

DEALING WITH HITTING & SLOW EATING

EPISODE 18



Key Principles

- Understanding the low-learning value of punishment
- Using logical consequences
- Taking action; explaining less
- Using positive consistency

MEET... Birdie, four-year-old Jolie, and two-year-old Ellie. Birdie has a close relationship with her girls, but has difficulty setting clear rules and following through with decisive, non-punitive action when rules are broken. Jolie and Ellie fight, and Birdie would also like to handle these situations effectively so her girls learn that hitting is not acceptable.



Understanding the low-learning value of punishment

In earlier episodes, we looked at how natural and logical consequences can be used to help children make reasonable and constructive choices. In *Episode 1*, Kathy used a combination of logical and natural consequences to help Joseph understand that it was not reasonable for Joseph to expect Kathy to keep dinner waiting for him, or to prepare a special meal when he decided to stop playing. When children experience consequences from their own actions, it motivates them to change their behavior. We saw this clearly, in *Episode 4*, when Devante got on board with chores when he thought he might have to forfeit his allowance to Miguel. To use consequences effectively, it's helpful to understand why punishment is not effective in motivating children to change or become constructive members of the family. While punishment will often motivate a child to stop an undesirable behavior temporarily, this external form of control does little to foster long-term, self-motivated change. Children will usually resume the undesirable behavior when the threat of punishment subsides. In addition, punishment breeds resentment. Children often see punishment as an unfair use of their parent's greater power. This abuse of power frequently leads, first, to resentment, and then, to revenge. A revengeful child will go to great lengths to make his or her parent uncomfortable, usually doing so by escalating the very behavior the parent had hoped to stop. In the long-term, this cycle of punishment by the parent and retaliation by the child will severely damage the relationship.

Using logical consequences

Logical consequences offer parents many advantages over punishment when they're trying to influence their child's behavior. First, unlike punishment, logical consequences don't create resentment by imposing physical or emotional discomfort on a child. Instead, logical consequences can help build the relationship by letting children learn how their own behavior affects their social environment, and as a result,

how people choose to interact with them. With appropriate logical consequences, children can learn how to get their needs met by being cooperative and by participating constructively in family life. When this occurs, there are many opportunities for parents and children to spend enjoyable time together. These shared activities and mutual enjoyment the foundation for a positive, respectful relationship. (For more information about logical consequences, see pages 1, 15, 62, and 83.)

Taking action; explaining less

Many parents who do a lot of explaining and reminding say they want to be fair to their children. Some parents even say they are afraid they will look like a “meany” if they take action without giving their child a couple of reminders or warnings. These are reasonable feelings. But, let’s look at the situation from another perspective. When a child’s environment is unpredictable and confusing, she is encouraged to push the limits in an effort to establish boundaries: without boundaries, the world can be a scary place for a child. By taking reasonable action promptly, you let your child know right away where the boundaries are. With this knowledge, he or she can get on with the important work of growing and learning new skills. Now does prompt, firm action seem unfair to you?

Building the relationship

Positive consistency is the best friend of taking action and talking less. Unless taking swift, firm action without talking is done consistently and with a positive attitude, it can be punitive and end up damaging the relationship. When rules are fair and reasonable, children will usually accept them readily. If you follow through with consequences kindly and consistently, you can create the sort of positive, predictable environment where children can thrive. In addition, giving positive and consistent encouragement to children when they are playing well and helping with household activities will encourage increased cooperation and mutual respect.



A CLOSER LOOK...

Applying key principles in this episode

Understanding the low-learning value of punishment

What Do Jolie and Ellie Learn?

During dinner, Birdie asks Jolie what the worst thing was that happened that day. Jolie says it was when Birdie spanked her. In this instance, Birdie and Jolie laugh because Birdie did not spank Jolie. In the past, Birdie has resorted to spanking in an effort to get the girls to cooperate. After watching the videotape of herself and her children, though, Birdie sees clearly that when she is firm, the girls don’t challenge her. For example, when she told Jolie that she could not have juice shortly before dinner, Jolie fussed briefly, then accepted tea instead. If Birdie can establish the same matter-of-fact approach in other areas where the girls challenge her, Jolie’s cooperative behavior when she couldn’t have juice will become the norm for both girls. In addition to being ineffective, punishment has another drawback for Birdie. It is teaching the girls that hitting is okay. If Birdie doesn’t want the girls to fight and hit as a way to get what they want, she needs to model the kind of behavior she would like to see in her daughters.

Using logical consequences

Well, That Didn't Work!

