

STRESS-FREE PARENTING

Adapted from the American School Counselor Association

USE CONSEQUENCES, NOT PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL PUNISHMENT. Set up a system where undesired behavior results in a related consequence. Teach your child why the action was undesirable. There are almost always natural consequences for poor choices.

Once you have set a consequence for an action, you must firmly impose it each time. Do not threaten. If the rule is broken, the consequence is imposed. The process will not work if you say "If you do that again . . ." or "Do you want . . ." All children respond best to consistency.

Avoid empty threats that you know you will not follow through with. Never say: "If you do that again I will take your phone away for a month" knowing this would never be imposed.

Grades should not be considered for consequences, only negative behavior. A child who is getting to bed on time, doing homework and trying, should be praised even if grades are not high.

Older children can be sent to their room, or any room where they are not allowed to watch TV or play. Taking away privileges such as talking on the phone, going out with their friends, or driving a car, will help them understand the seriousness of their actions.

BE FAIR AND LOVING. Consequences do not always need to be imposed. Sometimes the natural consequence, along with a discussion about why the behavior was a poor choice, is enough to make an impact. Kids who are punished for everything will not feel comfortable coming to parents when they are in trouble. A trusting, open and honest relationship creates a learning experience for both parent and child. Parents who treat their children respectfully and fair will be respected in return.

Allow your child to suggest consequences. Kids believe it will be easy for them to behave in the future. One twelve-year-old, who said he would never use drugs, suggested permanent grounding and no car through high school. They decided on: "no car at age sixteen or loss of the car for six months for drug activity." It became a contract that the child remembered when tempted. He later said he would have used drugs when they were offered, but he was too afraid of losing the car.

Most children engage in experimental or risky behavior throughout their adolescence. Again, imposing harsh or unreasonable consequences often do not deter further incidences. Encourage your child to be open and honest about

experiences and frequently discuss reasons not to engage, peer pressure, coping techniques, and developing positive interests and activities.

AVOID NEGATIVE COMMENTS. The more impartial you are when imposing the consequence, the better the results will be. You can even take the child's side and say "I'm sorry this happened and you have to be grounded for three days, but the time will pass quickly and I'm sure it won't happen again." Do not make angry statements. Negative comments move the system from loving and fair to nasty and vindictive. Your children will treat you and the rest of society the way they are treated.

TALK WITH YOUR KIDS. Some people avoid saying what they need to say because they are afraid of the results. Tell your kids the truth. "I worry if I do not know where you are. What can we do to solve this problem?" helps a child to understand why they need to check in, rather than, "How dare you not let me know where you are?"

LOVE YOUR CHILDREN UNCONDITIONALLY. Think about these two statements: 1) "If you ever _____, I will disown you!" and 2) "I hope you never _____, but if it should happen and you need me, I will be here for you!"

The first statement will make a child fearful that they can never make a mistake, so they don't bother trying to do the right thing. The second statement acknowledges that mistakes can happen and parents will help their child learn why it shouldn't happen again.

USE A FIXED BEDTIME. Bedtime should be 9:00 P.M. on school nights and 10:00 P.M. on non school nights. This can be accomplished by using a digital watch or clock with an alarm. A later bedtime can be earned by good behavior. If the bedtime goes to 9:15 and a negative progress report comes home or the child is sleepy in school, the bedtime goes back to 9:00. Bedtime can be quiet time in their room as they grow older.

10. TELL YOUR CHILDREN THEY ARE WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO BE. I remember my mother telling me when I was young that I was smart and good looking. I grew up believing both, and I have lived my life as if it were true. I never saw the connection until I read in a psychology book that children believe what they are told about themselves. Telling a child: "You are a bad kid!" may cause them to grow up believing it and allow them to feel comfortable doing the things a bad person would do.

I learned this eleven years ago and started telling people to change the things they say to their kids. One woman told her four-year-old to: "Have a nice day," every morning when she dropped him off at his preschool. After our discussion

she started telling him to "be a good boy." He is fifteen now and she wishes she had done the same with her older son who is on probation.

Each parent must decide which positive things they will say to their children. Remember that parents who say negative things pay for it later.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN VALUES. Don't just teach your children to always do the right thing and have high standards, but demonstrate it. Think what lesson children learn when they see their parents stealing small items from work, slapping someone when they are angry, calling in sick when they are not, and abusing drugs, legal or illegal. Tobacco and alcohol are drugs, and kids know it. Remember, children do as they see, not what they hear.

HONESTY - Tell the truth! Parents who tell little lies can be teaching their kids to lie when they think it is necessary. When you catch your child lying, examine yourself.

COURAGE - Have the strength to NOT follow the crowd when the crowd is wrong. People of courage say NO and mean it. They influence others by the strength of their convictions.

PEACEFULNESS - Learn to compromise rather than argue.

SELF-RELIANCE - Be responsible for your own actions. Abandon the need to blame outside forces. Commit to personal excellence in everything you do. Parents must learn to let children make decisions. People who are allowed to make small mistakes as children mature earlier. Their decision making ability enables better life-choices in their teens and twenties.

SELF-DISCIPLINE - Use moderation in eating, speaking (don't curse/yell/lie), and use of alcohol/tobacco/cafeine/etc. Our kids know if we are in control and taking care of ourselves. They learn by our example. Children of parents who smoke are twice as likely to start before graduation from high school. Kids who are not smoking by then will probably never start.

FIDELITY - Be true to your commitments. If you say it, you should mean it. If you change your mind later, you should know in your heart that it is the right thing to do. Children of parents who know how to make and keep commitments are able to identify and associate with other people who do the same. This will help them in all aspects of life.

JUSTICE AND MERCY - Be fair in everything you do. Live by the golden rule. Consider this when setting rules and consequences. Remember what it was like when you were a kid . . . be fair!

LOVE - Teach your children to love themselves and to love others. They will always care what happens to themselves and to others.

* PARENTS, LEARN TO CARE ABOUT YOURSELF. DO NOT MODEL DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR.

* TELL YOUR CHILDREN THAT THEY ARE LOVED. THEY WILL CARE ABOUT THEMSELVES.

* CARE ABOUT OTHERS AND TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THE SAME. YOU WILL BE HAPPIER.

Parenting is as difficult as any profession, but like any profession, training is the key to success. Continue to learn and discover how to talk to your kids so you can help them grow.

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For questions or comments, e-mail to:

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