

Staying Consistent

Consistency is one of the keys to your child's behavior.

Consistent in the dictionary means firm coherence in applying principles or a policy.

Staying consistent is always a challenge. It is always easy to make rules, give guidelines, but it's a whole different story when it comes to enforcing them, especially when we are tired or in a hurry. But if we can understand the importance of being consistent and see the final outcome it will be worth all the effort it takes.

Our children learn through a process called "rehearsal and repetition."

Take for example, learning math: We begin to teach them that one plus one equals two and after a period of time they begin to understand. Then we teach them that two plus two is four. If one plus one did not always equal two, and two plus two equal did not always equal four, they would be confused. Not only that, but how would your child ever learn how to add and subtract? This learning process is called "internalization" because your child takes it from the outside in and it becomes a part of him on the inside.

Just like kids need to know that one and one is two they also need to know what time they're going to go to bed, how they're going to be dealt with if they curse, and what's going to happen if they don't do their homework. Consistency is a key learning tool for your child, because when something is consistent, he can rehearse it and incorporate it inside of himself until it becomes a part of him.

So we have this rule every day...you clean your room... and keep in mind that you also need to teach them how. What if one day the child doesn't clean their room and the mother yells and screams at them to "get in there and pick things up"? And what if the next day, she's in a hurry so she picks it up for them? And then, what if two days later she yells at them again? And then on Friday, she picks it up for them because company is coming over. What are you teaching them and what are they learning?

Most kids learn that if they put up with their mom yelling at them a little bit, eventually she'll clean their room for them. The other thing that happens is that they don't know how their parents are going to react; they're effectively learning how to live with anxiety and chaos. They're learning that the world is not predictable and adult responses can't be gauged. As a result, different characteristics develop in different kids. Some become aggressive and hostile, while others become compliant and passive. All of them learn to deal with unpredictability, which again creates anxiety. Kids have to develop the capacity to deal with anxiety when they're young, so this can be overwhelming to their defenses. Sadly, they often wind up solving problems using inappropriate behavior.

Why is consistency so difficult for most parents?

Why is it so hard for parents to be consistent? First of all, parents are human. Unless we really push and train ourselves, I think it's easy to get off track. To a parent, expediency often takes the place of consistency. It's quicker to pick up your child's room yourself when you've got company coming over than it is to get your son to take responsibility for it. Did you ever hear a parent say "I get so frustrated that my daughter won't do what I've told her to do a thousand times that and I end up screaming at her." If you yell at your child for two days because he's not doing his chores, then you do his chores for him the next two days, and the following day, you punish him, you're going to raise a child who learns that nothing anyone does is predictable. And if things aren't predictable and he can't internalize problem-solving and social skills, he also won't be able to internalize the values, knowledge and experiences that it will take to shape his behavior."

We also need to understand that your child will constantly test you until he grasps - takes hold of - what you are teaching him and again, once they get it, the battle is won and you will only need to remind him once in a while.

I understand that parents work and they get tired ,they deal with issues in their own life, but we need to always remember they need us to be consistent....they need us to be the example.

I understand that parents do get worn down; often they'll try to be consistent, but if they don't see change right away, they give up. I think giving up after a few days or weeks is one of the biggest mistakes you can make as a parent. Changing a behavior takes time and it takes consistent application of new principles and ideas in order for kids to incorporate them on the inside. And until then, your child needs a parent to structure his life and set limits on him because he's a kid—not a little adult. The child is not the parent.....you are. Children don't think like adults, they don't see the world the same way as adults do, and they don't experience things the way we do. A young child's mind works very differently from ours, and so does an adolescent's.

What you can do to become more consistent

It's so important to keep it as simple as possible. For instance, write down the rules that you know are appropriate. This is effective because then it isn't left up to your imagination or to memory. You have a list. For example answer the questions below:

What time is bed time?

What time is hygiene time in the bathroom?

What time is homework time?

What are the rewards for obedience?

What are the consequences for disobedience?

All of these rules need to be written down and kept in plain sight and then the parents need to began to incorporate them. It would be good to read them out loud every morning. Remember the concept of rehearsal and reinforcement is important with parenting, too. As a parent, you need to rehearse this new information. The process of reading it out loud reinforces your new techniques and rules. Then you put them into practice. The day will come when you don't need to read your list out loud, because you'll be living it. It's a simple tool but it helps you to be more consistent.

Get the support you need

If you don't understand how important consistency is and you don't know how to apply it on a regular basis in your home, you need to get help. There are parenting programs, classes, support groups and professionals out there who can help you.

How to apply the new rules

Most of the time when we make new rules it's either because we are fed up with something or that we're just starting to set rules at an early age. I think that the last thing that you want to do is make a big announcement to your kids about all the changes that will be taking place, and then not follow through. That's what tends to happen; you feel better, the pressure is off for a little bit, but then when you don't follow through, it falls apart. The first thing you should do is start applying your new rules one or two at a time.

Expect resistance, depending upon the age of your child. If they're five or six years old, you could experience tantrums. If your children are older, you could get arguments and door-slamming. Although it might not feel like it at the time, these are all signs that your new techniques are working. Your child may not like it but remember, you're the parent and you win if you are persistent. So don't give up or give in.

After you start to successfully implement the new laws in your home, you can begin to talk to your kids about the changes. If you have a pre-adolescent or teen in the house I think it is important to sit down when things are going well and say, "I'm going to be doing things more consistently from now on. I haven't really followed through and I'm not comfortable with the way I've been setting the rules down. So from now on, curfew means curfew. If you come in two minutes after curfew or one minute after curfew, there will be consequences. If you come in on curfew or before, there will be a reward.and the reward is that you get to go out again next Saturday night. Your room has to be clean by this time. Homework has to be done by this time. Your grades have to be maintained at this level in order for you to drive or to go out on the weekends at night."

The older the child, the more resistance you can face. Expect to be tested. In fact, whether your child is four or fourteen, expect to be tested. Above all, don't give in.the testing will diminish in time.

The other thing you need to ask yourself is, "Are my expectations realistic? Am I being consistent about the right things?" If you're being consistent about a seven o'clock bedtime for a young child, that's great. If you're being consistent about a seven o'clock bedtime for a 13-year-old, I think you should take another look at that.

As parents we need to constantly make readjustments, be flexible and be firm. Consistency is just the willingness of a parent to take the time to stick to the rules they've laid out for their child. The benefits of consistent parenting are that your child will internalize your rules and values over time and learn to do things with simple reminders rather than conflict.