If Birdie establishes and follows through consistently with logical consequences, she can take big strides toward modeling the kind of behavior she would like to see in her girls. Why? One reason is that logical consequences are non-punitive and don't involve one person getting his or her way by force or intimidation. Another reason is that logical consequences encourage children to make responsible choices. When a child experiences a logical consequence, he realizes that the consequence isn't imposed arbitrarily by a parent. Instead, the consequence is a logical response from the social environment. This is similar to what the child already knows about the physical environment. For example, when you touch something hot, the consequence is pain or discomfort. Birdie has many opportunities to use logical consequences to provide a positive role model for Jolie and Ellie, and to improve the quality of family life. For example, if dancing and jumping are causing a disturbance, it is logical that the activity stop; we live in the world with other people and need to be aware of their needs. Despite Birdie's efforts to communicate this to the girls, it doesn't seem to concern them very much since they continue to play noisily. It would be reasonable for Birdie to tell the girls when the activity starts that the music will be turned off immediately if the girls are too loud. They understand why. Birdie just needs to follow through the first time they don't cooperate. Birdie can take a similar approach with mealtime: Birdie is responsible for making dinner and should not have to spend her whole evening preparing, eating and cleaning up. A reasonable time to have an enjoyable dinner can be established. When the time is over, so is dinner. Hitting can also be handled effectively with a logical consequence. Hurting other people is not acceptable in our social world. If everyone hit other people whenever they wanted to, we would live in chaos. In this context, it is reasonable and logical that people who hit should take a break from being around others.

Taking action; explaining less

Yeah, Yeah, Yeah... Blah, Blah, Blah

If a child drew a picture of a Reminder Animal for "R" in an alphabet book, the animal would probably have two arms and two hands, stand upright on two legs and look suspiciously like the child's parent. In *Episode 10*, we saw that Marina had her mother well-trained. The more Karen reminded and threatened, the less Marina cooperated. When Birdie gives long explanations or multiple reminders, the girls, like Marina, are quick to push the limits. But, when Birdie is firm and clearly expects

cooperation, the girls go along without a fuss. We see this most clearly when Birdie asks them to move their art activity to the table and when Jolie accepts tea instead of the juice she wants. The girls are already cooperative when Birdie is firm with a reasonable rule. With logical consequences and firm, kind, consistent action, the girls will undoubtedly become even more cooperative. Things like hitting, ignoring requests, and dawdling at dinner will all quickly become relics when Birdie stops being a Reminder Animal.

R is for Reminder Animal



Positive

Consistency *How Many Chances Do I Get? I'll Take One More, Please*

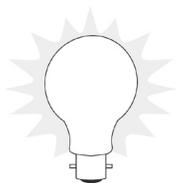
Birdie gives Jolie and Ellie mixed messages. She tells them they need to dance quietly, but when they don't she allows the activity to continue. When Jolie says "No!" to Birdie's request that Jolie go upstairs, Birdie returns to the kitchen to finish making dinner. When Jolie puts her feet up on the chair, Birdie reminds her it isn't allowed. Jolie takes her feet off, but quickly puts them back again. In her discussion with Dr. Morse, Birdie says she "has to keep reminding" Jolie to put her feet down, and as a result dinner takes forever. Who is making Birdie remind Jolie? No one, of course.



Birdie is choosing to remind. If instead, she followed through with a reasonable consequence, it is unlikely Jolie would persist in her behavior. If Birdie talks less and follows through positively and consistently when necessary, the girls will quickly realize pushing the limits brings little reward. Then, Birdie's time with the girls can be enjoyable and relaxing. When this happens, she will get the double benefit of having opportunities to use positive consistency by thanking the girls for being cooperative and encouraging them to contribute to family life.

Action Guidelines from This Episode

- The consequence of hitting is to not be with people.
- Children usually cooperate with a firm and reasonable request.
- Talking and reasoning with children who don't want to do something is rarely effective.
- Children believe your actions, not your words.



YOUR TURN

What would you do?

1. How do meal times go in your family? Even parents who don't tend to remind or threaten have difficulty at dinner. If meals have become a time for your child to push the limits, try to turn this around over the next week by setting a reasonable amount of time for dinner. Explain that when that time is up, dinner is over. Then, during dinner, don't remind your child to eat. Just have a pleasant conversation. When dinner time is over, remove plates and serving dishes. Be prepared for a day or two of protest. Follow through anyway for the entire week and see how things are going by week's end.
2. Are you a Reminder Animal, in general? Lots of parents are. During the next week, try not to give reminders. Tell your child the needs of the situation once, then follow through firmly if necessary.