

How to Use Consequences

☑ **Create a few simple and clearly defined rules and consequences.** Children have a hard time understanding a long or complex list of rules, and there's no chance for success if they don't know what the rules are.

☑ **Always follow through.** The threat of a consequence will quickly become meaningless if the consequences never actually happen. It's tempting to feel sympathetic and let your kid off the hook, but this will lead to more problems down the road.

☑ **Don't overdo it.** Many parents have a habit of dishing out extreme consequences when they're upset. When punishments are too extreme, parents often let their children off the hook once they have cooled down, or when the punishment becomes too inconvenient for the parent (e.g. having to monitor the child all day). This tells your child that the consequences are not serious.

☑ **It's okay to be flexible.** You want your child to do the dishes, but they're in the middle of a video game. Instead of telling them to do the dishes "right now", give them a reasonable timeframe. Try this: "I need you to finish doing the dishes within the next hour". How would you feel if you were watching your favorite show, and your partner demanded you do the laundry "right now"?

☑ **Take away privileges.** Removing TV or phone privileges can be very effective. However, avoid taking away things that are beneficial for your child. If your child calms down by playing guitar, or they strive for good grades so they can play on the basketball team, don't take those away.

☑ **Never use corporal punishment, shaming, or humiliation.** Children who receive corporal punishment—including spanking—learn that violence is an appropriate response to their problems. They tend to be more aggressive with other children, and they carry this into adulthood. Shaming and humiliating your child can irreparably damage your relationship and cause significant distress.

☑ **Don't give up your leverage.** If you take away everything, there's nothing left to take away. Don't put your child in a position where they have nothing to lose.

☑ **Sometimes it's better to ignore bad behavior than to punish it.** Children may purposefully use bad behavior to get attention. Even negative attention is better than no attention. If your child's behavior isn't dangerous or destructive, it's okay to ignore them until they stop.

☑ **Choose your battles.** So, your child has picked the clothes up off the floor, and put them in the dresser, but the clothes aren't folded neatly. Let it go! Ask yourself: "Is this problem really that important right now?"

How to Use Rewards

☑ **Set achievable goals.** If your child doesn't believe they can achieve their goal, they won't try. A good rule of thumb is that your child should earn their reward about 75% of the time.

☑ **Rewards must be desirable.** Choose rewards your child actually wants. Whether they admit it or not, most children want the attention of their parents. Never underestimate the power of a smile or a hug. Sometimes these little rewards can be more powerful than anything else.

☑ **Praise behaviors instead of traits.** For example, if your child gets a good grade, praise their hard work instead of their intelligence. If your child believes they passed a test because of their intelligence, what does it mean when they fail a test? Also, praising a behavior such as hard work will lead to more hard work, but traits like intelligence are outside of your child's control.

☑ **Give rewards regularly and consistently.** Instead of offering one big reward for a long-term accomplishment, try offering smaller rewards along the way. Children have a hard time waiting for distant rewards, making them less effective. Regular rewards keep children motivated.

☑ **Catch your child being good.** Is your hyper child sitting still? Let them know you notice! Try to catch your child being good—no matter how minor it seems—at least 3 times a day. The best way to end a bad behavior is to reward the opposite good behavior.

☑ **Always follow through.** If you promise a reward but don't follow through, your child may not take you seriously next time. However, every time you do follow through, your promises gain credibility.

☑ **Be clear about rewards and how to earn them.** Specify what exactly rewards will be (rather than "extra TV", say "30 minutes of extra TV") and what your child needs to do to earn them ("hang up your clothes, put away toys, and vacuum the floor" rather than "clean your room").

☑ **Don't take away rewards that have already been earned.** If your child earns a reward and then gets in trouble for something unrelated, let them keep the reward. You can use a consequence for the negative behavior, but it should not affect the reward. Taking away rewards can lead to a constant sense of defeat when the child works hard but never sees positive outcomes.

☑ **Reward good habits instead of good outcomes.** For example, reward your child if they study for an hour each night, instead of rewarding them for an "A" on a test. Even though it seems obvious to adults, many children don't know how to get an "A" on a test. Use rewards to teach your child habits that will eventually lead to the ultimate goal.