



CHILD BEHAVIOR HELP

(1)

🛒(0)

[\(https://www.empoweringparents.com/cart/\)](https://www.empoweringparents.com/cart/)[Log In/Register](#)[\(https://www.empoweringparents.com/my-account/\)](https://www.empoweringparents.com/my-account/)

[Home \(https://www.empoweringparents.com/\)](https://www.empoweringparents.com/) / [Coaching Blog \(https://www.empoweringparents.com/category/coaching-blog/\)](#) / [A Tip for Picking an Effective Consequence](#)

### A Tip for Picking an Effective Consequence

Posted January 27, 2016 by Marissa Stephens, 1-on-1 Coach

[\(https://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/author/mstephens/\)](https://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/author/mstephens/)

◀ 354

🗨️ 0 Comments



A frequent question we hear from parents is, “What should I choose as a consequence?”

Our answer is always to choose a *task-specific* consequence. These are the consequences that will help your child practice skills and behaviors that need improvement.

Here’s an example of what we mean by task-specific.

🗨️ For example, instead of saying, “Clean your room now or I’m taking away your phone for a week!”

Try: “You know it’s your job to keep your room clean. It’s still messy. If it’s not clean by dinner, you’ll lose your cell phone privileges.”

Hopefully by dinner the room will be clean. But if it’s not, sit down with your child and tell him that he needs to tidy his room, and *keep it clean for 24 hours*, in order to earn his phone back.

**An effective consequence requires kids to practice a behavior that needs improving. Otherwise they are just doing time.**

If your family is working on consequences, you can find a great article here: [Why Don’t Consequences Work for My Teen? Here’s Why and How to Fix It. \(https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/why-dont-consequences-work-for-my-teen-heres-whyand-how-to-fix-it/\)](https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/why-dont-consequences-work-for-my-teen-heres-whyand-how-to-fix-it/)

Thanks for being with us here. Feel free to share your thoughts with the Empowering Parents community below.

Warmly,

Marissa S., Empowering Parents Coach

Need more help with consequences? You may like James Lehman’s video program, [The Complete Guide to Consequences \(https://www.empoweringparents.com/product/the-complete-guide-to-consequences/\)](https://www.empoweringparents.com/product/the-complete-guide-to-consequences/)

**About Marissa Stephens, 1-on-1 Coach**

(<https://www.empoweringparents.com/blog/author/mstephens/>)

Marissa is a proud mom to two boys, age 10 and 5. She earned her degree in Sociology from Saint Joseph's College of Maine and has been a 1-on-1 Coach since 2011. Prior to coming to Empowering Parents, Marissa gained experience working as the House Manager of a group home for teenage boys, as a Children's Mental Health Case Manager, and also spent several years working on the Children's Unit at a Psych. Hospital.

**Thank you for signing up to receive our FREE weekly newsletter!**

 [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/ParentingAdvice) (<http://www.facebook.com/ParentingAdvice>)

 [Twitter](http://twitter.com/emp_parents) ([http://twitter.com/emp\\_parents](http://twitter.com/emp_parents))

 **Popular on Empowering Parents**

Trending on EP



5 Parenting Rules That Don't Work: How to Se...  
[www.empoweringpare...](http://www.empoweringpare...)



How to Deal with Sassy & Mouthy Kids | Empo...  
[www.empoweringpare...](http://www.empoweringpare...)



The Top 5 Parenting Mistakes and How to A...  
[www.empoweringpare...](http://www.empoweringpare...)

AddThis ([http://www.addthis.com/website-tools/overview?utm\\_source=AddThis%](http://www.addthis.com/website-tools/overview?utm_source=AddThis%20Tools&utm_medium=button&utm_campaign=Recommended%20Content%20List))



 **Reader Comments**

 **17 comments**

(<http://livefyre.com>)  
**48 people listening**

Sign in or Post as Guest ()



(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/86474514/>)



(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/75966560/>)



(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>)



(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/99735698/>)



(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/3424839/>)



(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/99940330/>)

		+ Follow	Share
			Post comment as...

