

SETTING LIMITS IN THE CLASSROOM

BY ROBERT J. MACKENZIE

MY JOB as a child therapist brings me into frequent contact with the most aggressive researchers in a large school district. I see the kids who don't stop at the signals their teachers hold up in the classroom, the ones who push everything to the limit. Loren, a second grader, is a good example. He was referred after a series of suspensions for disruptive and uncooperative behavior in the classroom.

"Loren won't listen to anyone," commented his teacher. "He thinks he can do whatever he wants. I've had numerous conferences with his parents, and they say he acts the same way at home. We're all at a loss for what to do."

When Loren arrived at my office with his parents, he plopped himself down in one of my comfortable blue swivel chairs and began sizing me up. Then he went right to work on me. We hadn't exchanged a word, but his research was under way.

What do you think Loren and many other children do when they first sit in my chairs? Right. They spin them, and sometimes they put their feet in them, too. They know it's not OK. Their parents know it, and so do I, but the kids do it anyway. They look at me, then at their parents, and go ahead and see what happens. This is limit-testing behavior. When it happens, I know I am about to learn a great deal about how the family communicates about limits.

I don't need behavior rating scales, standardized tests, or lengthy clinical interviews to see what's going on. I just watch the child, the chairs, and the parents for ten to fifteen minutes, and I usually have all the information I need to see what's going on.

Loren's parents responded to his chair spinning the way most permissive parents do. They ignored it. They pretended it wasn't happening and focused instead on telling me about all of the disruptive things Loren did

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at school. Loren continued spinning. Five minutes passed. Not one signal had been given.

Ten minutes into our session, I could see Loren's father was becoming annoyed. He made his first attempt at a signal. He said Loren's name softly and gave him a look of disapproval.

Loren did what most kids do when this happens. He acknowledged the gesture, stopped briefly, then resumed his spinning as soon as his father looked away. Loren and his parents were reenacting a script, the same one they go through dozens of times each week whenever Loren misbehaves.

With his behavior, Loren was asking the same questions he asks at home and in the classroom: "What's OK? What's not OK? Who's in control? How far can I go? And what happens when I go too far?" He knew his parents weren't going to do anything about his behavior, so he was conducting his research to determine my power and authority and the rules that operated in my office. Between disapproving looks from his father, Loren continued to spin. I waited to see what would happen next.

A few more minutes passed, then Loren's father did what many other parents do at this point. He reached over and stopped the chair with his hand. His signal elicited the same response as before. Loren acknowledged the gesture, waited for his father to remove his hand, then continued spinning.

Loren's parents were doing their best to say stop, but Loren knew from experience that stopping was not really expected or required. All of the gestures were just steps in a well-rehearsed drama. The spinning continued. I could see why he wasn't responding to his teacher's signals in the classroom.

Fifteen minutes went by, and Loren still had not received a clear signal from his parents. Their anger was apparent. Finally his exasperated mother turned to me and said, "See what he does! This is the same thing we have to put up with at home!"

At this point, I intervened and helped Loren answer some of his research questions. In a matter-of-fact voice, I said, "Loren, I'd like you to use my blue chairs, but I have two rules you'll have to follow—don't spin them and don't put your feet in them. I'm confident

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DAVIS.

you can follow my rules, but if you don't, you'll have to sit in my orange chair for the rest of the session." I keep an old plastic orange chair in my office for these situations.

What do you think Loren did? Sure, he did the same thing most strong-willed children do. He tested. Not right away, but within a few minutes, he gave the chair another spin and looked for my reaction. He heard my words, now he wanted hard data. He wanted to see what I would do.

So I did what I always do when this happens. I pulled out the orange chair and said calmly, "This will be your chair for the rest of the session. You can try my blue chairs again next session." Then I stood next to him and waited for him to move with a look of expectation. Reluctantly, Loren moved into the orange chair.

What did Loren and I just work out? I just answered his research questions. He heard stop, and he experienced stopping. Now he knows what I expect and what will happen if he decides to test the next time he visits my office. Loren has all the information he needs to make an acceptable choice.

You're probably wondering what happens when children refuse to get out of the blue chair. The interesting thing is that most don't test when they get the information they need to make an acceptable choice. I see more than a hundred chair spinners a year in my counseling work. Only a few continue to test when I bring out the orange chair.

What happens when they do? The process is still the same. The questions haven't changed. They are still asking, "Or what? What are you going to do about it?" So I try to give them the data they're looking for in the same matter-of-fact manner. I turn to their parents and say, "Your child doesn't want to get out of my chair. Do I have your permission to move him?"

In ten years, I've never had a parent say no. Most are so embarrassed over their child's behavior, they can't wait to get out of my office. Others are very curious to see if I can actually get their child to cooperate.

Once I get their permission, I turn to the child and say, "Your parents say I can move you into the orange chair, but I'd prefer that you move yourself. What would you like to do?" I take a few deep breaths and wait patiently for fifteen or twenty seconds.

What do you think they do? A very few, maybe two or three each year, wait until I get up out of my chair before they are convinced I will act. Then they move into the other chair. The vast majority move on their own. Why? They move because they have all the information they need to make an acceptable decision. Their questions are answered. Even aggressive researchers can make acceptable choices when provided with clear signals. Their cooperation demonstrated the power of a clear message.

When children like Loren misbehave at school, the focus is on their problem behavior not the hidden forces that operate beneath the surface to shape that problem behavior. This is where my investigative work begins. I try to determine why the teaching and learning process breaks down. Is the problem teaching? Or learning? Or is something else going on? I try to answer these questions by examining the ways rules are

taught both at home and in the classroom.

