

Arranging Consequences

Many anger episodes involve a child's oppositional behavior. The youngster refuses to cooperate, and the parent or teacher threatens a consequence of some kind. In response to this threat, the child's behavior escalates, and further threats ensue. All too often, both the child and the adult get angry, and the situation deteriorates. What started as a small problem that a parent or teacher was trying to deal with logically has mushroomed into an emotional mess.

There is an alternative to using threats and punishments that can be very helpful with emotionally reactive children. Instead of threatening a logical consequence ("If you don't put your bike away, you're not going to be able to ride it tomorrow") or a punishment ("If you don't put your bike away, you will not be able to watch TV tonight") consider a third alternative. Let your child have their way and "arrange" a consequence later that will more naturally help them develop responsibility and self-control. By avoiding threats and punishments, we reduce the risk of fueling a child's emotionality. By arranging consequences later, we have more control over the situation and can pick moments that are more convenient. While there is still chance the child will lose their temper, we have chosen the moment to make our point. Here are some examples of how to use this approach:

1. If a child refuses to brush their teeth, try not reading to them later (their breath smells). When you stop at a store, don't buy them candy or gum because they are not taking care of their teeth. Arrange an extra cleaning at the dentist or take 50 cents out of their allowance each week to pay for fillings (they get the money back if they don't have any cavities).
2. If a child refuses to pick up their toys, let them stay on the floor. Who knows, something might "accidentally" spill on one of their Pokémon cards or trip on one of their Lego projects. We might have time to stop at the toy store, but who wants to buy something for someone who does not take care of their things? It is hard to vacuum around small toy pieces and you never know when something might get swept up. If you must pick up your child's things, make sure that you keep track of the time it takes and require your son or daughter to repay you before you do something for them.