[Newest \(\)](#) | [Oldest \(\)](#) | [Top Comments \(\)](#)



**aimer**

3 days ago

i have a 16 year old who is very strong willed. Quite negative/critical in nature. weekends sleeps in until 11 pm, rolls out of bed , computer, down for a late breakfast which he expects me to make, then maybe a walk around the house then back up to his room for a few hours. he is engaged in sports hockey once a week, works out after school 3x weekly each time for 1 1/2 hours. gets average grades, has a tutor which I pay for, but when asked to clean his room, do laundry, help out around the house we get ill do it later, never gets done, I promis, still never gets done. we have cut out the innernet until he does it but that doesn't really have long lasting effects. mu husband has some lecture loud voice engagements with child which usually ends up in cursing from the child. he attends regular sunday mass, but I guess im at a loss about my expectations, any suggestions, I don't want loud confrontations.

Like () Reply ()



**Docnoronha**

3 days ago

My daughter screams and threatens and gets her way. My younger son is terrified of her and I don't have spousal support for discipline . She just won't do I tif she does not want to. She knows standing in front of my face and screaming will make me give in for the sake of peace in my house.

Like () Reply ()



**D**

4 days ago

How in the world is a messy room connected to a cell phone or its use? Firstly, a messy room is a child's business...as a parent it's our job to model, show and explain the benefits of a tidy room (e.g.. less stress, know where belongings are, free to have company over without embarrassment etc. etc.) Children figure out very quickly about the "remove privileges games" that parents play....soon that kid will be down to a bare mattress and won't care, and that "teaches" nothing. I could go on an on here but wanted to say that this post is way off base!

Like () Reply ()



**CariShepard** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/3424839/>)

4 days ago

Okay, I need some help coming up with consequences. My oldest (he is 22 but due to his having ~~Down Syndrome and Autism is functioning~~ (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/3424839/>) likes to get up at night and take pop/soda that is purchased for his father (his father uses the pop/soda like many people use coffee as he works night shift and typically takes 3 bottles with him for his 12-hour shift). We have tried having him replace the pop/soda (1 six pack taken with 4 six packs, we tend to buy it on sale when it is 4-5 six packs for \$10) -- this isn't working. When he is caught, he swears he won't steal again, yet continues. We do attempt to keep it locked, but sometimes there are a bottles in the fridge (most people prefer to drink cold pop/soda) or left out for one reason or another. My son then blames his taking it on it being left where he can get it or worse yet, on me not getting up and catching him before he gets it. (We have an alarm on his door due to his wandering tendencies, and he knows the rule is at night, he is not to go past the bathroom door -- basically he can use the bathroom and then back to bed. If I don't get up and sit on the couch until he returns to bed he feels that means he has 'permission' to get into stuff {food/pop}.)

Like () Reply ()

Ω

**Marissa EP** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/75966560/>) moderator 3 days ago

**@CariShepard** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/3424839/>)

Thanks for writing in with your question, and I can hear how frustrating your situation must be. When it comes to giving consequences for a child, teen, or young adult with a developmental disability, I would encourage you to check in with your child's doctor or treatment team, to help determine what might be a developmentally appropriate consequence, or help identifying what consequences may have been helpful in the past. Best of luck to you and your family as you continue to work on this with your son.

Like () Reply ()

**jd**

4 days ago

Our 15 year old son takes things around the house (like tools, tape, scissors, tape measures, etc) and uses them for purposes which often causes them to be damaged. Then, on top of that, he doesn't return them to their rightful spot (even if they have not been damaged) so when one of the other family members needs these supplies, we can't find them. What would a task-specific consequence look like in this case?

