

Choosing Effective Negative Consequences

Replacing punishment with consequences that work



A negative consequence is effective when it helps bring about long-term positive change in a child’s behavior, while still preserving a loving parent/child relationship. The difference between punishment and positive discipline is intent: the intent of punishment is to inflict pain; the intent of positive discipline is to train a child in positive, pro-social behaviors. Punishment is ineffective because it does not bring about long-term change (i.e. you can’t punish people into lasting good behavior), and it harms relationships so children don’t want to please you. Choosing consequences ahead of time enables you to be fair (kids know what to expect), fit the consequence size to the misbehavior, and teach missing skills to help your child improve long-term behavior. Consequences should include a “response cost” —the time, effort, or money the child needs to give to “make it right.”

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Positive Practice (practice the missing social skill that led to the misbehavior)
- Extra chores (choose a chore from the Chore Jar)
- Time out (effective for kids ages 2–12)
- Make it right (apologize and fix the mistake)
- Grounding from privileges or possessions for a short time (6–24 hours) until the child does Positive Practice or makes it right

EFFECTIVE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES ARE:

1. **Mild:** Doesn’t cause physical or emotional harm
2. **Kind:** Doesn’t involve anger, yelling, humiliation, or threats
3. **Logical:** Results logically from the misbehavior
4. **Instructive:** Involves practicing the missing skill
5. **Understood:** Agreed upon beforehand
6. **Simple** to give and track (ex. “Chore Jar” and “Tracking Sheet”)
7. **Consistent:** Negative behavior results in negative consequence
8. **Loving:** Followed by a sincere expression of love
9. **Safe:** Never violates a child’s basic human rights to food, shelter, emotional and physical safety, love, or education

DRAWBACKS TO PUNISHMENT INCLUDE:

1. **Fear and resentment:** Kids won’t like or respect you, making it hard for them to obey you or accept your values
2. **Two-faced behavior:** Kids only behave when you’re around
3. **Imitation:** Children hurt others (including you when they’re grown)
4. **Low self-esteem:** Children think parents don’t love them
5. **Hard to control:** Kids build up tolerance to pain; parents escalate and become abusive
6. **Ineffective:** Usually fails to produce lasting change
7. **Insecure attachment:** Failure to bond with parents; negatively affects future relationships
8. **Harsh physical consequences** lowers a child’s IQ

PRE-PLANNED NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

As a family, discuss negative behaviors and decide on negative consequences ahead of time. Write them in the spaces below.

Minor Offenses	Medium Offenses	Major Offenses
Behavior	Behavior	Behavior
Consequence	Consequence	Consequence
Behavior	Behavior	Behavior
Consequence	Consequence	Consequence
Behavior	Behavior	Behavior
Consequence	Consequence	Consequence
Behavior	Behavior	Behavior
Consequence	Consequence	Consequence
Behavior	Behavior	Behavior
Consequence	Consequence	Consequence