**How to Give Consequences So They'll Stick-Even When Kids Say They Don't Care**  
  
**1. Use Consequences That Have Meaning**

It's almost never effective to give your child a consequence in the heat of an argument. Often, parents will be either too harsh or too lenient, because nothing   
appropriate comes to mind immediately. I advise parents to sit down and write a Consequences List. You can think of this as a menu of choices. When compiling this   
list, keep in mind that you want the consequence to be unpleasant, because you want your child to feel uncomfortable. If, like most teens, your child's cell phone has   
meaning for him, don't be shy about using it as leverage. It's also important to think about what you want him to learn-and this lesson should be attached to the   
consequence. So let's say your child curses and is rude to his sister, and you want him to learn how to manage his feelings. I think an effective consequence might be   
that he would lose his cell phone until he doesn't curse and isn't rude to his sister for 24 hours. In those 24 hours, he might also have to write a note of apology to   
his sibling stating what he'll do differently the next time he gets frustrated. If he fails to write the letter, he doesn't get his phone back-and the 24 hours starts   
all over again.  
  
**2. Don't Try to Appeal to His Emotions with Speeches**

Remember, your job is not to get your child to love his sister or to appeal to his emotions with a speech, because all he will hear is, "Your sister looks up to you,   
blah, blah, blah." Your job is to take his phone and say, "Hey, we talk to each other nicely around here. And if you can't do that, then you can't use the phone. We'll   
talk about giving it back to you after you talk nicely to your family for 24 hours."  
  
**3. Make Consequences Black and White**

When you give a consequence, the simpler you keep things, the better. Again, you don't want to get into legalese or long speeches. What you want to do is lay out your   
consequences for your child's inappropriate behavior very clearly. It's often helpful if he knows ahead of time what will happen when he acts out. Just like there are   
speeding signs on the highway, the consequences for your child's behavior should be clear to him. Tell him, "If you talk nastily to your sister, this is what's going   
to happen from now on."  
  
And whenever you're going to introduce an idea to your child that may be unsettling, anxiety-provoking, or frustrating to him, do it when things are going well-not   
when everybody's screaming at each other. Wait until a calm moment and then lay out the consequences simply and clearly.  
  
**4. Have Problem-Solving Conversations**

I think it's vitally important to have problem-solving conversations with your child after an incident has occurred. When things are going well, you can say, "If you   
get frustrated with your sister in the future, what can you do differently, other than to call her names? Let's make a list." You might help jump start some ideas by   
saying, "Instead of calling her names, how about going to your room and listening to some music for a few minutes. Could you do that?" And try to help your child come   
up with his own ideas. He might say, "If she follows me around the house, I'll go to my room." You can then say, "All right, why don't we try that" For the rest of   
today, if your sister bothers you, pick one thing that you're going to do from this list and see if it's helpful."  
  
Conversations like these are how you get your child to think about alternative solutions other than yelling at his sister, name-calling, or acting out. Look at it this   
way: we all get frustrated, we all get angry, and we all get anxious. But everyone has to learn to deal with those feelings appropriately-and a problem-solving   
conversation is the most effective way to talk with your child about change.  
  
**5. Don't Get Sucked into an Argument over Consequences**

Don't accept every invitation to argue with your child. Understand that he wants you to get upset so he can drag you into a fight. Your child also wants to show you   
that he's not hurt by the consequence you've given him. Believe me, I understand that it's annoying and frustrating as a parent. Kids will try to push your buttons by   
saying, ?Who cares; whatever.? But don't get sucked into it. Just say, "All right, it's too bad that you don't care-that means it's just going to happen more often."   
Then go do something else. And remember, while you don't want to get sucked into a power struggle, you also don't want to destroy your child's pride by demeaning him,   
either-you just want him to stop talking poorly to his sister.  
  
