

## 5. YOUR CONSEQUENCES: MAKING THEM HAPPEN

As a parent, there are times when you need and want to *provide* a negative consequence for unwanted behavior. At these times, clarity and consistency are the keys.

**Tip:**

Do not use your “biggest hammer” right away. The consequence should fit the behavior, and there should be room for improvement—if you kick him out of the house at the first sign of negative behavior, you won’t know whether smaller consequences (coupled with rewards for positive behavior, of course) could have influenced change.

Save the big consequences for the really big stuff, and have some smaller consequences for smaller issues. Even more important, don’t threaten any consequence unless you are willing to implement it (don’t threaten to kick them out unless you are ready to change your locks).

**Clarity** – Let your child know *beforehand* what will happen if she engages in the behavior you want her to avoid. This means being clear yourself: figuring out ahead of time realistic and meaningful consequences for the range of behaviors you want to address. (The consequence should match the severity of the behavior, and it must be possible and practical to enforce.) Communicating the plan in advance puts the choice in your child’s hands—she knows, going in, the consequences of acting one way versus another.

**Consistency** – Everyone involved must be willing to enact the consequence and be able to enforce it, as together you should present a united front (even if you feel somewhat differently). Discuss in advance and pick consequences you can agree to and can help each other enforce. For example, if you plan to take away driving privileges for a week if your child comes home drunk, work out who is going to drive her to school and other places she needs to go. If one of you thinks you might waver in following through, then plan how to help each other stay consistent. Communicate at every stage.

Through planning ahead you’ll be able to work around obstacles ahead of time. This will help enormously with your consistency. And consistency helps your credibility, your sense of control, and your child’s motivation.

**Note:** It’s better not to have any consequences or rewards at all than to promise them to your child and then not follow through. Failing to be consistent hurts your credibility as well as your ability to influence positive change for your child.