

DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE SEPARATION & ROUTINE

EPISODE 15



Key Principles

- Establishing rules and routines
- Using logical consequences
- Learning to observe yourself

MEET... Amy and 14-month-old Evan again. In this episode, Amy introduces a baby gate to help her foster Evan's self-reliance. Amy is also continuing to work on her own ambivalence about separating from Evan by establishing clearer rules and routines and following through more consistently.



Establishing rules and routines

In earlier episodes we've looked at how children can become confused without clear rules and routines, or when the rules and routines that have been set up are not followed consistently. We've seen how this can actually encourage children to test limits in an effort to define the boundaries of their world. On the other hand, we've seen how following rules and routines consistently can help children develop feelings of competence and confidence; in an orderly and predictable environment, children have many opportunities to learn new skills and contribute to family life. In this episode, we'll look at how establishing and following appropriate rules and routines can also help children become more self-reliant and independent. For example, when children are expected to spend time playing independently while a parent is working or doing chores, they can prove themselves quite capable. (Of course, parents need to make sure the environment is well organized with toys and activities to support their children's efforts.) Rules and routines not only help the child become more independent. They can also help an overly engaged parent establish boundaries between herself and her child.

Using logical consequences

In *Episode 1* and *Episode 4*, we saw how logical consequences can be used with children who are old enough to understand a parent's description of a consequence. In *Episode 1*, Kathy established the logical consequence that, if Joseph missed dinner because he did not come in on time, he would go without dinner. This logical consequence was reasonable, and not unexpected; Kathy had explained to Joseph at an earlier time that mealtime would be the only opportunity for dinner. In *Episode 4*, Devante experienced the same arrangement and changed his behavior to arrive on time. Devante also experienced and accepted the logic of a logical consequence that occurred more spontaneously: if he didn't want to do his chores, Miguel would

do them and receive the money that Devante got when he did do his chores. It might seem that logical consequences require that the child be quite verbal and able to discuss the situation or understand the parent's verbal description of the consequence. While being able to have a discussion about the problem area can be helpful for establishing some logical consequences, it isn't necessary. For example, a logical consequence can be used with a very young child to interrupt a dangerous, destructive, or disruptive behavior that would naturally continue if the parent didn't intervene. In this episode, we will look at how logical consequences can improve life with a toddler

Learning to observe yourself

Learning to observe yourself goes hand in hand with a key principle in this series: managing yourself, not the child. In earlier episodes, we've observed parents who work hard to change their children's behavior, often with limited success. Many of these parents find, though, that when they change their own behavior, their children's behavior also changes. Understandably, parents are often most interested initially in using self-observation and management to reduce their children's misbehavior. And certainly, this can be effective. Remember in *Episode 4* how quickly Devante gave up resisting chores when Miguel and Juanita detached themselves from his efforts to have an argument? But, learning to observe yourself can also be helpful in encouraging children's competence and confidence. In *Episode 9*, Esther saw how recognizing and letting go of her own perfectionism have helped her children become more confident and competent mealtime helpers. In this episode, we will see how an overly engaged parent can use self-observation to foster her child's independence and self-reliance.



A CLOSER LOOK...

Applying key principles in this episode

Using rules

and routines *The Baby Gate of the Mind*

In *Episode 14*, we saw what Evan's favorite toy was: his mom! When Amy was cooking, Evan preferred hanging out beneath her feet to using his toys in the living room. To help establish rules and routines about where Evan can play while meals are being prepared, Amy has started using a baby gate between the kitchen and living room. While Amy's intention is good, she has not used the gate consistently. Perhaps because he is confused by this inconsistency, Evan continues to seek out Amy's attention. And perhaps because Amy is ambivalent about separating from Evan, she unnecessarily seeks out Evan. For example, when he falls but isn't hurt, she goes to him and ends up distracting him from playing happily by himself. Amy knows from her experience with bedtime that it is possible to overcome Evan's attention-seeking and her own over-engagement by sticking to rules and routines. She was able to change the pattern of Evan sleeping in her



bed by sticking to a new bedtime routine that required Evan to sleep in his own bed. While Evan fussed initially, within two weeks he was sleeping well on his own. If Amy uses the baby gate consistently, Evan will undoubtedly also adjust well to changes in the mealtime routine. In fact, there are signs that he is already adjusting to the significance of the gate. When Amy puts it up so she can clean the kitchen without being interrupted, Evan plays alone for a bit and then stands calmly on his side of the gate without fussing.

