let a child stand up when the child believes he is ready is to teach the child to listen to the voice outside of their head when it comes to safety issues. It teaches the child he is too dumb to judge for himself when he is safe and when he is not. Children, in order to be safe when parents are not around, which is most of the time, must learn to judge personal safety for themselves.

For those children with sabotage on their minds it is best for parents to get out of any and all battles that do not have a direct affect on the quality of the parent’s or family’s life. These tend to be battles they cannot win anyway. Parental energy must be saved for those things a child does that have a direct bearing on the quality of life for everyone else in the family. Issues such as poor quality of chores, infectious bad attitude, and uncooperative during family outings are the parents business to address with appropriate consequences as the family environment deteriorates in the child’s presence. When the child’s behavior negatively impacts the parents and family then the parents have a responsibility to step in, express their feelings and impose a logical consequence.

The best way to express those feelings is with “I” messages. “I am angry your chore is not done.” “I am disappointed I am going to be late because you didn’t get ready on time.” “I don’t like the fact that I have to go over to the school so often to meet with teachers about your behavior.” The use of “I” in these instances takes the heat off of the child and makes it clear that being angry, disappointed, whatever, is the choice of the parent. There is no blaming. No one is saying, “You make me so angry when”. To say that is to abdicate responsibility for one’s feelings and to blame the child. That is very poor modeling as parents do not want the child to ever throw that back at the parents by saying, “You make me so angry.”

Consequences Represent Choices – both for the parent and the child

The importance of this phrasing becomes very clear when a consequence is imposed. The point of the consequence is not to punish the child but to make it clear that the child can do whatever the child is going to do, but the parent is going to make sure that they are no longer hurt by the child’s choices. Good consequencing lets a child practice making choices in such a way that no matter what

the child chooses the parents are OK. Both parent and child win. This frees up parents' time and energy to be loving and non-angry. Well imposed consequences are not supposed to be designed to make the child suffer. Their goal is to protect the parent from bearing the brunt of the child's behavior and put the burden for it back on the child where it belongs. That means that the consequence must enable the parent to be OK with the behavior as it is no longer hurting them. It is not useful for children who are already suffering from bad behavior to have guilt for hurting others layered on top of their psyche. Children need to become emotionally and behaviorally happy because it improves the quality of their lives, not because they owe someone else happiness. Guilt is not a particularly useful emotion in terms of changing long term behavior. It is just an extra layer of "feeling bad" and actually has more of a paralyzing effect in the child than a liberating one. Effective consequencing frees up the parent to continue to be loving toward the child while the child confronts his own behavior, not the parents' behavior. Effective consequencing can therefore save a foster or adoptive placement by saving parents from their own anger and recriminations and giving them a means to still feel good about and remain committed to a child who is not reciprocal or cooperative in any way.

Whose problem is it?

When deciding whether or not to impose a consequence it is good to look at "the units of concern". Who is bothered the most by the behavior and who should be bothered the most by the behavior? When a child is very small, an infant in arms, then the parents take on all of the units of concern for that child's food, safety, comfort, contentment, hygiene, etc. By the time the child is 16 or so then the child should be preparing for life out in the real world by picking up all of the units of concern for food, safety, comfort, grades, peer relationships, hygiene, etc. In between these years it is the parents' responsibility to gradually turn over the units of concern to the child. When the parents keep too tight a rein on issues that are rightfully the child's then there is the potential that the child will question his own competence. Rather than feeling good that his parents care so much for him as to take such good care of him, he grows up feeling bad that he is incapable of taking care of himself. When the parents loosen up the reins prematurely then the child is not capable of handling the responsibilities given him and fails, again reinforcing that he is incompetent. A balance must be struck between turning over the units of concern too quickly or too slowly.

Establishing units of concern is an important concept to be applied to consequencing as the greater the number of units of concern that an individual has regarding a problem, the greater the chance of behavior change. If the parents are most bothered by the behavior then they are going to take on the units of concern and do whatever they can to help the child. Thus, parents who are more concerned about their children's grades then their children are will behave in such a way as to take charge of the problem. They will lecture, cajole, reward, punish, call the teacher, hire a tutor, etc in order to busy themselves solving the problem for the child. The child, seeing that the parents have picked up the units of concern for their grades, will sit back and relax as there are only so many units of concern to be picked up and if the parent has picked them up then the child doesn't need to. However, if the parents express only a distant interest in the child's grades then the child must pick up the units of concern for passing the test, writing the paper, or reading the book. For the most part, if a teacher is assigning the homework then it is with the expectation that it is within the child's ability to complete it. Whether the child is a kindergartner or a senior the same rule would apply. The logical consequence for not doing homework is to fail the grade. It is far better to fail a grade earlier rather than later. The older the child is when he learns the lesson that his schoolwork is his responsibility the higher the price the child must pay. There is no hardship to repeating 3rd grade. Beginning 9th grade, however, grades count towards college applications so the price of failure is much higher. The cost of flunking a college course can be thousands of dollars in wasted tuition and dorm fees. The sooner children take on the units of concern for their own education the sooner the natural consequence of failure kick in and the sooner children will take responsibility for their own future.