Like () Reply ()

**mom22boys** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>)

4 days ago

When my son was younger, I always tried to use surprise (not warned) logical consequences and empathy to the maximum. So sad you threw a toy, you lose the toy. You don't turn the TV off when asked or have a fit about it, so sad, no TV for the weekend, etc. However, starting at about age 9 it became very difficult to figure out his "currency" and related consequences didn't fit griping, snarking, or arguing. It really is screen time, treats, and mostly that phone (even tho it is wifi only), or occasionally an outing is cancelled, period. I still try to use related consequences if I can (ie: you bought more than two treats on your lunch account this week, I shut down extras on your lunch account next week), but for attitude issues with adolescents and teens, that is difficult. And I pay thousands of dollars for tournament baseball and am not about to throw it away for simple smaller behavior issues, by not taking him to practice (OK for rec sports). Baseball is very good for him. A few years ago, he had to sign a contract with us that showed that he could maintain his homework schedule and grades, and attitude specifics in order to be signed up for Fall. But now we are past that at age 12. Our favorite go-to consequences are task-specific which I learned from James Lehman's video! They are now no phone/screen/dessert/nerf gun/phone/bedtime extension/playing with neighbor kids, until I see three days of (insert behavior change). It works beautifully and is a nice short term goal. Sometimes it takes only three days to succeed, sometimes two weeks, but it is clear expectation. And the weirdest thing we created and instituted with our son last year and have gone back to it many times to curb snarky, disobedient behavior, is a "Yes Mom/Dad" tally sheet and goals. Nipped that negative attitude in the bud AND he became HAPPIER and we certainly did. He can get into very bad habits at 12 pitting himself against us. But it works like this: Goal is 30 Yes Moms for a school day, 60 for a weekend day. He concentrates on saying Yes Mom and taking care of things and he ends up with WAY more "yeses" and freedom and nobody is griping at him. He is clearly so much happier with those guidelines. We don't take advantage, it is just a nice replacement for stomping off, arguing, debating, or the grunted "ok" or no answer at all. My 6 year old likes it too! Keeping track is a pain, but it is proactive once a problem is seen and gives him a goal to shoot for. Once he has earned back whatever he needed a week of good Yes Moms for, we keep it going for a few weeks or a month to seal in the behavior. We could do it year round, but it can be a bit cumbersome.

Like () Reply ()

()

**Poppy234** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/99735698/>)

4 days ago

**@mom22boys** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>) I LOVE the 30 yes rule. We would love 30 yeses in a day. Going to try that!

1  (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>) Like () Reply ()



**irisgripri** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/99940330/>)

2 days ago

This sounds intriguing! Would you be so nice as to give a more detailed example of how you use the yes/no strategy? I really appreciate it!

1  (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>) Like () Reply ()



**Kim**

4 days ago

Hi Marissa, how can this tip be applicable to younger kids? Preschoolers and elementary age children?

Thank you

Like () Reply ()

Ω



**Marissa EP** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/75966560/>) moderator 4 days ago

@Kim  
(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/75966560/>)

This is a question we hear frequently from parents, and the process is quite similar for younger children, but with shorter time frames. Dr. Joan Simeo Munson has a great article addressing this exact question, specifically addressing **giving effective consequences to younger children**.

(<https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/5-steps-to-giving-effective-consequences-to-young-kids/>) Thanks for writing in with your question,

Marissa

1  (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>) Like () Reply ()



**mom22boys** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>)

4 days ago

@Kim For young kids, they can lose the item they had issues about (TV, toys, etc.) for a certain amount of time that they can play/talk respectfully (1 hour, until the timer goes off, res of afternoon- based on age).

They can also do a chore to replace the energy you used handling the issue or cleaning up their clothes off the bathroom floor for them (basically paying back your time/energy)- my kids as preschoolers could empty the trash cans and say to me why he was replacing my energy. Little kids may not do a great job of vacuuming or dusting, but as long as they are doing their best, just tell them they really worked hard to pay you back. Forgive them and move on. My kindergartener can empty the dishwasher. Sometimes I have the kids (6 & 12) do a job together if they have been bickering and taking up my energy to continuously intervene. The job together is done to "practice" working together. We have lots of jobs like that if they need more practice too.

