

Consequences vs. punishment. Is there a difference?

This article will discuss the concepts of consequences vs. punishments. I have heard people say there isn't a difference. Be is this true? Let's examine them to see.

Consequence definition is a result or effect of an action or condition.

Punishment is the infliction of a penalty as retribution for an offense. It usually involves suffering, pain or loss. definitions came from Merriam Webster dictionary.

Parenting is the most challenging responsibility a person can have. Establishing rules and boundaries are key components to parenting along with being consistent. Children are going to misbehave, push boundaries and break rules no matter how great a parent you are. Your little boo boo will defy you, frustrate you and push your buttons at some point in time before they reach adulthood. They may be responsible for some of the gray hairs on your head.

Punishment is a specific action used by any parents since the beginning of time. How many of us have been spanked, sent to our room without dinner, made to put soap in our mouth, or some other physical type of punishment? We say I was spanked and I turned out alright. Is that true? How do you feel emotionally about how you were punished? What lessons did you really learn? Was it fear or intimidation? Was it how to do what you wanted in more discreet or sneaky ways? Punishment is used by some parents to control their children's negative actions or misbehaviors. Some types of punishments include yelling, screaming, pinching, pulling, grabbing, swatting, shaking, punching, slapping, cursing, belittling, name calling, withholding food, affection, isolation, embarrassing, beating, and ignoring their child just to name some types of punishment. Do any of these techniques really sound like positive ways to deal with misbehavior. I must admit that most parents have used at least one of the above-mentioned methods of punishment, myself included. Punishment can be an immediate short-term solution to an infraction but where is the lesson in it?

Consequences are actions given by parents in response to breaking the rules.

The goal of consequences is to get your child to take responsibility for his/her actions and hold them accountable. There are two types of consequences. Natural consequences and logical. Natural consequences are actions that will occur without parental involvement. If you drink drunk and the police see you, you will get arrested. If you don't study for a test, you will probably receive a low grade. if you mistreat people then you will not be able to maintain friendships or relationships. These consequences happen as a direct result of the action the person performed.

Logical consequences are actions done specifically to teach a lesson and hopefully create better future choices. They are meant to extinguish negative behaviors. Some examples are: A parent taking away cell phone privileges from a child who repeatedly talks over the agreed upon cut off time.

A child who doesn't come home by curfew time consistently and they are not allowed to attend activity or event they enjoy in the near future. Like a party, game or social gathering.

A child who makes inappropriate posts on the internet is restricted from using social media for a specific period of time.

All consequences should follow the SMART format

S= Simple. Not a series of consequences. Two at most

M= match the offense. It should be specific to the infraction or action. Children should know that the consequence is a result of what they choice to do.

A= Appropriate. You don't want to frustrate a child by going overboard. When we as parents get upset we can tend to go to the extreme to make our point.

R= Realistic. Don't say you are punished for an unrealistic reason. You can't expect a young child to follow a consequence the same level as for a teenager. They won't understand it.

T= Time limited. Consequences do need to have an end date. I know you want to say your child is punished until they do better but that is vague and unclear and frankly unfair to the child. If your child has control issues they will buck, you every time to prove they can and will outlast you and your consequence. This is not fun for anyone.

Be consistent with consequences. Don't give them in an arbitrary manner or in anger. Post in your home the rules and consequences and have a discussion with your children in a family meeting. Make sure your child understands. Don't argue with your child about consequences. State the offense and the consequence. Allow your child to express their opinion on why they choose the behavior they did. This opens the lines of communication and provides learning opportunities for your child.

Share some of your own errors in judgment. (be wise) Maybe you went to work late consistently, and you were written up or your pay was docked. Older children will understand this better than younger children. The older child can see how ding consistently tardy can effect your budget and job security. Use simple words to talk to your children about it in a way they can relate to. Once I told a six- year old that his stealing was causing people not to trust him and how would he like it if people came to his home and stole from his things. He then understood the concept better. He could see how his actions not only were not a good choice, but how it would require people to have to replace the items taken and damage their relationship. All this was done without a punishment but by giving him a consequence. He had to use his allowance for two weeks to replace the amount of the items stolen.

Encourage your children. Catch them doing positive things and praise them often. This is called positive reinforcement. It increases the likelihood of the positive behavior reoccurring. Minimize the negative ones but don't ignore or overlook them. Don't bring up past offenses. Even if they do it multiple times (and they will). Simply state the inappropriate action and apply the consequence. Don't argue with them. Say You know the rules and the consequences. You made the choice. I am sure you will do better the

next time. Of course, this does depend on the type of misbehavior. Safety is always priority and anyone that harms others must be dealt with in a way that shows the seriousness of their actions. Sometimes you will need to involve outside support. A teacher, counselor, pastor, mentor, or friend or family member may help especially when you are too emotionally upset to be rational. No one wins when you are out of control and you are teaching your child how to behave in negative situations. Yes, you can show disappointment in your child's behavior but not in them as a person. They need to always feel secure and confident of your love for them.

Try to find the root of the misbehavior (see my five key reasons kids misbehave article). The goal of consequences is not to humiliate your child or demean them, but to teach them to be responsible for their own actions and be accountable. Punishment can often make the child focus on your punishment and lose sight of what they did. They will remember how mean you were, how loud you yelled, or how hard you pinched them. They can often resent you as a parent and not learn that their behaviors caused the situation. Children need to learn life lessons and how to make appropriate choices. Punishment can instill fear, anger and frustration in children. It can also contribute to them becoming more vested in bucking your authority and being untruthful, sneaky and manipulative. It can truly damage the parent child bond of trust and closeness. It even can breed hatred. They might focus on the pain not the lesson.

Communication is key with establishing consequences. Discipline is essential with all children. They require stability, and consistency and parents should model appropriate behaviors. Talk to your children often. Their brains don't fully develop until the age of 25 and they don't have the logic and impulse control that you as adults do. (I hope you do). Sometimes they really don't know why they did what they did. They are reactive and impulsive and egocentric. Help your children see that their actions can negatively impact others and contribute to their character and reputation. If a child consistently lies they need to know people won't believe them or feel they are trustworthy. If they are mean to people, then people won't want to be around them for long. If they steal people won't trust them. If they manipulate people, then people won't think well of them. If they are violent, they could injure someone, and people won't associate with them. Consequences can teach children how to respect themselves and others and ultimately help them become better people.

If you are consistent with consequences, then you are creating a responsible person.

Consequences hold a child responsible for their actions. Punishment usually makes the child focus on the punishment and on their parents' level of punishment and does not teach them to be accountable for their choices. Consequences keeps the lines of communication open, sets specific measurable expectations and teaches life lessons.