Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

Child Care Bureau

Logical Consequences

L. Fox • S. Langhans

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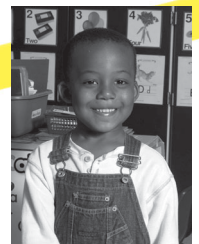
WHAT WORKS BRIEFS

SERIES

Logical Consequences

This *What Works Brief* is part of a continuing series of short, easy-to-read, "how to" information packets on a variety of evidence-based practices, strategies, and intervention procedures. The Briefs are designed for in-service providers and others who conduct staff development activities. Those who are responsible for professional development should find them useful in sharing information with professionals and parents to help teachers and other caregivers support young children's social and emotional development. The Briefs include examples and vignettes that illustrate how practical strategies might be used in a variety of early childhood settings and home environments. The strategies described in the Briefs are most successful when used in the context of ongoing positive relationships and supportive environments. The strategies are most successful for an individual child when developed based on observation and assessment of the child including information from the family, teacher, and other caregivers.

It's time for clean-up, and Saif's teacher has provided a prompt to the class and individually to Saif. After clean-up, the children will go outside to play. Most of the children begin participating in singing the clean-up song and putting their materials away. However, Saif is still intently playing in the block area. When a peer approaches Saif's structure and reminds him that it is clean-up time, Saif ignores him and continues building. Saif's teacher realizes that Saif is not participating in clean-up time. She moves to him, prompts him again to clean up, scolds him for not listening, and then proceeds to assist him in putting his blocks away.

Sarah's parents are always running late because Sarah does not get dressed when she is asked. She dawdles and plays with her toys until her parents come in and scold her, spank her and dress her. They have tried threatening her by taking away her favorite toys and snacks, but this strategy has not worked either. They are at a loss as to what to do next.

What Are Logical Consequences?

Logical consequences refer to the actions or responses that are implemented following a child's inappropriate behavior that serve to discourage the child from engaging in the behavior again. Logical consequences are used as an alternative to punishment strategies such as reprimands or scolding. They are used to help guide children in the right direction by guiding them to face the results of their behavior. The process is a learning experience for children, teaching them that they have responsibility for and control over their own behavior The consequences of their actions are logical because they are clearly related to the child's behavior. Children usually accept logical consequences when the consequences are framed in a guiding way rather than when they are framed as punishment. Children learn that the choices they make have consequences, whether positive or negative. They are taught that they are responsible for their own behavior. Logical consequences help guide children in learning how they are expected to behave in the real world.

For example, Saif's teacher is frustrated in her attempts to get Saif to clean up; she resorts to helping him clean up the blocks and provides a reminder that he needs to follow her direction in the future. Because this has become a pattern, Saif is not guided to take responsibility to clean up his play materials. In a similar vein, Sarah's parents are using traditional punishment procedures rather than logical consequences to deal with Sarah's behavior. When they dress Sarah themselves, they are not teaching her what behavior is expected. Taking away her favorite toys and snacks is also ineffective because these actions are unrelated to the behavior of getting dressed. Consequences should be linked directly to the desired behavior.

How Should Logical Consequences Be Implemented?

Logical consequences should be presented to the child as a choice. The child may engage in the expected behavior to access an activity, object, person, or material. The options should be related to the task by being logically linked to the current activity and the resulting action. For example, a logical consequence to not cleaning up after a snack may be that the child's access to the next activity is delayed. A natural consequence to leaving the tricycles out on the playground may be that they become wet and can't be used the next day. A logical consequence that may follow throwing sand out of the sand table is that the sand table is closed so that the sand can be cleaned up.

When choices are provided to the child, they should be stated calmly, clearly, and respectfully. Logical consequences should not be arbitrary, threatening, or punitive. The tone of voice used can mean the difference between logical consequences and punishment. When Sarah's parents yell at her, Sarah may feel she has no choice in the situation. Threats usually tell children what not to do rather than teach what they can do in order to get what they want. The options that will be used for logical consequences are planned in advance of the situation and presented to the child prior to when the undesired behavior is expected to occur. The child is made aware of the options and is guided to understand what may result from his or her action.

Saif's teacher realizes that Saif is not learning how to clean up his materials and that she is always helping him clean up so that he can go outside with the rest of the class. The following day, prior to clean-up time, Saif is told that when it is clean-up time he will need to clean up his toys so that he can go outside. The teacher reminds Saif of his choices when she prompts the class to clean up. Saif did not clean up his blocks with the rest of the class. The teacher said to him, "Saif, the children who clean up are going to go outside to play. If you want to join them, you need to clean up." Saif refused and stayed inside with the teacher. The following day, the teacher reminded Saif that he would be able to go outside if he cleaned up with the rest of the class. When the teacher prompted the class to begin clean-up time, Saif immediately began putting his blocks away.

