



CONSEQUENCES—Teach children to understand cause and effect.

Teaching Children Cause and Effect While the
Stakes Are Still Low

By Alvin Erickson
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Why Consequences Matter

Every adult lives with consequences — legal, relational, financial, emotional.
The question is not *whether* children will face consequences, but **when and how** they learn about them.

Children who do not learn cause and effect early are not spared consequences later — they encounter **much harsher ones** when the cost is higher and the damage is real.

One of the greatest gifts a parent can give is allowing children to experience **small, manageable consequences** while they are still protected by home, relationship, and guidance.

What Often Goes Wrong

Many loving parents confuse consequences with punishment.

- Punishment is reactive.
- Consequences are instructive.

When consequences become threats (“If you don’t do this, then...”) children stop learning and start resisting.

They either become fearful, defiant, or emotionally detached.

Another common mistake is **rescuing children too quickly**:

- fixing what they forgot
- smoothing over what they broke
- shielding them from discomfort

This teaches children that **someone else will absorb the cost** of their choices.



What Consequences Are (and Are Not)

Consequences are:

- connected directly to behavior
- immediate or near-immediate
- proportional
- calm

Consequences are not:

- shaming
- yelling
- unrelated punishments
- threats made in anger

A consequence should answer one simple question for the child:

“What happens when I do this?”

Real-Life Examples

Example 1: Young Child (Ages 3–6)

Behavior: Child throws toys

Consequence: Toys are put away for the rest of the day

No lecture. No drama.

Just calm follow-through.

The child learns: *throwing toys means losing access to them.*

Example 2: Elementary Age (Ages 7–10)

Behavior: Child refuses to do homework

Consequence: Homework time continues until it's done

Not:



- loss of unrelated privileges
- yelling
- humiliation

The consequence is built into the task itself.

Example 3: Preteen / Teen

Behavior: Misses curfew

Consequence: Earlier curfew next time

The consequence is logical, not emotional:

“You showed you need more structure.”

The Parent’s Role

Parents do **not** control outcomes — they control **consistency**.

Your job is not to:

- argue
- convince
- win

Your job is to:

- stay calm
- follow through
- let reality teach

If you feel angry while delivering a consequence, pause.

Consequences delivered in anger feel like rejection, not instruction.

Common Parenting Traps

1. **Threats instead of consequences**
 (“If you don’t clean your room, no birthday party.”)



2. **Inconsistent follow-through**

Children quickly learn which consequences are empty.

3. **Delayed consequences**

Young children cannot connect today's behavior with tomorrow's loss.

4. **Overly harsh consequences**

Too much pressure causes shutdown, not growth.

What This Looks Like at Different Ages

- **Toddlers:** Immediate, physical-world consequences
- **Elementary:** Task-based consequences
- **Teens:** Loss of autonomy tied to responsibility

The older the child, the more the consequence should prepare them for adult life.

One Rule Parents Must Remember

Never use a consequence you cannot enforce calmly.

If you are emotionally escalated, wait.

Calm consistency builds wisdom.
Fear builds rebellion or secrecy.

Biblical Wisdom

I think Galatians is the obvious anchor.

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

— **Galatians 6:7**

This is one of the clearest statements of cause and effect in Scripture.

Actions have outcomes.

Choices matter.

Reality responds.



Then I would add a supporting Proverbs verse.

"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid."

— Proverbs 12:1

Some translations say "stupid," some say "brutish."

Either way, Proverbs is making a strong point:

Wise people learn from correction.

Foolish people resist it.

That is exactly what consequences are trying to teach.

Practical Wisdom / Application

Most people hear:

"A man reaps what he sows."

and think about farming, morality, or major life decisions.

That's certainly part of it.

But imagine a parent teaching that principle to a child:

You forget your homework. —**You reap what you sow.**

You stay up too late and feel exhausted the next day. —**You reap what you sow.**

You practice an instrument faithfully. —**You reap what you sow.**

You treat people with kindness and earn trust. —**You reap what you sow.**

You break trust repeatedly. —**You reap what you sow.**

Children do not learn responsibility because parents lecture them.

They learn responsibility when they experience the connection between choices and outcomes.

Now consider Proverbs:



"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge."

Discipline is not punishment.

It is learning.

A wise child gradually learns:

- My choices matter.
- My actions have consequences.
- I can influence my future.

Consequences help children understand reality while the stakes are still low.

Small lessons today often prevent much larger lessons later.

Final Takeaway

Consequences are not about control — they are about preparation.

Children who learn cause and effect early are not crushed by life later.

You are not being unkind.

You are being faithful to reality.

One Thing to Try This Week

Option 1: Don't Rescue

Allow one natural consequence to happen this week.

Then discuss:

"What did you learn from that?"

Option 2: Connect Choices and Outcomes

At dinner ask:

"What's something that happened today because of a choice you made?"

Parents should answer too.

Option 3: Notice Cause and Effect



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Point out one positive consequence this week:

"You practiced and got better."

"You were kind and earned trust."

Children need to see that consequences can be positive as well as negative.

Wisdom Principle: You reap what you sow.