Why Consequences Are Important

Consequences are like walls. They stop misbehavior. They provide clear and definitive answers to children's research questions about what's acceptable and who's in charge, and they teach responsibility by holding children accountable for their choices and behavior. When used consistently, consequences define the path you want your students to stay on and teach them to tune in to your words.

If you've relied on permissive or punitive methods in the past, you will probably need to use consequences often during the first four to eight weeks that you implement the guidance strategies I describe. Why? Because your aggressive researchers will probably test you frequently to determine if things are really different. This is the only way they will know that your rules have changed and that your walls are really solid. You are likely to hear comments such as "You're not fair!" or "You're mean!" as they attempt to break down your walls and get you to revert back to your old behavior.

This is what Mr. Harvey discovered when he attended one of my workshops looking for more effective ways to handle the daily testing, resistance, and argument he was encountering in the classroom. It didn't take him long to recognize that his permissive approach was part of the problem. His limits were soft, and his consequences, if he used them at all, were late and ineffective. His kids were taking advantage of him, and he was eager to put an end to it. After he completed my workshop, he made an announcement to his class.

"I'll be running the classroom differently from now on," Mr. Harvey began. "I'm not going to repeat my directions anymore or remind you to do the things you're supposed to do. I'm not going to argue or debate if you don't want to do it. I will only ask you once. If you decide not to cooperate, then I will use consequences to hold you accountable." He explained logical consequences and the time-out procedure.

"He doesn't mean it," whispered one student. "Yeah, he knows who's really in charge here," chuckled another. Their reaction was understandable. Their previous experience gave them little cause to regard his words seriously.

But Mr. Harvey kept his word. When he gave directions or requested their cooperation, he said it only once. No more repeating or reminding. When the kids ignored him or tuned out, he used the check-in procedure. When they tried to argue or debate, he used the cut-off technique. [See sidebars, page 35 and 36.] If they persisted, he followed through quickly with logical consequences or time-out.

"What got into him?" wondered several students at the end of the first week. "Yeah, we liked him better the old way."

The methods worked. For the first time, Mr. Harvey's students were accountable for their poor choices and behavior. They were learning to be responsible, but their testing didn't let up for a while.

In fact, their testing intensified during the first few

The Check-In Procedure

WHEN WE give a clear message with our words, but students don't respond as expected, sometimes we're not sure if our message was heard or understood. We wonder: "Did my message get across? Am I being ignored? Is it time to move on to my action step?"

The check-in procedure is a simple technique that helps us answer these questions without getting hooked into the old repeating and reminding routine. When in doubt, check-in with the child by saying one of the following:

"What did I ask you to do?"

"Did you understand what I said?"

"Were my directions clear?"

"Tell me in your words what you heard me say."

For example, morning snack is over, and it's time for Mrs. Jansen's preschoolers to get ready to go out to the playground. "Put your napkins, wrappers, and other garbage in the waste can," she says. Most of them do, except for Stacey who just looks at her blankly, then heads to the door with her classmates.

"Did she hear what I said?" wonders Mrs. Jansen. "She doesn't act like she did." Mrs. Jansen is tempted to ask Stacey a second time when she remembers the technique she learned in the book — when in doubt, use the check-in procedure. She gives it a try.

"Stacey, what did I ask you to do before you go outside?" asks Mrs. Jansen.

"Pick up my mess," replies Stacey.

"Then do it, please," says Mrs. Jansen matter-of-factly. Stacey goes back to pick up her mess.

In this case, Stacey was limit testing. She had the information she needed but chose to ignore it. She fully expected to hear a lot of repeating and reminding before she would actually have to pick up her mess, if she would have to pick it up at all. The check-in procedure helped her teacher to clarify their communication, avoid a dance, and eliminate the payoffs for tuning out all at the same time.

Now, let's consider another scenario. Let's say that when Mrs. Jansen checks in with Stacey, she responds with the same blank stare because she really was tuned out completely. What should Mrs. Jansen do?

She should give Stacey the information that Stacey missed the first time and preview her action step. Mrs. Jansen's message might sound like this: "Put your napkins, wrappers, and other garbage away before you go outside. You won't be ready to leave until that job is done." Now Stacey has all the information she needs to make an acceptable choice. All Mrs. Jansen needs to do is follow through.

The check-in procedure also can be used in situations where children respond to our requests with mixed messages; that is, they give us the right verbal response but continue to do what they want. Sam, a high-school senior, is an expert at this. He sits in his seventh-period literature class and doodles when he's supposed to be writing a short plot summary. There are thirty minutes left in the period. The teacher notices his lack of progress.

"Sam, you have thirty minutes to finish up," he says as he passes by Sam's desk.

"I will," says Sam, but ten minutes go by, and he hasn't written a sentence. He hopes to avoid the assignment altogether or talk his way out of it when the bell rings. His teacher suspects this also and decides to check in.

"Sam, what did I ask you to do?" inquires his teacher.

"I'll finish up," says Sam in a reassuring voice.

The teacher clarifies Sam's message. "Your words say that you will, but your actions say you won't. Let me be more clear. You won't be ready to leave until you finish your plot summary. I'll be happy to stay with you after school if you need more time to finish up." Now his teacher's message is very clear.