Sarah's parents decided to try out some of these techniques. One Saturday afternoon, they were planning on taking Sarah to see the latest children's movie that she had been begging them to go see. They told her that she needed to start getting dressed so that they would make it to the movie on time. Sarah ignored them and continued playing with her dolls. A few minutes later, Sarah's father calmly stated that they needed to leave in 5 minutes in order to make it on time. Five minutes later, Sarah was still not dressed so her father told her that it was too late to make it to the movie. They decided to try again on Sunday afternoon and discovered that Sarah readily got dressed the first time she was asked.

The Use of Logical Consequences

Logical consequences are not used to threaten or intimidate a child. Logical consequences should not be used if the child does not understand the options and is not able to make a decision about the action to choose. If used appropriately, logical consequences should result in rapid changes in the child's behavior within the targeted routine or activity. If the problem behavior persists, the teacher or parent should think about why the child is engaging in the behavior and consider the use of other approaches to assisting the child.

Saif's teacher was at a loss as to how to get Saif to cooperate and participate with the class. Because materials had to be put away before the transition to outside she often found herself helping Saif clean up his materials. She knew that this approach was not effective, because he was not learning to clean up his materials, but she was unsure as to how to handle the situation. Scolding Saif about the situation seemed to have no effect. The use of logical consequences helped Saif learn the importance of personal responsibility and the relationship of his actions to accessing an activity that he desired.

Before learning about the effectiveness of logical consequences, Sarah's father might have threatened her by yelling, "If you don't get ready right now, we are not going to take you to the movies!" This approach is an example of punishment rather than logical consequences, because rather than using a calm, respectful approach, Sarah's father yelled at her and threatened her with the consequences. Sarah's mother had a habit of storming into Sarah's room, spanking her, and then dressing Sarah herself. Sarah then got to go to the movie anyway, without having learned what behavior she was expected to do in order to get the desired consequence of going to the movie. She had not been given the responsibility for her own actions.

Who Are the Children Who Have Participated in This Research?

Studies that show the effectiveness of logical consequences include this technique in conjunction with other positive child guidance procedures. This research has been conducted with young children who have behavior problems (e.g., noncompliance, aggression, oppositional behavior) and children from families who have multiple risk factors (i.e., poverty, substance abuse, low social support, parent personal history of childhood maltreatment). Research has been conducted in a wide variety of settings including Head Start classrooms, early care and education programs, and family homes. Moreover, this research has been conducted with children from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Logical consequences should result in rapid changes in the child's behavior within the targeted routine or activity.

We welcome your feedback on this What Works Brief. Please go to the CSEFEL Web site (http://csefel.uiuc.edu) or call us at (217) 333-4123 to offer suggestions.

Where Do I Find More Information on Implementing This Practice?

See the CSEFEL Web site (http://csefel.uiuc.edu) for additional resources.

Dinkmeyer, D., & McKay, G. D. (1989). *The parents' handbook: Systematic training for effective parenting* (3rd ed.). Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.

Dreikurs, R. (1987). *Children: The challenge.* New York: Dutton.

Gartrell, D. (1994). *A guidance approach to discipline.* Albany, NY: Delmar.

Kaiser, B., & Rasminsky, J. S. (2003). *Challenging behavior in young children: Understanding, preventing, and responding effectively.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Landy, S. (2002). *Pathways to competence. Encouraging healthy social and emotional development in young children.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Nunnelley, J. C. (2002). *Powerful, positive, and practical practices: Behavior guidance strategies.* Little Rock, AR: Southern Early Childhood Association.

What is the Scientific Basis for the Practice?

For those wishing to explore this topic further, the following articles have documented the scientific basis for using logical consequences. Research on the use of logical consequences as a behavior intervention procedure examines the effectiveness of this approach in combination with other child guidance procedures. These studies provide support for the use of this technique with other positive discipline strategies.

Huebner, C. E. (2002). Evaluation of a clinic-based parent education program to reduce the risk of infant and toddler maltreatment. *Public Health Nursing, 19*(5), 377-389.

Reid, M. J., Webster-Stratton, C., & Beauchaine, T. P. (2001). Parent training in Head Start: A comparison of program response among African American, Asian American, Caucasian, and Hispanic mothers. *Prevention Science, 2*(4), 209-227.

Sanders, M. R., Markie-Dadds, C., Tully, L. A., & Bor, W. (2000). The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program: A comparison of enhanced, standard, and self-directed behavioral family intervention for parents of children with early onset conduct problems. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 68*(4), 624-640.

Webster-Stratton, C. (1999). *How to promote children's social and emotional competence.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Webster-Stratton, C., Reid, M. J., & Hammond, M. (2004). Treating children with early-onset conduct problems: Intervention outcomes for parent, child, and teacher training. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 33*(1), 105–124.

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Strategies for Increasing Peer Social Interactions: Prompting and Acknowledgment

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