By the time a child is ready for kindergarten he is ready to keep track of his own belongings. Therefore the logical consequence of losing his coat is to have him do a chore and earn enough to take him to a thrift store and buy another one. By the time a child is attending first grade then he is ready to keep track of his own food consumption. Therefore the logical consequence of forgetting his lunch is to go hungry. Getting children used to the natural consequences of their own behavior makes it easier to accept when parents must step in and apply a consequence.

Consequencing develops thoughtfulness in parent and child

One of the goals of consequences is to make the child thoughtful about the value of persisting in the behavior. The question the child needs to be asking is, “Is this behavior really worth it?” “What exactly am I gaining by doing this?” When the child is asking this question of himself instead of the parents asking it of him then it is clear that the child is picking up the units of concern. This is good!

To go back to a previous point in order to further drum it in.....If the parents are angry and upset by the behavior then the child often decides the behavior is worth it if for no other reason than to make his parents angry and upset. The secondary gain is worth it!!! Seeing the parent lose control and being able to control the parents through negative behavior, for some kids, is all the reward they need! Once the parents withdraw from the conflict and become dispassionate about the child’s choices then the child can focus on how the behavior affects him, not on how the behavior affects his parents.

Imposing thoughtful consequences is a worthwhile skill for parents to master. Consequencing protects the parents from the child’s choices and puts the child in a position of thoughtfulness. Two excellent accomplishments from one technique! The key word here is “thoughtful”. Consequences must be arrived at thoughtfully. Consequences that are just thrown out in the heat of the moment tend to be more in the realm of punishment than truly meeting the definition of consequencing. There is no need to hurry. The adage “You can do the wrong thing over and over or the right thing once” applies here. After a child has brought a negative behavior to the parents’ attention the parent can take time to discuss appropriate consequences with their spouse, other members of their support group, the therapist or the psychiatrist. When everyone is calmed down and the heat is off is the best time to state the consequence for the behavior. In the meantime, the parent can simply smile and say, “Funny choice.” Those two little words put the child on notice that something is going to happen, no one knows yet what that something will be, but it will be appropriate and chances are the child will have to decide whether or not that particular behavior is worth doing again. Good consequencing makes it more difficult or painful to be irresponsible than to be responsible. Deciding on what consequence will create the “teachable moment” in the child can take time.

Consequences that are arrived at precipitously have a tendency to be either under reactive or over reactive. There is also the distinct possibility that the consequence will punish the parent rather than make the child thoughtful. “You are grounded” as a response to negative behavior has an obvious negative result for the parent because in order for the child to be effectively “grounded” the parent must stay home to enforce it. In effect, “grounding” puts a dampening effect on both parent and child. This is hardly the effect that is needed in order to teach the child that his behavior is separate from his parents.

Consequences are most effective when they are relevant

Good consequences are as close to natural as possible. The consequence, in other words, must have a connection to the behavior. High schools around the country violate this principle every time they remove a child from playing basketball because he flunked math. In actuality participation in extracurricular activities has a higher correlation to adult success than grades, yet schools routinely take away something the child is good at in order to consequence him for not doing well in something he is not good at. It would be like telling a doctor that until he figures out how to change the oil in his car he can’t practice medicine. In order to mimic the real world then, a consequence for stealing is to sew the child’s pockets shut so he can’t put stolen goods in them. A consequence for not being willing to do

the dishes is to not eat with the family and thus avoid having dishes dirtied on his behalf. A consequence for choosing to wet the bed is that it is the child's responsibility to change the sheets, wash them and remake the bed without it being a problem for his parents. If the child doesn't then the child sleeps in a dirty bed. Good consequences make sense to both the parent and the child so the parent can impose them without feeling guilty and the child can accept them without feeling resentful.

Good consequences put behavior in terms of choices.

- The child may take a shower and go with the family to the movie or pay a babysitter to stay home with him.
- The child may bring his clothes down to the laundry room and mother will wash them or he can throw them on a pile in his room and when he needs them he can wash them, or wear them dirty.
- The child may get his chores done in time to join the family for dinner or have a peanut butter sandwich in his room.
- The child can either work at school or work at home. If his grades are good then he is demonstrating that he is working hard at school. If his grades are failing then he is obviously not working hard at school. Since everyone needs to work he can work with his head at school or his hands at home. He can do extra chores around the house to ensure that he has some marketable skill when he is older.
- The child can either get up in enough time to get dressed for school or he can get dressed in the car. Either way the car for school leaves at 7:45.
- The child can either pack himself a lunch, go hungry at school or do extra chores to pay for a lunch pass.
- The child can either be ready for school on time or practice getting ready for school on Saturday.
- The child can either work to pay off the expense of replacing the window he broke or the money that would have been spent on Christmas/birthday presents will be used to pay for the window.

