

# NO MORE LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES AT LEAST HARDLY EVER! FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

By Jane Nelson

During a class meeting, students in a fifth grade class were asked to brainstorm logical consequences for two students who didn't hear the recess bell and were late for class. Following is their list of "consequences":

- 1 Make them write their names on the board.
- 2 Make them stay after school that many minutes.
- 3 Take away that many minutes off tomorrow's recess.
- 4 No recess tomorrow.
- 5 The teacher could yell at them.

The students were then asked to forget about consequences and brainstorm for solutions that would help the students be on time. Following is their list of solutions:

Someone could tap them on the shoulder when the bell rings.

- 1 Everyone could yell together, "Bell!"
- 2 They could play closer to the bell.
- 3 They could watch others to see when they are going in.
- 4 Adjust the bell so it is louder.
- 5 They could choose a buddy to remind them that it is time to come in.

The difference between these two lists is profound. The first looks and sounds like punishment. It focuses on the past and making kids "pay" for their mistake. The second list looks and sounds like solutions that focus on "helping" the kids do better in the future. It focuses on seeing problems as opportunities for learning. In other words, the first list is designed to hurt, the second is designed to help.

In the first list, the kids try to disguise punishment by calling it a logical consequence. Why do they do that? Could it be that this is what they are learning from adults? The Four R's of Logical Consequences (Related, Respectful, Reasonable, and Revealed in advance) were conceived in an attempt to stop the trend of logical consequences sounding like punishment, but they have not totally eliminated this problem.

Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children DO better, first we have to make them FEEL worse? When people first hear this quote from “Positive Discipline”, they usually laugh as they think about how it doesn’t make sense. However, when it comes to application, it seems that parents, teachers, and students have difficulty accepting that people do better when they feel better.

For example, many teachers like Nos. 2 and 3 on the first list above, (“Make them stay after school that many minutes,” and “Take away that many minutes off tomorrow’s recess.”) It is true that those suggestions are related, reasonable, and could be enforced respectfully and revealed in advance. However, they all focus on making the child pay for the past mistake instead of finding a solution to solve the problem in the future. In other words, they are designed to make the children feel bad in the hopes that they will be motivated to do better. Punishment often stops misbehavior, but it hardly ever motivates children to do better in the future—unless they are approval junkies. Instead, they are motivated to rebel, get revenge, or to be more careful about getting caught.

Kay Rogers, a recently retired teacher from Sharon School in North Carolina said, “After I heard about the possibility of focusing on solutions instead of consequences, it was the hardest habit for me to break. All my life I had believed that kids learned from punishment—or at least from consequences. I can now see that my students and I both tried to disguise punishment by calling it consequences—even though the consequences weren’t as harsh as blatant punishment. I had to learn about the effectiveness of focusing on solutions right along with my students. We were all surprised by the difference it made in our classroom. The level of respect and caring for each other was raised tenfold. Students became pleased to find their name on the agenda because they knew, as Jane Nelsen had told us, that we would have a whole room full of consultants to give them valuable suggestions. And, the solutions they found were much more effective in changing behavior than anything we had done before.”

This does not mean logical consequences cannot be effective when properly understood and appropriately used. Hopefully, the chapter on Natural and Logical Consequences in the newly revised edition of Positive Discipline will help. However, logical consequences are rarely necessary and are only one possibility. Rudolph Dreikurs taught that logical consequences are effective ONLY for the mistaken goal of undue attention (and are only one option even for that goal). Too many adults look for logical consequences “to punish” every behavior. Looking for solutions is more effective in most situations.

Many teachers have switched and now teach the Three R's and an H for Solutions: Related, Respectful, Reasonable and HELPFUL. Once students have brainstormed for solutions to a problem, it is extremely important to let individual students choose the solution he or she thinks will be most helpful. A vote should be taken only if the problem involved the whole class.

Of course, focusing on solutions instead of consequences is more effective in homes also. One parent said, "I can't believe how many power struggles I created by trying to impose 'logical consequences'. We have so much more peace in our home now that we focus on solutions."

The chapter on logical consequences in Positive Discipline (see [www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com)) explains when and how to use effective logical consequences. However, in most cases, it is much simpler and much more helpful to focus on solutions.

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