"Darn! It didn't work," Sam says to himself. He gets out a clean piece of paper and hurries to complete the assignment before the bell rings.

weeks. His aggressive researchers did everything they could to wear him down and get him to revert back to his old ways. It didn't work. He didn't give in or compromise, even when they told him he was mean or unfair. He was prepared for their resistance.

An initial increase in testing during the first four weeks is a normal and expected part of the learning and change process. After all, Mr. Harvey told his students things were going to be different. How could they know for sure that he really meant what he said? Of course, they had to test and see for themselves. When they did, Mr. Harvey answered their questions with instructive consequences.

Four weeks after he started, Mr. Harvey noticed a change. The change was subtle at first, not dramatic.

There was less testing and more cooperation. The kids were tuning back in to his words. They were beginning to change their beliefs about his rules.

Your consequences will accomplish your immediate goal of stopping your students' misbehavior when it occurs, but teaching them to tune back in to your words will take time. How much time? This depends on your consistency, the length of time you've been using soft limits, and the amount of training your students need to be convinced that your rules have changed.

As you accumulate hours of consistency between your words and actions, you will notice less testing and less need for consequences. This will be your signal that your students are tuning back in. They are be-

The Cut-Off-Technique

THE CUT-OFF technique is an effective method for interrupting dances when children try to hook us into arguing, debating, bargaining, or compromising our limits. As the name implies, the cut-off ends the interaction by specifying a consequence if it continues. The "Or what?" question is answered. If children continue testing, follow through with your consequence. Either way, the dance stops, and your students receive the clear message they need.

When children try to engage you in arguments, debates, bargaining, or other forms of verbal sparring, say one of the following:

"We're done talking about it. If you bring it up again, then..." (Follow through with your action step.)

"Discussion time is over. You can do what you were asked, or you can spend some quiet time by yourself getting ready to do it. What would you like to do?" (Follow through with a time-out consequence.)

For example, a group of sixth-grade boys play catch with a football on the blacktop area. Their errant passes barely miss younger children playing nearby. The yard-duty teacher intervenes.

"Guys, it's not OK to play catch on the blacktop," says the teacher matter-of-factly. "You can play on the grass away from the younger children."

"We're not hurting anybody," says one boy.

"Why can't they move if they don't want to get hurt?" asks another.

The teacher isn't sure his message got across. He decides to check in. "Did you guys understand what I asked you to do?" he inquires.

"Yeah, but I don't see why we should," says one boy. The others nod in agreement.

"I'm not going to debate with them about why they should follow the rules," the teacher thinks to himself. He decides to end this potential power struggle before it begins. "We're done talking about it," he says. "If you pass the ball on the blacktop again, I'll have to take it away, and you'll spend the rest of the recess on the bench."

Now his message is really clear. The boys know their options. They have all the information they need to make an acceptable decision. Whether they cooperate or test, either way, they will learn the rule he's trying to teach. No dances this time.

Emily's first-period teacher also uses the cut-off technique effectively when Emily arrives late to class and tries to talk her way out of a tardy slip.

"I was only a couple of minutes late, Miss Stevens," pleads Emily. "It won't happen again. I promise."

"I hope not," replies Miss Stevens "but you still need to pick up a tardy slip before I can let you back in class."

"It's not fair!" insists Emily, hoping for a little bargaining room. It nearly works. Miss Stevens is about to argue the issue of fairness when she remembers the technique she read about in the book.

"We're done talking about it, Emily," says Miss Stevens matter-of-factly. "If you want to discuss it further, we can arrange a time with your counselor after you pick up your tardy slip." That wasn't what Emily wanted to hear. Reluctantly, she heads to the attendance office.

ginning to change their beliefs about your rules.

What Makes a Consequence Effective?

The effectiveness of your consequences depends largely on how you apply them. If you apply them in a punitive or permissive manner, your consequences will have limited training value. You'll be teaching different lessons than you intend, and you, not your students, will be responsible for most of the problem solving. If you apply consequences in a democratic manner, however, your signals will be clear, and so will the lessons you're trying to teach. Consequences are most effective when used democratically.

Let me illustrate this point by showing how three teachers can use the same consequences for the same misbehavior with varying degrees of effectiveness. Mr. Wallace uses the permissive approach. When he sees Kenny cheating at tetherball, he gives Kenny a lecture on the importance of honesty and fair play and asks him to sit out his next turn. "What a joke!" Kenny says to himself. Within minutes, he's back to his old tricks.

Mrs. Hunter uses the punitive approach. When she sees Kenny cheating at tetherball, she singles him out for humiliation. "Nobody likes to play with a cheater!" she says in a loud, accusatory voice. "If you can't play fair, you won't play at all. No more tetherball for a week."

"A week!" exclaims Kenny. "That's not fair!" He walks off feeling resentful and considers ways to get back.

Miss Fisher uses the democratic approach. When she sees Kenny cheating, she calls him aside respectfully. "Kenny, you can't play tetherball if you don't play by the rules," she says matter-of-factly. "You need to find another game to play for the rest of this recess. You can try tetherball again next recess." No lectures. No humiliation. No long or drawn-out consequences. Next recess, Kenny plays by the rules.

Each of the teachers in these examples decided to limit Kenny's tetherball time as a consequence for not playing by the rules. Mr. Wallace applied the consequence permissively. His message was respectful, but his consequence lacked firmness. It was too brief.

Kenny continued testing.

Mrs. Hunter applied the consequence punitively. Her message was more than firm. It was harsh and not very respectful. Kenny understood the rule she was trying to teach, but he didn't feel good about the way her message was delivered. He left their encounter feeling resentful with no greater desire to cooperate.