Using logical consequences

Communicating Limits by Acting

Amy makes herself very available to Evan and enjoys her close relationship with her son. But, in her effort to be close and responsive, is Amy giving Evan unrealistic ideas about what is acceptable or appropriate behavior? Earlier in this episode, you read that logical consequences can be used effectively with very young children to interrupt dangerous, destructive or disruptive behavior. During the evening, Amy tries unsuccessfully to interrupt several instances of disruptive and destructive behavior by talking to Evan. Evan disrupts dinner by dropping his food on the floor a number of times. It becomes obvious that he is not “dropping” his food; he is throwing it. Amy asks him to stop several times, but continues to give him food. It would be very logical for Amy to remove the food, rather than give Evan continued opportunities to throw it. If Amy were to use the logical consequence of removing Evan’s food after one “dropping,” Evan would quickly learn that if he wants to eat, he needs to keep his food on his highchair tray. Later, while Amy is nursing Evan, he bites her. Amy’s initial instinct is good: she tells Evan he hurt her and removes herself from the situation. Then, she quickly lets Evan get in her lap again. He kicks her. She removes herself, but shortly after lets him rejoin her. The reminders continue, and so does Evan’s behavior. When Evan hurts Amy, it would be very logical for her to separate herself from Evan for a significant period of time. She might even consider using the baby gate if necessary. Evan wants to spend time with Amy and he will quickly learn not to hurt her if it means she will not stay close to him.

Learning to observe yourself ...

Building Evan’s Confidence through Self Observation

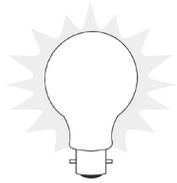
Many of the challenges Amy experiences with Evan stem from her own desire to remain close to him and ensure that he is not unhappy. And yet, when Amy establishes and sticks to reasonable rules and routines, Evan has proven himself quite adaptable and increasingly self-reliant. A good example of this success is how Amy was able to turn bedtime around by observing both Evan and herself. Amy noticed that Evan did not have trouble falling asleep at school or at nap time. Yet, he fussed at night. Is there any surprise in this, though, since Amy consistently let him get out of his own bed when he didn’t settle down? As Amy has consistently followed the bedtime routine (one book and song, then into your own bed), Evan has learned that he is quite able to sleep on his own. By observing how her own engagement with Evan at meal preparation time was making those times difficult, Amy has now started down the road to turning this situation around. As she uses the gate more consistently, Evan’s behavior will continue to change. He is already playing more independently



and will even stand and chat with Amy from his side of the gate. In areas where Evan is clearly acting in ways that are disruptive (throwing food) or dangerous (biting and kicking Amy), Amy can see that her own reluctance to establish a logical consequence and follow through with it, when necessary, have allowed Evan's behavior to escalate. By using self-observation, Amy can focus on what she is doing to encourage or allow the problem behavior. Then she can and change her own behavior. In most cases, Evan's behavior will quickly improve.

Action Guidelines from This Episode

- Be aware of who is needing reassurance.
- Regular routines help both children and parents.
- Take decisive action when hurt by children.
- Good separation helps make good connection possible.



YOUR TURN

What would you do?

1. Listen to yourself as you talk to your child during the coming week. Do you hear yourself reminding or warning your child? If so, pick one problem area where you will establish and follow through with a routine or logical consequence that will show you are not going to use repeated reminders and warnings anymore. As you shift from reminders or warnings, keep track of how long it takes your child to make changes in response.
2. Encourage your child to become self-reliant and independent. Let he know you appreciate it when she plays well on her own. When she is frequently seeking out your attention, arrange an activity for her (e.g., finishing a puzzle, building a tower, etc.) that will take several minutes to complete. When she completes it without stopping, comment and thank her.