

PARENT HANDOUT: REASONABLE CONSEQUENCES



Disruptive Behavior Skill 6

WHAT ARE REASONABLE CONSEQUENCES?

- ▶ Children sometimes act in ways that are disobedient, disrespectful, destructive, or dangerous. You can respond with Reasonable Consequences, which can take two forms: 1) your child makes up for their misbehavior (e.g., cleans up the mess they made), or 2) loses a privilege (e.g., time away from a current preferred activity). Removing your child from enjoyable activities and/or attention discourages them from these behaviors.
- ▶ To use this strategy, you first discuss with your child which behaviors are unacceptable in your family and what their associated consequences will be. By making your expectations and the predictable penalties of misbehavior clear, your child learns to think before acting and to make better choices.
- ▶ This skill is effective with children of all ages when addressing moderate to severe misbehavior.

HERE'S HOW TO USE REASONABLE CONSEQUENCES AT HOME

- 1 Decide which behaviors lead to a Reasonable Consequence.** Consequences work well for unsafe behavior (e.g., hitting, kicking, running away), destruction of property (e.g., throwing things, punching a wall), and breaking house rules (e.g., not completing homework, refusing to do chores, swearing, being mean or rude). If your child struggles with more mild misbehavior, such as whining, complaining, or having a bad attitude, using other skills in this guide like Praising Good Behavior (Skill 2) and Shifting Attention (Skill 3) can be enough.
- 2 Choose Reasonable Consequences.** Pick the consequences your child will face for the misbehaviors you listed above (review our list of examples for ideas). It helps to tie consequences to misbehaviors (e.g., if your child refuses to turn off the TV, losing TV time may be more effective than sending them to their room). Next, decide how long a consequence will last. For younger children, an immediate and brief break from an activity can be very effective (e.g., if Nina throws her video game controller when she loses a game, she instantly loses access to the device for 15 minutes). For older children, you can require the completion of a task before a privilege is restored (e.g., if Sam shouts at his mother while doing homework, he must help her clean the bathroom before he can ride his bike after dinner like he wants).
- 3 Discuss with your child ahead of time.** Be sure to review the plan with your child. If they know which misbehaviors lead to which consequences, they will not be surprised in the moment and cannot claim you are being unfair.
- 4 When your child begins to misbehave, remind them of the consequences.** Remind your child that engaging in X behavior leads to Y consequence (e.g., "Remember Thomas, it is not okay to call your brother names. If you say mean things to him, you won't be able to play for 15 minutes.").
- 5 Try to deliver Reasonable Consequences immediately after misbehavior happens.** Consequences are most powerful when delivered as soon as possible after misbehavior occurs. If your child throws a tantrum today, they will change their behavior faster if they lose screen time right afterward, rather than the next day.
- 6 Be firm, calm, and consistent.** When delivering a Reasonable Consequence, calmly and clearly remind your child of the connection between their misbehavior and the consequence (e.g., "As we talked about, swearing is not allowed. Because you cursed at me, you will now lose your phone for 10 minutes."). Do not get pulled into arguing or negotiating with your child. The calmer you are, the calmer your child will be. The more consistently you deliver Reasonable Consequences, the faster your child's behavior will improve.

PARENT HANDOUT: REASONABLE CONSEQUENCES TIPS



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HOW CAN REASONABLE CONSEQUENCES HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ With Reasonable Consequences, you choose predictable consequences your child will face for moderate to severe misbehavior. When children know the penalties for acting in unacceptable ways, they are more motivated to make better choices and take responsibility for their actions. Over time, using Reasonable Consequences results in less misbehavior.
- ▶ This technique increases the consistency of your responses to poor behavior, helps you stay calm when your child misbehaves, and decreases arguments between the two of you. It also lessens the chances that you will turn to a harsh or ineffective form of discipline to manage your child's behavior.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

I tried to use consequences at home and my child's behavior got worse!

Parents often find that when they start giving consequences, children act out even more. It's common to feel upset if your child's behavior worsens. Remember that if you give in to your child's tantrum or pouting, your child will learn that those are effective ways to get out of facing consequences. In fact, the worse children's behavior is in response to consequences, the more their behavior may improve afterward.

When I take a privilege away, my child argues with me or refuses to listen. What do I do?

This is a typical reaction to consequences. Try to stay calm and firm. Reasonable Consequences are only effective when your child learns that you mean what you say and rules must be followed. Remind your child of the pre-decided consequences for poor behavior and ignore attempts to argue or negotiate. Over time, your child will follow your instructions to avoid facing consequences they do not like.

I'm not sure which kinds of behaviors warrant Reasonable Consequences.

Consequences are most effective in response to moderate to severe misbehavior, such as when children destroy property (e.g., break or throw things), are aggressive or act in unsafe ways (e.g., hit, kick, punch, run away), or violate household rules (e.g., lie, steal, curse, are mean or rude, refuse to do homework or chores). Look at our list of examples for ideas from other families.

You can also use Reasonable Consequences if your child has difficulty with more mild misbehaviors, such as whining, annoying you, or having a bad attitude. However, skills in this guide like Praising Good Behavior (Skill 2) and Shifting Attention (Skill 3) can be even more effective. You can look at these sections of the packet to learn more.

If your child's misbehavior feels uncontrollable, extreme, or constant, you may need additional support to manage and improve their behaviors. Check in with your child's primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.



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EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE CONSEQUENCES FAMILIES USE AT HOME

Younger Children

- ▶ When Monica is done playing, she leaves her toys around the room instead of putting them away. She cannot play with her toys again until she cleans up.
- ▶ Instead of eating his vegetables, Alex throws them on the floor. He cannot have dessert, which he loves.
- ▶ Carmen gets glue and marker on the table, breaking a house rule. She must help clean the table before she can do any more arts and crafts.
- ▶ Henry refuses to share toys with his sister and brother. The next time they play, he has to wait until both his siblings have picked to choose his toys.
- ▶ When it is time for bed, Tracy refuses to turn off the TV. She loses her TV time for the next day.
- ▶ Jordan is frustrated and kicks his sister. He is moved to a separate room and can't play with his sister or toys for 20 minutes.
- ▶ When Nicole calls her parents names, they will not talk to her until she can speak in a respectful way.
- ▶ On the way home, Connor runs into the street. He must hold his parent's hand the rest of the way.

Older Children

- ▶ Allison is frustrated with her homework and refuses to do it. She cannot use her tablet until her homework is done.
- ▶ While running around the house, Jonathan breaks a lamp. He has to complete household chores to earn enough money to buy a new one.
- ▶ Angela rides her bike outside the part of her neighborhood her parents allow her to ride. She cannot use her bike for the rest of the week.
- ▶ Christopher dislikes his curfew and comes home late. His curfew gets moved up by 30 minutes.
- ▶ Instead of going to the library like she said, Hannah goes to the mall with her friends. She loses her phone and social media access for one week.
- ▶ Anthony leaves his clothes on the floor of his room instead of hanging them up in his closet. Now he only has wrinkled clothes for school.
- ▶ Natalie spends time on her computer instead of completing her assigned chores to clean her room and do the dishes. In addition to her regular chores, she must do an extra chore that week.
- ▶ James and Ben dislike taking turns sharing their video games. Whoever argues or fights loses their turn.