Miss Fisher applied the consequence in a democratic manner. Her message was both firm and respectful. Her consequence achieved the right balance between the two extremes. It wasn't too long, and it wasn't too brief. It was instructive. No feelings were injured. No relationships were damaged. Kenny received the information he needed to make a better choice. He didn't need a week to show that he could cooperate.

Miss Fisher was effective because she understands how to use consequences. Let's look at the properties effective consequences share in common.

Immediacy

It's snack time, and Ricky, age four, decides to blow bubbles in his carton of milk. His classmates are amused, but not his teacher. She gives him some choices. "Ricky, it's not OK to blow bubbles in your milk. You can drink it the right way, or you'll have to put it away. What would you like to do?"

"I'll drink it the right way," says Ricky. He does, too, for a while, but as soon as his teacher leaves, he decides to test. He puts the carton to his lips and blows some more big bubbles. Without any further words, his teacher removes the milk carton. Ricky will have another chance to drink the right way next time they have snacks.

Consequences are most effective when they are applied immediately after the unacceptable behavior. The immediacy of the consequence helped Ricky make the cause-and-effect connection between his misbehavior and the consequence he experienced. The lesson was instructive. If his teacher had chosen instead to overlook his misbehavior and withhold his milk during the next snack period, her consequence would have had much less impact.

Consistency

Tina, an eighth grader, loves to visit with her friends between classes, but her next class is PE, and she doesn't want to be late. Last time she arrived late to PE, she had to go to the office for a tardy slip and lost points for missing calisthenics.

"I'll be careful," Tina says to herself. She keeps an eye on her watch and continues to visit. With one minute to go, she sprints for class and nearly makes it. Her teacher greets her at the door.

"Hi, Tina," says Mrs. Perles, as she points in the direction of the attendance office. "I'll see you after you pick up a tardy slip."

"Not again!" says Tina remorsefully. She searches for a good excuse. "I had trouble with my locker," she says convincingly. "Can't this be an exception, please?"

Mrs. Perles holds firm. "Sorry, Tina," she says. "You can explain your situation to Mr. Harris, our vice principal, if you wish, but there's nothing more I can do."

Tina is determined to avoid consequences if she can. When she appeals her case to Mr. Harris, he also

holds firm. "Ten minutes is plenty of time to get to class," he says. "I'm sure you'll be more careful next time."

"Rats!" Tina says to herself. "He's as tight as Mrs. Perles." She picks up her tardy slip and heads back to class.

Consistent consequences are vital to effective guidance. Your consistency helps children collect the data they need to arrive at the conclusions you intend. Some students, like Tina, need to collect a lot of data before they are convinced, but the process is the same for all. Tina will learn that she is expected and required to show up for class on time.

As the example illustrates, consistency has many dimensions. There's consistency between our words and our actions. There's consistency between the classroom and the office, and there's consistency between the way consequences are applied from one time to the next. Tina experienced consistency in all of these areas. She received the clearest possible signal about her school's rule.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that Tina's PE teacher is only 60 percent consistent about enforcing her rule about showing up for class on time. What can she expect from Tina and others? More testing? Of course. In reality, the rule is only in effect 60 percent of the time. How will the kids know when it is and is not in effect? They will have to test. Inconsistency is an invitation for testing.

Relatedness

When we fail to pay our phone bills for several months, does the phone company respond by disconnecting our cable TV service? No. That would not stop us from using our phone without paying. Instead, they use a consequence that is logically related to the behavior they want to change. They shut off our phone service and charge us a reinstallation fee when they hook us back up. This teaches us to be more responsible about paying for our phone service.

Children also learn best when the consequences they experience are logically related to their behavior. It makes little sense to take away a child's recess privileges or an upcoming field trip because that child decides to bother a classmate during instruction. What does annoying others have to do with recesses or field trips? The consequences and the offending behavior are not logically related.

A more instructive consequence would be to temporarily separate the student from others and provide him with some time to get back under control. The message might sound like: "Jimmy, you need to move your desk about five feet away from Ben. You can move back to your old spot after lunch." Jimmy hears stop and experiences stopping. The consequence is both immediate and logically related to the behavior we want to change. Jimmy has the data he needs to make a better choice.

Duration

Stephanie, a second grader, makes disruptive noises while her classmates work quietly at their seats. The teacher tries to ignore the noise, but it gets louder. Finally, she walks over and asks Stephanie to stop. Stephanie does, for a while, then starts up again a few

minutes later.

"I've had enough of your rudeness!" says the teacher angrily. She sends Stephanie to the office and tells her not to return until after lunch. It's only nine-thirty.

Sure, the consequence stopped Stephanie's disruptive behavior, but it also eliminated all her opportunities to demonstrate that she could cooperate and behave acceptably during the remainder of the morning. A brief five- or ten-minute time-out would have accomplished the teacher's purpose adequately.

When it comes to applying consequences, more is not necessarily better. Consequences of brief duration often achieve our training goals more effectively than long-term consequences, particularly with preschool and elementary-school children. Why? Because brief consequences, applied consistently, give children more opportunities to collect data and make acceptable choices. More teaching and learning occur.

This principle is difficult for many teachers who operate from the punitive model to accept. From their perspective, if a little is good, then a lot must be wonderful. They tend to go overboard with the length or severity of their consequences, then they add to their own frustration by expecting change to happen rapidly. They don't realize that long, drawn-out consequences actually slow down the training process by providing fewer opportunities for learning. Worse yet, teachers must endure the resentment their consequences cause.