The message to the child throughout is that the parent will never force the child to do anything. The child is free to do whatever he wants as long as he understands that his choice will then give direction to the choice a parent will make in response. The child is not the only one who gets to make choices! The child needs to learn that he can do anything he wants as long as he is willing to accept the consequences of what others do in response to protect themselves from the child's choices.

In all of the above situations the parents are taken care of regardless of what the child chooses to do. The possibilities are endless. One bottom line rule, however, is make sure you never give a child a choice you can't live with! It would be unwise to say, "You can get your chores done in time to join the family for dinner or not eat." Alternative food can be given to nudge cooperation, but it cannot ever be withheld. Giving alternative food actually promotes real world thinking. People who are homeless because they are not collecting a paycheck and so cannot pay for niceties such as food and housing do not get to choose what they are going to eat, or where they are going to sleep. The real world does not let them starve, but it does not take them out to restaurants with menus either. Hence the name, "soup kitchen." Children need to see the same connection in their life. The quality of their work has a direct bearing on the quality of the food they eat, the clothes they wear and the possessions they have.

Developmental age, not chronological age, is critically important to the selection of appropriate consequences

Good consequences are developmentally appropriate to the child's emotional age, not their chronological age. When deciding on what to consequence, how to consequence and when to

consequence a key factor is the developmental age of the child. For most children, most of the time, the cognitive ability, emotional maturity, physical size and chronological age are roughly equivalent. However, children who have been abused, neglected, abandoned and/or otherwise have had numerous setbacks or interruptions to their development often behave in ways consistent with a much younger child. A way to make a rough guess as to maturity, is to set aside the birth date, and instead evaluate the level of a child's conscience development. Infants do what is right because their parents take physical control of them. The parents put them in a safe spot, feed them when they are hungry, wash them when they are dirty, dress them in clothes appropriate to the conditions, etc. A child, regardless of his birth date, who requires supervision in every aspect of his life and is incompetent to take over the most basic functions for himself would have an emotional age of 1, whether he was 7 or 17.

Consequencing a child with such a low ability to function would be inappropriate.

Typically a child between the ages of 1 and 2 has learned to attend to his mother's voice and follow simple directions as long as mother is in the room to physically take control if he goes astray. The toddler walks to the top of the stairs and mother says, "Don't go near the stairs." Often the toddler will respond to the voice command and stop. If the toddler continues toward the stairs then mother scoops the child up and redirects him. A child, regardless of his age, who only does what is right when mother is in the room and ready to enforce appropriate behavior physically would have an emotional age, or conscience development age, of 1 – 2 and must have behavior expectations and consequences in keeping with that age. Between 2 and 4 children typically increase their ability to do what is right as long as mother is in the room to remind them of what the expectations are. Mother generally can say less and less and intervene physically less and less as the child begins to internalize her voice and presence and make decisions according to what he perceives would please her. When a much older child does well when mother is present but makes poor decisions when mother is not present then tasks must be assigned accordingly and consequences imposed that would be appropriate for a 3 or 4 year old. The parent must not ask a child who is only capable of making good choices when mother is in the room to go outside and do a task independently. That expectation sets the child up for failure and the mother up for frustration! Appropriate tasks might be setting the table or folding clothes while mother is in the room to establish an unspoken presence that translates into a spoken presence when necessary. An appropriate consequence might be to not have dessert or not go on an outing when being under self control would be necessary for everyone to enjoy themselves. Some natural consequences can begin to be allowed to impose themselves. A child who breaks a toy does not get it replaced. Children who are too large physically for parents to intervene when they are behaving inappropriately and who are too young emotionally to make safe choices often must be placed in staffed facilities for the safety of both them and their family.

About age 5 most children have the capacity to internalize their mother's voice and presence to the point where they can make good behavioral choices even when mother is not in the room with them. That skill is what makes it possible for 5 year olds to begin kindergarten. They are able to take their mother's values and voice to school with them and can hear her say, "Stand in line", "Sit quietly for your teacher," "Share the toys," etc. It is at this developmental stage of conscience development that children do what is right because they can hear their mother's voice inside of them telling them to do what is right. At this stage appropriate tasks can be accomplished outside of the actual physical presence of mother. A child can be sent out in the yard to pick up trash or sent to his room to clean it up. More natural consequences can be allowed to exert themselves. A child who does not put his coat on for recess will get cold. Appropriate consequence to impose for a child who does not set the table on time is to have him eat elsewhere.