1  (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/75966560/>) Like () Reply ()



**Tracie Shroyer** (<http://allowanceacademy.com/>)

4 days ago

Wouldn't it make even more sense to have a consequence that relates to the task they didn't do? For example, could you say, "Your room is awfully messy. I'm thinking you may have too much stuff in there for you to manage. Why don't you spend a few hours in there cleaning up what is important to you. When you're done, I'll take care of the rest." Then, when they are done, go in and remove whatever didn't get cleaned up. You could get rid of it, put it away to be earned back by doing extra chores, etc. This only happens once or twice before they understand their room needs to be clean. A phone has no link to a messy or clean bedroom, so taking it away isn't really

a logical consequence. If they were abusing their phone privileges by having it in their room when they aren't allowed to, then it makes perfect sense to take away a phone.

With teens, it might make sense to say, "I see you're having trouble with keeping your room clean. So in the future, before I give you permission to go out, I'll be checking your room to see if it's clean. If it isn't, you don't even need to ask, because I'll be saying no." This puts them in control of the situation but the end result is the same.

Of course, we want our kids to listen to us because we're the parent and they need to respect our requests, but, in the long run, if the consequences are logical the kids seem to understand and learn from them much better.

Like () Reply ()



**ForConsideration** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/86474514/>)

4 days ago

Personally, I think always going for the cell phone is a mistake. I know it seems like it is the only thing they care about, but it's not. There are other options. I prefer to tie it to something that they want. For example... "I've asked you a few times to clean your room and it's still not done. If it isn't done before your soccer practice, you won't be going." You can tie it to dessert. You can tie it to a special event. If you are going to go for the phone, don't make it an extended duration. That often punishes the parent as well because you can't get hold of your child during the day. I'm a fan of taking it away for the evening. For example, "I've asked you a couple of times to clean your room. If it's not cleaned by dinner, I'll be taking it for the evening. You can have it back in the morning, assuming your room is cleaned up.". Might not seem like much of a different, but to a kid that's a big deal, as it is when they are in prime communication mode with their friends. Just food for thought.

1 (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>) Like () Reply ()



**Rose**

4 days ago

I recently watched a video where it said to have consequences be most effective it needs to relate to the behavior itself. So taking away a phone privilege for a messy room, does not fit that criteria. Is there another consequence that would fit messy room? Thank.

Like () Reply ()

Ω



**Marissa EP** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/75966560/>) moderator

4 days ago

@Rose  
(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/75966560/>)

Thanks for your question! To clarify, the privilege in this scenario can be anything you choose to withhold, and doesn't necessarily have to be connected to the room care. *How* they earn the privilege back though, is what you do connect to the messy room. The privilege would be earned back once the behavior that caused them to lose the privilege has been corrected, in this case, cleaning the messy room. I hope this helps!

Marissa

Like () Reply ()



**mom22boys** (<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>)

4 days ago

@Rose I believe that is much easier when they are preschool/early elementary.

(<http://www.livefyre.com/profile/67397092/>) When they get older and up, there often isn't a related task. I struggled with that for years. If I can make it related, I try to. Sometimes we just have him do a certain amount of minutes of chores, ie: those last 30 minutes I spent handling your fit and arguing about whatever, was time I was going to be folding that basket of laundry and unloading the dishwasher. So now I am moving on to my next thing and you will complete those for me. That is 30 min of work, and you make take as long as you need to do it, however when you are done, you are free to play/read, etc. My son is still very emotional at 12, so we deal more with the overreactions and attitude than we

do deliberate disbehaviors, which may have easier related tasks (don't come home on time, don't go out with friends tomorrow and not until three days of following all house rules, etc) but we haven't crossed that bridge yet.

Like () Reply ()

Responses to questions posted on EmpoweringParents.com are not intended to replace qualified medical or mental health assessments. We cannot diagnose disorders or offer recommendations on which treatment plan is best for your family. Please seek the support of local resources as needed. If you need immediate assistance, or if you and your family are in crisis, please contact a qualified mental health provider in your area, or contact your statewide crisis hotline.

*We value your opinions and encourage you to add your comments to this discussion. We ask that you refrain from discussing topics of a political or religious nature. Unfortunately, it's not possible for us to respond to every question posted on our website.*



© 2016 Empowering Parents.  
All Rights Reserved.

**Empowering Parents connects families with actionable tips, tools and child behavior programs to help resolve behavior issues in children ages 3-23.**