Consequences of unclear duration also create problems. Byron, a third grader, is a good example. When he disrupts class, his teacher asks him to go to the time-out area until she feels he's ready to return to his seat.

"How long is that?" Byron wonders. "Five minutes? Ten? Twenty? Possibly all morning?" Byron isn't sure, but he knows one way to find out. Every few minutes he calls out, "Is it time yet?" His annoyed teacher considers adding more time.

Effective consequences have a beginning and an end that are clear and well-defined. Unclear or open-ended consequences invite the type of testing Byron did. If his teacher had specified five minutes as the amount of time Byron needed to spend in time-out, her consequence would have been clear. Byron probably wouldn't have persisted with his disruptive questioning.

Respect

Drake, a sixth grader, enjoys negative attention, and he has discovered a good way to get it. When it's his turn to be blackboard monitor, he runs his fingernails down the center of the board and gets the intended response. His teacher isn't amused.

"Drake, you can erase the board quietly or we can find someone else to do the job. What would you like to do?"

"OK," says Drake with a mischievous smile. "I'll do it the right way." He does, too, for the rest of the morning, but when he's finishing up a job later that afternoon, he runs his fingernail down the board once again.

"Take your seat please, Drake," says his teacher matter-of-factly. She turns to the class. "Who would like to be Drake's replacement for the rest of the week?" A

half dozen hands shoot up.

Drake received a clear message about his teacher's rules and expectations. He also received an important object lesson in respectful problem solving. No one was blamed or criticized. No feelings were hurt, and no relationships were damaged.

Now, consider how this situation might have been handled by another teacher who uses the punitive approach. When Drake runs his fingernail down the board the first time, this teacher explodes.

"I knew I couldn't trust you with even a simple task," she says angrily. "You obviously need a few years to grow up before you're ready for this type of responsibility. Now take your seat!" Sure, her consequence stops Drake's misbehavior, but what does he learn in the process?

The method we use is the method we teach. The method itself communicates a message about acceptable behavior. When we apply consequences in hurtful ways, we teach hurtful problem solving.

Clean Slates

It's been three weeks since Kyle, a seventh grader, was suspended from school for instigating a food fight in the cafeteria. He threw a carton of milk and hit another student in the head. Although Kyle has been well behaved in the cafeteria ever since, his fourth-period teacher continues to remind him almost daily about the poor choice he made and the consequence he experienced.

Kyle's teacher can't seem to let go of the consequence. Her focus is stuck on stopping the unacceptable behavior when it should be directed to encouraging Kyle's present cooperation. Kyle needs a clean slate and a fresh opportunity to show that he can make an acceptable choice and behave responsibly.

What You Can Expect

When you begin holding your students accountable with effective consequences, you are likely to encounter an initial increase in testing and resistance. Don't be alarmed. This is temporary. It's a normal part of the learning and retraining process.

Your students have already formed beliefs about how you are supposed to behave based on months and sometimes years of experience. They are not likely to change these well-established beliefs overnight just because you said things are going to be different. They will need to experience more than your words to be convinced.

Imagine how you would react if a close friend told you he was going to behave differently. Let's say this person had always been critical and judgmental of others in the past, and now he claims that he's going to be more tolerant and accepting. Wouldn't you want to see the change for yourself over time before you believed it? Most of us would. Students are the same.

Telling students that you're changed may not be enough to change their beliefs or their behavior. They will want to experience the change for themselves over time before they are likely to revise their beliefs and accept the fact that you are different. You will have to show them with your consistent behavior.

In the meantime, you should expect them to test

Effective consequences have a beginning and an end that are clear and well-defined.



your new methods and to do everything they can to get you to behave "the way you are supposed to." If you've been doing a permissive dance in the past, they will probably continue to ignore you, tune you out, challenge your requests, and dangle delicious baits to get you back out on the dance floor. If you've been punitive, they will probably continue to annoy you and provoke your anger.

Consequences will play an important role during this retraining period. You will probably need to use them frequently. The more hours of consistency you achieve between your words and actions, the quicker your students will learn to tune back in, reduce their testing, and cooperate without the need for consequences.

How long will this take? This depends on a number of factors—the age of your students, your consistency, temperaments, and how much history you and your students need to overcome. Most teachers who apply

the methods with good consistency report a significant reduction in testing during the first eight weeks. Younger children, ages three to seven, respond more quickly. Older children and teens require longer. Your consistency will accelerate the learning process for children of all ages.

The notion of a quick fix is very appealing. We all want our students' behavior to improve as quickly as possible, but we also need to recognize that these patterns did not develop overnight. Retraining takes time. Expectations of a quick fix will only set you and your students up for unnecessary frustration and disappointment. Allow the teaching-and-learning process the time it needs to do its part.

NATURAL CONSEQUENCES: NATURAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

IT'S SNACK time in Mrs. Clarey's kindergarten class. She passes out small paper cups filled with nuts and raisins to her students, and they all go outside to eat their snacks on the lawn. Two of her students, Dustin and Max, decide to play a game with their food. They toss their snacks into the air and try to catch them in their mouths. Most ends up on the ground.

"Their snacks won't last long like that," Mrs. Clarey thinks to herself. She's right. Within minutes, the boys come up and ask for more.

"Sorry," she replies. "One cup each is all we get."

