



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

*A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania*

## **Parent Guide to Fostering Self-Discipline, Part 5 CONSEQUENCES versus PUNISHMENT & REWARDS**

Dear Parent,

Listening and obedience are essential ingredients of self-discipline. The word *obey* means *to listen to another*, the kind of listening that leads to positive action and life-giving choices. A disciplined person is one who demonstrates the ability to act appropriately upon what is heard. A self-disciplined child is motivated within himself to do the right whether observed or not. Discipline is not a single act or statement. It is a process. Both learning to discipline and learning from it take time.

Parents are the primary agents in the formation of self-discipline within children. Parents are the first to instruct a child how to recognize God's voice and how to make life-giving choices in response. Through efforts at discipline formation a child comes to realize that any person of any age can be an agent of God's will and, therefore, the need for obedience and discipline extends to every situation. Growth in discipleship brings true freedom. A self-disciplined child knows and accepts personal boundaries, standards, and expectations; exercises freedom with responsibility; tries to cooperate; demonstrates accountability; upholds the common good; and accepts the natural or the logical consequences of choices. This is discipline at its finest!

### **Discipline: What it is and what it is not**

Discipline is not a synonym for punishment. Neither is discipline acquired through rewards. **Discipline** is instructive, respectful, pro-active and positive. It is a respectful process of becoming responsible, inner directed and cooperative. Children learn discipline from their parents and they learn from discipline over time. When parents create a climate of respect, consistency, and reasonable, pre-determined limits children learn to choose better ways to behave, to be responsible and to cooperate.

**Punishment**, on the other hand, is a penalty inflicted for an offense. It is an ineffective tool in the formation of authentic self-discipline. It motivates further misbehavior in vengeful ways because punishment will be perceived by a child as unfair, arbitrary, hurtful, unreasonable, or disproportionate to what she did or what she failed to do. Punishment can hurt the parent-child relationship because it prompts fear, resentment, and negative self-esteem. Punishment is often characterized by threats, yelling, put-downs, taking things away, spanking and hitting.

### **Natural and Logical Consequences**

Not only are they ineffective methods of discipline, but punishments and rewards are actually obstacles to discipleship. **Consequences**, either natural or logical, are the effective alternative to develop self-discipline. Psychologist Rudolf Dreikurs coined the terms and his

**Rewards**, like punishment, are intended to control or manipulate behavior. Consequently, they invite resistance by attempting to force children to conform. Though attractive externally and producers of quick results, rewards disrespect the person of the child by denying him the formation opportunities to develop the elements of autonomy, initiative, and industry which are vital to self-discipline, character formation, and positive self-esteem. Rewards make the parent responsible for the child's behavior, not the child; and rewards prevent children from learning to make decisions and from determining a code of rules for future behavior. Rewards encourage the child to believe that appropriate behavior is required only when an adult is present or looking at her and evaluating her. Furthermore, the value of a reward becomes arbitrary. Children demand bigger and better rewards in exchange for temporary cooperation. Where does it stop? Rewards foster an attitude of "What's in it for me?" and that level of moral thinking "freezes" a child in the mindset and the behavior of an eight year old.

research provides practical guidance for parents. His work is popularized in the STEP literature (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) written by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay. Consequences hold children responsible for their choices, allow them to develop and own a personal

code of behavior, and permit them to learn from experiences that are impersonal, i.e., hunger, tiredness, tardiness. Consequences teach the reality of the social order which is impersonally related to their choices, behaviors, and mis-behaviors.

**Natural consequences** are outcomes that happen without adult interference. For example, if you do not wear a coat on an icy day, you get cold. If you do not bring your lunch to school, you get hungry. Natural consequences are often the best way to help a child to learn the results of behavior and choices. Allow natural consequences to run their course unless they are (1) dangerous, (2) interfering with the rights of others, or (3) the child does not realize the harmful impact his choices have on others. At such times, logical consequences need to be applied.

**Logical consequences** are outcomes that require the intervention of another person. For example, when the TV is blaring, a parent can give the choice to either turn the TV volume down or to play outside. Or if clearing the bedroom floor of toys and clothes is an issue, a parent can establish that their child has the choice to pick up the items by vacuuming time or that the parent will place them in bags and put in the basement at the time of cleaning. A matter-of-fact tone of voice, friendly attitude, good will, and willingness to accept the child's decision are essential characteristics in formulating logical consequences.

**Effective logical consequences** are pre-determined outcomes that are (1) **related** to the behavior,

### Formation in Self-Discipline

Discipline is a learning process that chooses methods best suited to the age and stage development of a child. Dinkmeyer and McKay, the primary authors of *Parenting Young Children* (p. 94) offer an acrostic to focus parents on positive, respectful ways to teach discipline to children under six years of age. Because these suggestions are basic to children of elementary and secondary school age as well as adults, they are listed here.

Be proactive. More action; less talk. Change the subject. Ignore behaviors like showing off, sulking, whining, temper tantrums, power plays, interrupting, begging for treats, and insults. Concentrate on what you are doing. Keep your face calm and let your body language communicate detachment. Pre-plan, set limits, give choices and make it clear when there is no choice. Show affection. Have fun with your child. Avoid over-protecting. Treat a behavior the same way each time it occurs. The more consistent you are, the more effective will be your discipline. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Be consistent in public, private, and to other children who visit your home. Encourage positive behavior whenever your child demonstrates it. As a last resort, use a time-out to help your child to re-gain control. In advance of misbehavior establish these six guidelines to using time-outs: (1) a place, (2) rules, (3) length of time: one minute per age, (4) unlocked door, (5) allow the child to play, and (6) When time-out is over do not discuss it. Time-out is not punishment.

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i.e., the outcome is logically matched to the mis-behavior; (2) **respectful** of persons, i.e., the choice respects both parent and child needs, it is conveyed with a sense of abandon to whatever choice the child makes, and it separates the deed from the child; and (3) **reasonable** in expectations, i.e., the consequence is fair, balanced, impartial, and concerned with the present. *The Parent's Handbook*, written by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay, suggests twelve principles to guide the use of natural and logical consequences to be related, respectful, and reasonable:

- Understand the child's goals, behavior, and emotions.
- Be both firm and kind.
- Don't try to be a "good" parent. (Do not overprotect or take on the responsibilities of the child.)
- Become more consistent in your actions.
- Separate the deed from the doer.
- Encourage independence.
- Avoid pity.
- Refuse to become over concerned about what other people think.
- Recognize who owns the problem.
- Talk less, act more.
- Refuse to fight or to give in.
- Let all the children share responsibility.

Be cautious! The difference between punishment and logical consequences can be a fine line. No matter how logical the action may seem, if your tone is judgmental, harping, harsh, or cynical; your attitude overbearing or bully-ish; or your demands absolute, your actions will be punitive and demeaning; not the kind of consequence that leads to self-discipline.

- Distract the child.
- Ignore misbehavior.
- Structure the environment.
- Control the situation, not the child.
- Involve the child.
- Plan time for loving.
- Let go.
- Increase your consistency.
- Notice positive behavior.
- Excuse the child with a time-out.