

#1

Discipline-based parenting is consistent, predictable and whenever possible involves predetermined consequences. Punishment-based parenting is inconsistent, unpredictable, and it minimizes the importance of predetermined consequences.

Discipline-based parenting

While discipline-based parents recognize the importance of being consistent, their kids may not always like the consistent decisions that their parents make. They may also not always appreciate the positions they take, but as a result of their consistent responses, kids will be more likely to develop a sense of safety and security. This is because they know where they stand, what they can expect and what is expected of them as well.

It is this consistency of discipline-based parents which gives kids a sense of predictability. Because their parents are both consistent and predictable they are able to make informed decisions about how what is expected of them. They will also have a better idea of what consequences they will have to face next time.

Once in a while, it is not possible to state ahead of time what the consequences will be. But even when from time to time kids do not know specifically and definitely what consequences await them if they decide to head in the wrong direction, they still have a fairly good idea (as a result of seeing Mom and Dad's consistency and predictability in past events) that whatever the consequences-while they may be fair-they probably won't be pleasant if they make the wrong choice again!

Discipline-based parents know that it is this healthy dose of consistency and predictability which sets the stage for their kids being equipped to process and think through the possible consequences of their actions before they act. The benefit of knowing-at least having a good idea-ahead of time what the consequences of their actions will be, develops in them the all important ability to think in terms of, "cause-effect."

This cause-effect thinking goes something like this: "If I do, then I can pretty well count on..... to happen". "Is it worth it?" "Is it right?" "Is it the best thing to do based on what I think will be the outcome of my actions?"

Discipline-based parents know that emotionally healthy kids do not usually experience a great deal of chronic anxiety in their lives. They also recognize the connection between being consistent-and as a result predictable-and their raising kids who are as free of anxiety as possible.

No one has the luxury of knowing for sure what's in store for them next in life. This is one of the reasons we all experience at least a small degree of anxiety from time to time (and are all at best, "normal neurotics"!). Consistency and predictability in raising kids help the discipline-based parent to minimize anxiety and fearfulness in their kids.

Discipline-based parents know they won't always be perfect in their efforts to communicate ahead of time what consequences their kids can count on. But they make an effort at it and they do their best. They consistently attempt to communicate their expectations and consequences in a loving, kind, firm and clear manner, even though in the midst of it all, they may be hurt, frustrated or angry (or maybe all three and even more!)

They do their best to avoid leading with their emotions when there is a conflict, even when they are in the heat of battle. Far easier said than done, but it can be done (at least most of the time!).

Punishment-based parenting

Punishment-based parents usually declare consequences as they express their anger (hurt, dissatisfaction, etc) at what their kids have done. As a result, the consequences are usually inconsistent, unpredictable, and determined by their emotions at the time, rather than by what is appropriate and reasonably called for in response to what has happened.

They do not recognize the value and importance of being consistent and predictable in the discipline of their kids. Since punishment is the primary change agent, and immediate behavior and attitude change is the only desired outcome, they teach their kids to evaluate only one cause-effect, and that is, "when I misbehave, I get hurt. If I don't want to hurt, I'd better not misbehave". While there is nothing really wrong with recognizing how their behaviors will affect them selves, it falls far short of what must be taught.

What's a parent to do?

Suppose for a moment that your teen-age son comes in on time from a date. After checking in with you they say good night, go into their room, and close the door behind them. Understandably you assume they are going to bed, but instead, they sneak out their window for a late night out on the town. (You kind of suspected that this was going to happen because that's what you did when you were their age!) When your son arrives back home several hours later, there you are, waiting for him in his room.

The discipline-based parent who is concerned with consistency and predictability would handle the situation something like this:

"I assumed that when you came in and said good night that you were on your way to bed. I am hurt/mad/disappointed (or whatever you are) that you lied to me, and that you chose to be sneaky in order to stay out later than you were allowed.

I don't know if this is a one-time event, or if it is a pattern that has gone on for a while. I do know though, that it is not going to continue. It's late, we're both tired, and so it probably isn't a good idea for us to talk about this tonight. We might both lose control. Give some thought to what you think might be an appropriate consequence for what you have done, and I will do the same. Then, sometime tomorrow we will talk more about this. For now, go to bed and do not leave your room".

The next day, you express to him in no uncertain terms the importance of being honest, and not resorting to sneaking around to get what he wants. You go on to say that the next time he wants to stay out later, he should ask. You might not allow it but you want to be open to his needs and you want to encourage him to be honest with you about what he wants. And who knows? You might just say yes once in a while.

Then you talk about what the consequences will be for this infraction and why you chose what you did. You remind him of the rules and make it clear that you do not expect it to happen again. You also address specifically what the consequences will be if it does happen again. You then express your love to them-in spite of your disappointment-and then you move on with our life, and with your relationship. You don't hold a grudge, nor do you bring up the incident again as a way of reminding them of our pain, sadness, anger, disappointment, or whatever.

Compare the above interaction based on discipline-based parenting with the following, punishment-based parenting response:

"Well, you've really blown it now. Any hope of my trusting you went right out the window when you did! I know that I haven't said anything in the past when I have suspected you taking off in the middle of the night, but this is the last straw! From this point on, you're grounded until further notice. Come right home after school, do not talk on the phone, and I don't want to hear a thing from you until you can say you're sorry. If this ever happens again, I can't even begin to tell you how you will regret it! Life as you have previously known it has just come to an end! Goodnight.

So what's the bottom line?

Challenges to our authority by our kids are not only inevitable at some time, in some way, and in some form, but they are even necessary in order for them to think in terms of “cause-effect”. Their challenge to our authority provide us with the opportunity to help them learn to think ahead of time about what the consequences of their actions to them selves as well as to others, might be.

When the inevitable challenges to our authority do come our way, consistency in our responses to them enables our kids to predict what is likely to happen next. It is this ability to determine ahead of time-their ability to predict-that helps them learn to think before they act/speak. We also teach them through our consistency and predictability to consider what affects their actions might have on others around them as well.

Challenging what they have previously accepted without much thought is normal and necessary, and their challenges are signs that they are actually attempting to think for them selves. Just as a toddler whose first steps are unsure and imperfect, our kids will not always get their attempts to think for them selves right the first time either (or the second, third or even fourth time for that matter!).

This is where our consistent responses to their “baby steps” toward independent thinking play such an important role in their development. It is not always easy to be challenged by them, but our efforts to respond in a consistent way will in the long run not only benefit them, but it will pay off for us as well.

Discussion Questions

Did your parents’ responses to your misbehaviors tend to be consistent and predictable?

How did their consistency and predictability-or lack of it- affect your ability to process cause-effect?

Do you believe your kids get a consistent and predictable response from you when they misbehave?

What seem to be the results thus far of either your consistency or inconsistency with them?

If you are generally consistent, what are some examples of that consistency?

If you are not consistent and predictable in your efforts to correct your kids, do you see any possible signs in them that suggest they do not feel secure and safe?

Discuss several specific ways in which you as parents can develop more consistency and predictability in your parenting efforts.