Mrs. Clarey let the natural consequence of losing snacks teach the lesson Dustin and Max need to learn. Like many of us, she was probably tempted to say "I told you so" or to provide a lecture on the poor choice of playing with their food. She also knew that any further words or actions on her part would take responsibility away from the boys and sabotage their real-life learning experience. Dustin and Max will probably think carefully next time they decide to play that game.

Natural consequences, as the name implies, follow naturally from an event or situation. They send the right action messages to children because they place responsibility where it belongs—on the child. Natural consequences require little or no involvement from teachers. We can easily sabotage the training value of this guidance strategy when we become overinvolved, try to fix the problem, add more consequences, give lectures, or add an "I told you so."

Some teachers find natural consequences easy to use and welcome opportunities to let children learn from their own mistakes. For others, particularly those who operate from the punitive model, natural consequences are not easy to use. When something happens, they have to fight their desire to take charge and control the lesson. Doing nothing when you want to do something can be frustrating.

If you find yourself wanting to take charge and control the lesson, practice limiting your involvement to restating the obvious facts of the situation. For example, if your students kick the soccer ball onto the roof after you asked them to play away from the building, you might say, "When the ball is on the roof, it's not

available to play with." No further words or actions are needed.

Let's look at some of the many situations where you can use natural consequences.

Situations for Using Natural Consequences

1. *When playground equipment or learning materials are lost, damaged, or stolen due to carelessness, misuse, or lack of responsibility.*

Natural consequence: Don't repair or replace the lost or damaged items until enough time has passed for students to experience the loss.

Mr. Ackers, a principal at an inner-city elementary school, loves basketball. He'll do almost anything to encourage his students to play. When the kids ask him to lower the rims on one of the courts so they can stuff the ball through the basket, he is happy to help out.

But Mr. Ackers soon notices a problem. Some kids continue to hang on the rims after they stuff the ball. "The rims won't last long if they keep that up," Mr. Ackers says to himself. When he explains this concern to the kids, they promise to be careful, but many continue to hang on the rims. By the end of the week, one rim is so badly damaged it is unusable. So the kids play half-court games with the remaining lowered rim. It's not long before that one is damaged, too.

"We need new rims to practice stuffing," the kids say the next time they see Mr. Ackers. He recognizes his opportunity to use a natural consequence.

"Rims are expensive," he says. "They don't last long when people hang on them. It will be a while before we can replace them." He wants the kids to experience the loss for several weeks or perhaps a month before he replaces the rims. Next time, they'll probably think twice before hanging on them.

2. *When children make a habit out of forgetting.*

Natural consequence: Don't remind them or take away their responsibility by doing for them what they should do for themselves.

Nine-year-old Kendra has a habit of forgetting her homework and lunch money in the mornings. Each time this occurs, one of her parents drops the forgotten item off at school. Noticing that this had become a pattern, Kendra's teacher suggests that the parents not make any extra trips for a two-week period.

"Kendra is a good student," says the teacher. "If she misses one or two lunches or assignments, it's not going to hurt her." Her parents agree.

On Tuesday of the first week, Kendra forgets her lunch money. When lunchtime arrives, she asks her teacher if her parents dropped off her lunch money. "Not yet," says her teacher.

That night, Kendra complains to her parents. "You forgot my lunch money! I couldn't eat lunch today."

"I'm sure you'll remember it tomorrow," says her father matter-of-factly. Nothing further was said.

Kendra did remember her lunch money, but on Thursday she left without her homework. Around mid-morning she asks her teacher if her parents dropped it off. "Not yet," says her teacher. Kendra received a zero on the assignment.

Nine-year-old Kendra has a habit of forgetting her homework and lunch money in the mornings. Each time this occurs, one of her parents drops the forgotten item off at school.



Once again, she complains to her parents. "You forgot to bring my homework. I got a zero on that assignment!"

"You're a very good student," says her mother. "I'm sure you'll remember it tomorrow." She did.

3. *When children fail to do their part.*

Natural consequence: Let them experience the result.

Austin, a ninth grader, knows he's supposed to take his dirty gym clothes home on Fridays to be washed, but when he opens his locker Monday morning, he sees the bag of dirty clothes. The aroma is unmistakable.

"Oh no!" he says to himself. "What am I going to do?" He decides to present his dilemma to his gym teacher.

"May I be excused from gym class today. Mr. Edwards? I left my gym clothes in my locker over the weekend. They really stink."

Mr. Edwards understands the situation. He also recognizes his opportunity to let the natural consequence teach Austin the lesson he needs to learn.

"Sorry, Austin," says Mr. Edwards matter-of-factly. "There's nothing I can do. You can wear them the way they are or lose half a grade for not dressing. It's up to you."

Austin decides to wear them. His classmates give him plenty of room to do his calisthenics. Austin took his gym clothes home that evening. He didn't forget again.

4. *When kids dawdle or procrastinate.*

Natural consequence: When possible, let them experience the consequence of their procrastination.

Michelle, a tenth grader, is a pro at procrastination. Each morning, Monday through Friday, she waits until the last possible moment to get ready for school. After she misses her bus, which she does most of the time, she pleads with her parents for a ride. Reluctantly, one of them bails her out then lectures her about responsibility all the way to school.

"This is crazy!" complains Michelle's mom to her daughter's guidance counselor. "She makes it to school on time, but we end up late."

"What would happen if you and your husband left for work on time without prodding, reminding, or offering Michelle a ride after she misses her bus?" asks the counselor.

"She would miss her bus and have to walk about a mile and a half to school," replies Michelle's mom. "I'm sure she would be late."

