

Choices and Consequences

"Choices and consequences" can be an effective behavior management tool to use with children and teens. Not only can it help teach children that they have the power to make good or bad decisions, it can teach them to correlate the decisions they make with the effects those decisions have. It is a good way to prepare them for the future...it is, after all, the way our world works.

The use of choices and consequences works best in homes that have already established rules. Regardless of the age of your child, it is important to have rules that are clear, written, posted, few in number (focusing only on the most important points) and age appropriate. This clearly sets boundaries for behavior by defining what is and is not expected in your family.

Before resorting to the use of choice and consequences, it pays to examine how you make requests of your child. The way a request is made can often lead to defiance. For instance, many parents approach their child with a request by asking if the child "wants" to do so-and-so, e.g. "Do you want to take out the garbage?". This type of question invites a child to refuse the request if they don't want to perform the activity---and most of the time, they'd rather not take out the garbage! A better way to make requests is to issue statements, e.g. "I need you to take out the garbage by 8 p.m. please". Use a firm but gentle tone of voice when making requests and establish eye contact if possible to help insure that you have the attention of your child.

Choices and consequences can be used when a child becomes defiant. In the example above, our choice and consequence might sound like this: "I requested that the garbage be taken out by 8 p.m. It is now 8:05 p.m. You have five minutes to take out the garbage. If you choose not to do this, you will lose _____".

Another approach is to "charge" your child for having to perform a task. If your child receives an allowance, you can "debit" their account. For instance, "If you choose not to take out the garbage in five minutes, I will have to do this chore. However, I charge to take out the garbage and it will cost you 50 cents from your allowance. Which do you choose?". If your child will not choose, then you choose for them. In this case, you would take out the garbage and dock their allowance 50 cents.

Of course, choices and consequences don't always have to carry negative results. A child can earn positive consequences for a job done. For example, "After the garbage is taken out, we'll be able to go for a walk around the neighborhood."

For choices and consequences to be effective, you must:

- *Clearly state the choice and consequence
- *Use a matter of fact tone with your child
- *Remain calm when making the statements
- *Avoid lecturing or admonishing your child after the request is made and if the child fails to follow-through
- *Enforce the consequence that has been given. Remember, the consequence for the choice is the teacher.