

NEWSLETTER

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The Punishment Should Match the Crime

When your child or teen makes a mistake that requires a consequence, see it as an opportunity to teach an important lesson. By responding thoughtfully, you can help correct the behavior and support your child's growth. Remember, mistakes are a valuable chance for parents to guide children and teens toward better choices.

As a parenting class facilitator, I teach parents that discipline means teaching children and teens to follow rules through both positive (*rewards*) and negative (*punishments*) reinforcement. This newsletter focuses on the **punishment** side of discipline and next month we will discuss the **reward** side of discipline.



Effective punishment should be proportionate and very closely related to the offense committed by your child or teen. The punishment should be appropriate for the child's age and be clearly defined with a specific beginning and end. Many parents instinctively respond by taking away phones, electronics, privileges, lecturing or grounding the teen in the home. While these consequences may work in some situations, if they have no correlation at all to the offense it's very likely that **the child or teen will learn nothing** and therefore the undesired behavior will continue. So, it's important that the "*punishment matches the crime.*"



For example, what does a child learn about stealing if for punishment you take away television privileges? What does a teen learn about adhering to driving safely by being grounded? To encourage real change, the punishment should match the offense as closely as possible. For example, if stealing is the issue, a parent might remove items from the child's room for a set period of time (*1 item each day for a week*), so the child understands what it feels like to have their own belongings taken away without their knowledge? Likewise, instead of taking away a phone after a speeding ticket, a teen could be required to pay the fine with their own money and write a five-page essay about the dangers of speeding and be required to cite five resources. When consequences are **thoughtful** and **relevant**, they are more likely to promote **positive behavioral changes** in the child or teen.

I still remember coming home past curfew as a teenager. The next morning my father never raised his voice, didn't mention that he knew what time I came home but told me to cancel my plans of going to the beach because I was going to spend the day picking up cow and horse manure from the pasture and putting at the compost pile for the garden. I performed the job in the summer heat in Florida instead of being at the beach with my friends. When the job was done my father only stated that I did a good job; the punishment was over. The next Friday I asked to go out with friends and was told to be home by 11 p.m. I was home at 10:45 and for as long as I lived as a teen in my parental home, I never broke curfew again because I never wanted to have to repeat the manure punishment again.

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