"Right," agrees the counselor, "and she would have to pick up a tardy slip at the attendance office before she could be admitted to class. After three tardy slips, she would have to put in an hour of detention. Maybe you should let the natural consequences of her procrastination teach the lesson Michelle needs to learn."

That evening, her parents sat down with Michelle and explained that things were going to be different. "We're not going to prod or remind you anymore in the mornings," said her mom, "and we're not going to bail you out with rides if you miss the bus."

"I'll believe it when I see it," Michelle thinks to herself.

She became a believer the next morning. Not a word was said when she went into her usual stall, not even when she missed her bus at 7:30. Her parents left for work on time. At 7:45, Michelle wasn't even dressed. She walked to school and picked up a tardy slip. The second day followed the same pattern, but that's all it took for her to get the message. The third day, she caught her bus and arrived at school on time. Natural consequences helped her make a better choice.

LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES: STRUCTURED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES are a highly effective guidance procedure popularized by Rudolf Dreikurs and proponents of Adlerian psychology. Un-

like natural consequences that follow naturally from an event or situation, logical consequences are structured learning opportunities. They are arranged by an adult, experienced by the child, and logically related to the situation or misbehavior.

Logical consequences send clear action messages. They stop misbehavior. They teach our rules, and they answer research questions that were not answered with our words. When children experience logical consequences, they know where they stand and what we expect.

Some teachers have difficulty using logical consequences because they are unsure about when to use them or how to set them up. But logical consequences are easy to use when you think in simple terms and follow some general guidelines. Consider the following example.

It's music time in Mrs. Allen's third-grade class. The kids have been practicing the song "Hot Cross Buns" with their recorders all week. They've nearly mastered it. The practice goes well until Lisa decides to prolong the rehearsal. Each time she reaches a certain point in the song, she blasts away with a high note.

The first time, everyone laughs, even Mrs. Allen. They think it's an accident. The second time, only Lisa laughs. Mrs. Allen gives her some choices.

"Lisa, you can practice the right way, or you'll have to put away your recorder and sit quietly while the rest of us practice. What would you like to do?"

"I'll practice the right way," says Lisa. The practice resumes. When the class reaches that familiar point in the song, Lisa can't resist. She let out another high note.

"Put your recorder away, Lisa," says Mrs. Allen matter-of-factly. "You can join us for music again tomorrow."

Lisa's teacher is using a logical consequence to support her rule about cooperating during music. Since Lisa chose not to use her recorder the right way and cooperate with the lesson, she temporarily loses her recorder and the privilege of practicing with the class. The consequence removes some of Lisa's power and control, but not her responsibility. In effect, she chose the consequence she experienced.

Guidelines for Using Logical Consequences

Logical consequences have their greatest impact when they are immediate, consistent, temporary, and followed with a clean slate. The following guidelines should be helpful.

1. *Use your normal voice.*

Logical consequences are most effective when carried out in a matter-of-fact manner with your normal voice. Language that sounds angry, punitive, or emotionally loaded conveys over-involvement on your part and takes responsibility away from the child. When this occurs, an instructive lesson can backfire into a power struggle and generate resentment. Remember, our goal is to discourage unwanted behavior, not the child performing the behavior.

2. *Think in simple terms.*

Many adults have difficulty using logical conse-

quences because they think too hard and get confused by all the details. The appropriate logical consequence is usually apparent when we think in simple terms. For example, most misbehavior involves at least one of the following circumstances: children with other children, children with adults, children with objects, children with activities, or children with privileges. In most cases, you can apply a logical consequence by temporarily separating one child from another, a child from an adult, a child from an object such as a jump rope, a child from an activity such as a game, or a child from a privilege such as recess or computer use.

3. *Before rules are violated, set up logical consequences with limited choices.*

For example, Glenda, age six, knows she's supposed to keep her hands to herself in the bus line, but the temptation to horse around is great. She reaches over and tugs on the back of Carly's backpack.

"Hey, cut it out!" shouts Carly. The teacher sees what's going on and gives Glenda some choices.

"Glenda, you can keep your place in line if you keep your hands to yourself. If not, you'll have to stand by me at the back of the line. What would you like to do?"

"I'll keep my hands to myself," replies Glenda.

"Good choice," says the teacher.

The teacher in this example intervened early and was able to arrange a logical consequence by giving Glenda limited choices. Glenda received all the information she needed to make an acceptable choice. In this case, she chose to cooperate. If she had decided instead to continue horsing around, the teacher would have followed through and moved her to the back of the line. Either way, Glenda was held accountable for her behavior.

4. *After rules have been violated, apply logical consequences directly.*

Sometimes, we don't arrive on the scene until after our rules have already been violated. In these situations, we should apply our logical consequences directly.

For example, Thad and Byron, two sixth graders, are supposed to be working on a science experiment. Instead, they pinch each other with tweezers from their dissection kits. Their teacher intervenes with logical consequences.

"Put away the tweezers," she says matter-of-factly. "Chad, please sit at the back table for the next ten minutes, and Byron, you can sit in the empty chair next to my desk. You both can have your tweezers back in ten minutes if you use them the right way."

When the teacher arrived on the scene, her rules had already been violated. The time for limited choices had passed. The boys needed a clear action message to stop their misbehavior and reinforce the classroom rules. By separating them from their dissecting tools and each other, she succeeded in teaching the intended lesson.