**6. Don't Teach Your Child How to "Do Time"**

Many parents get frustrated and ground their kids for long periods of time in order to make the punishment stick. Personally, I think that's a mistake. If you simply   
ground your child, you're teaching him to do time-and not to learn anything new. But if you ground him until he accomplishes certain things, you can increase the   
effectiveness of the consequence by 100 percent. I always say to make your consequences task-oriented, not time-oriented. So if your child loses his video game   
privileges for 24 hours, he should be doing something within that time frame that helps him improve his behavior. Simply grounding him from his video games for a week   
will just teach him how to wait until he can get them back-not how to behave more appropriately. Remember, if you ground him for 30 days, you've fired your big gun. If   
you ground him for 24 hours, you still have plenty of leverage. Many parents believe the key to making consequences effective is to get a bigger hammer, but that's not   
a sound teaching method.  
  
Again, we want consequences to be learning experiences. A consequence that doesn't fit the crime will just seem meaningless to your child, and won't get you the   
desired result. Remember, you don't want to be so punitive that your child simply gives up. That will never translate to better behavior.  
  
**7. Engage Your Child's Self-interest**

Learn to ask questions in ways that appeal to your child's self-interest. So for example, you might say, "What are you going to do the next time you think Dad is being   
unfair so you won't get into trouble?" In other words, you're trying to engage his self-interest. If your child is a teenager, he won't care about how Dad feels.   
Adolescents are frequently very detached from that set of feelings. They might feel guilty and say they're sorry later, but you'll see the behavior happen again. So   
learn to appeal to their self- interest, and ask the question, "What can you do so you don't get in trouble next time?"  
  
Put it in his best interests: "Understand, if you're going to talk to your sister meanly or curse at her, things are only going to get worse for you, not better. I   
know you want to keep your phone, so let's think of ways for you to be able to do that."  
  
**8. How Will I Know If a Consequence Is Working?**

Parents often say to me, ?My child acts like he doesn't care. So how do I know if the consequence I'm giving him is actually working?? I always tell them, "It's   
simple-you'll know it's working because he's being held accountable." Accountability gives you the best chance for change.  
  
**9. Some Things Should Never Be Used as Consequences**

In my opinion, there are certain things that should never be taken away from kids. For instance, you should never prohibit your child from going to the prom. Not ever.   
That's a milestone in your child's life; personally, I think that milestones should not be taken away. Your child is not going to learn anything from that   
experience-he's just going to be bitter.  
  
I also believe that sports should not be taken away. I have no problem with kids missing a practice if that's part of a consequence, but taking away the sport entirely   
is not a good idea.  
  
**10. Don't Show Disgust or Disdain**

When giving consequences to your child, I think you should be consistent and firm, but don't show disgust or disdain. In my opinion, you should never be sarcastic with   
your child because it's wounding. What you're trying to do is raise someone who can function, not somebody who feels they're a constant disappointment to you. It's   
very important to shape your behavior so that your child knows you're not taking his mistakes personally. Remember, the look on your face and the tone of your voice   
communicates a lot more to your child than your words do. Positive regard is critical for getting your message across.  
  
I think it's important to remember that life is really a struggle for many kids. Going to school is difficult, both academically and socially, and there is tremendous   
pressure on children and teens to perform today. Personally, I think that kids should be recognized and respected for that. Think of it this way: what you're really   
trying to do is work on your child's behavior to get him to try to do different things. So if your child misbehaves and you ground him from everything indefinitely,   
you're losing sight of all the other things he did right-and he will, too.  
  
Instead, we want to look at inappropriate behavior as a mistake your child makes. Parents often wonder why their kids make the same mistakes over and over, and I say,   
"Well, they do that because they're kids. They're not pretending. They perceive things very differently than adults do." We want our kids to learn, so we use the   
things they enjoy as leverage to teach them better behavior. After all, giving your child a consequence until he shows you he can do better is an effective tool you   
have at your disposal at all times-even if he tells you he doesn't care.