Most children, at about 6 years of age, begin to do what is right because they want to avoid the consequences of not doing right. They have had some experience with the concept of consequences by then and are beginning to understand how they work. They begin to anticipate an unwelcome consequence will occur if they displease their teacher or parents and a welcome consequence will occur

if they please their teacher or parents. This, coupled with the budding ability to adhere to the internalized voice and values of their parents and teachers, make this age a critical one developmentally.

Goals of Consequencing – Development of Self Control and Acceptance of Responsibility

Many children who have suffered abuse and neglect get stuck in the developmental ages and conscience acquisition of 5 and 6 year olds. Because at a critical stage of their development they did not develop an internalized voice of a mother and her value systems they flounder behaviorally as the only voice and values they have internalized are based on their own skewed view of the world. Additionally, cause and effect thinking is critically underdeveloped as it was not taught at an earlier age. Rather their internalized voice and value system tends to be based on erratic and unpredictable forms of punishment. It is therefore of utmost importance that the development of cause and effect thinking, the byproduct of the administering of consequences in lieu of punishment, be the goal of parenting, not the consequence itself!

If you can't enforce the consequence, don't impose it

Another essential rule that governs consequencing is making sure the consequence you are imposing is enforceable. Parents must talk about themselves and what they actually have control over. They must make statements about what they will or won't do, what they will or won't allow, or they will or won't provide.

- As soon as your chores are done you may talk on the phone. (Parents can unplug the phone and put it in another room until the chores are done.)
- I will be glad to drive you to practice as soon as you put your laundry away.
- Everyone who has taken a shower in the last 2 days can watch a movie in the family room.
- Anyone who has talked sassy to me in the last 24 hours does not get dessert.

These are all enforceable by the parents. What would not be enforceable is, "You can't eat until your chores are done." All the child has to do is grab a banana from the kitchen counter or dig a granola bar out of his backpack and he is eating without doing his chores. Better to say, "You can't eat dinner with the rest of us until your chores are done." That is enforceable. It would not be enforceable to say, "You can't go to soccer practice until you put away your bike." All the child has to do is find a friend to take him or walk and unless you want an ugly scene on your hands you will have a difficult time stopping him. What you can say is, "I will not drive you to soccer until your bike is put away." That is enforceable. Never ask a child to do something unless you have a good idea of what you will do if he doesn't do it.

Steps to Responsibility

Jim Fay has laid out excellent "Steps to Responsibility" that incorporate all of the principles of consequencing.

1. Give the responsibility. Assign the task.
2. Hope the child blows it. We learn more from our mistakes than our successes. So when the child does not do the chore right there is more opportunity for learning to take place. Beside, if the parent is "hoping the child blows it" then when the child does blow it the parents cannot get angry as that is what they were hoping for.
3. Be empathetic. No recriminations. No angry words. Expressions of sorrow for the child, not anger at the child, are appropriate and set the state for thoughtfulness to kick in.
4. Allow consequences to fall where they may.
5. Place solving the problem with the child. They can solve it in any way that does not cause problems for someone else.
6. Give the responsibility again. To not give the child the responsibility again is to tell him that

he cannot learn from his mistakes.

Force is not a factor in consequencing

Consequencing will not work when it used to force a child to do something or not do something. Parents are only truly in control of themselves. Consequencing is being firm about what you are going to do, not what you are going to make the child do!

Punishment or discipline? How do you tell?

How do parents tell when what they are doing is punishment or discipline?

1. Who is angry? If the parents are angry then no matter what they are doing or saying it is punitive.
2. Is the consequence/discipline open to discussion with other adults? Can the parents tell each other what consequence they imposed or what they did without fear of being judged harshly or questioned for it? Can the parents tell the therapist or others what the child did and what the consequence was with the assurance the other person will agree it was reasonable? Any parenting intervention that is done in secret must be suspected of being abusive.
3. Is the consequence jointly decided upon? Is there more than one parent or adult that is buying into the rationale of the consequence?
4. Are the results of the consequence worthwhile? Did the consequence help the child become thoughtful? Did the consequence help the child take on responsibility for his own behavior? Are the parents OK?

Parenting with pizzazz means setting firm limits by taking good care of yourself. Whenever possible and whenever it makes sense, give choices. Allow consequences with empathy. This maintains the parent and child relationship. Let the consequence do the teaching. This creates thoughtfulness in the child and is an acknowledgement by the parents that they believe their child is smart enough to learn from his mistakes. And that is the goal of consequencing! Learning!

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