5. *Use timers for dawdling and procrastinating.*

Timers are useful in situations when children test and resist limits by dawdling or procrastinating. Liz and Becky are a good example. These two fourth graders live for recess. They're usually the first ones

out the door when the bell rings and the last ones to return when recess ends. It's the last part that has become a problem, but their teacher has a plan for holding them accountable.

The next time the girls arrive late from recess, their teacher greets them at the door with a stopwatch. She clicks the watch as they walk through the door and announces, "You both owe me forty seconds from your next recess. You can leave forty seconds after every one else."

Forty seconds may not sound like much of a consequence, but it can be an eternity to two fourth graders who want to be the first ones out the door. After several of these experiences, Liz and Becky started returning to class on time.

6. *Use logical consequences as often as you need them.*

Logical consequences are training tools. Use them as often as needed to stop misbehavior and support your rules. If you need to repeat the same consequence three or more times a day for the same misbehavior, don't be too quick to assume that the consequence is ineffective. More likely, you're dealing with an aggressive researcher who needs to collect a lot of data before he or she will be convinced you mean business. Well-established beliefs and behavior patterns don't change overnight.

Situations for Using Logical Consequences

Logical consequences have instructive applications in a wide variety of situations. The following are just a few of the many possibilities.

1. *When children misuse classroom materials, instructional items, or playground equipment.*

Logical consequence: Separate the child from the item temporarily.

Derek, a third grader, knows it's not OK to swing on the tetherball rope but does it anyway and gets caught.

"Stop swinging on the tetherball rope, Derek," says the yard-duty teacher. "You need to find another game to play today. You can try tetherball again tomorrow."

2. *When children make messes.*

Logical consequence: Clean it up.

Todd and Kirk, two seventh graders, write graffiti in the boy's bathroom and get caught. Graffiti has been a serious problem at their school. A lot of money has been spent on cleaning it up. The staff is concerned, but they are divided about the best way to deal with the problem.

The principal wants to send a message to other students. He suggests suspending the boys for a week and turning the matter over to the police.

The dean of boys thinks the principal's plan is too harsh. "They need to understand the seriousness of what they did," he says. He recommends eight weeks of mandatory counseling.

The vice principal has another idea. He proposes a logical consequence. "Todd and Kirk helped make the mess. Shouldn't they clean it up?" He suggests giving them some choices. "They can put in forty hours of their own time cleaning up graffiti, or they can be suspended, and the matter can be turned over to the po-

Natural and logical consequences, used correctly, have helped thousands of teachers to regain control of their classrooms and to enjoy more satisfying and cooperative relationships with students.



lice." Everyone liked the plan.

When the choices were presented to the boys, they decided to avoid the police and put in forty hours of clean up. The lesson wasn't lost on others.

3. When children won't cooperate with other children.

Logical consequence: Separate the uncooperative child from others temporarily.

Cleve, a first grader, throws sand at others in the sandbox. When his classmates complain, the yard-duty teacher uses a logical consequence.

"We don't throw sand," says the teacher. "You need to find somewhere else to play this recess. You can play in the sandbox again next recess if you don't throw sand."

4. When children try to hook us into arguments or treat us disrespectfully.

Logical consequence: Separate yourself from the child temporarily.

Roberta, a ninth grader, wants to leave class early to get a good seat at a spirit rally. When her teacher denies the request, Roberta does her best to turn a no into a yes.

"Come on, Mr. Richards," pleads Roberta. "Be fair!"

"You'll have plenty of time to get a seat if you leave with everyone else," he replies.

"Yeah, but not a good seat," argues Roberta. "I don't want to sit in the very back. What's the big deal, anyway?" Her voice has a sarcastic tone. Mr. Richards decides to cut off the discussion.

"We're done talking about it," he says. "If you bring it up again, you'll have to spend some time by yourself."

"Why?" Roberta protests. "Are you afraid you might be wrong?"

"Take your books and have a seat at the back table," says Mr. Richards. "I'll let you know when it's time to rejoin the group." He said the discussion was over, and he backed up his words with a time-out.

5. When children waste or misuse instructional time.

Logical consequence: Make up the wasted time.

Kendall, a third grader, has twenty minutes to complete a page of math problems before recess. Fifteen minutes go by. He hasn't done a single one. He hopes to avoid the assignment altogether.

"Put your worksheets on my desk when you're done and line up for recess," says the teacher. Kendall is the first to turn in his assignment. He hopes she won't check his work. She does.

"You're not ready, Kendall," says his teacher matter-of-factly. "Your work isn't finished."

"I'll finish it at home tonight," he says, hoping she'll go for it. She doesn't.

"The assignment is due now," she says. "Since you've chosen not to finish it during class time, you'll have to finish it during recess." Kendall spends his recess completing his worksheet. He'll probably think carefully next time he wants to avoid an assignment.

6. When children fail to handle activities responsibly.

Logical consequence: Separate the child from the activity temporarily.

Roy, a fifth grader, knows he's supposed to sit quietly at school assemblies but decides to show off for his friends. His teacher takes him aside.

"Roy, you can sit with your friends if you're quiet. If you're not, I'll have to move you. What would you like to do?"

"I'll be quiet," says Roy, but within minutes, he's talking loudly and being disruptive. His teacher intervenes a second time.

"Roy, you need to sit next to me," she says matter-of-factly.

Natural and logical consequences, used correctly, have helped thousands of teachers to regain control of their classrooms and to enjoy more satisfying and cooperative relationships with students. If you are willing to invest the time and energy needed to learn the skills, you, too, can share the rewards. □