



## Consequences vs. Punishment

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As a parent, if you're unsure if you're giving a consequence or a punishment, try the **Litmus Test** and ask yourself these questions:

**If I do *this action* as a parent, who will my child become *legitimately* frustrated or angry with? Me or him/herself?**

If the answer is "Me", then you might be giving a **punishment**.  
If the answer is "Him/Herself", you're probably giving a **consequence**....  
(but be prepared for your child to act angry with you anyway!)

See the table below for more examples of consequences vs. punishment:

Consequences	Punishment
Done thoughtfully, in a planned, expected, and calm manner (not out of anger)	Done out of anger or while angry; response is unexpected and inconsistent
The child is given the responsibility for the child's behavior & held accountable for it	The parent (mistakenly) takes the responsibility for the child's acts and takes the child's behavior personally
The parent's attitude is one focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sensitivity to feelings</li> <li>• planning, teaching</li> <li>• consistency</li> <li>• mutual respect</li> </ul> And therefore, learning can occur.	The parent's attitude is focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anger, hostility, blame</li> <li>• guilt, defensiveness,</li> <li>• and disrespect;</li> <li>• (sometimes being apologetic)</li> </ul>
The child feels: capable, respected, and responsible. The child is given choices within limits set by parent and has a sense of having some power	This leaves two people who are feeling angry; thus, not much learning can happen at this time - conditions are poor for learning. The child is left feeling powerless and incapable or defeated; the child responds with anger or helplessness
The action taken by the parent is focused and reasonable; focused on the short-term perspective that kids have regarding time	The action taken by the parent is often overblown or exaggerated and the focus is too long-term for the child to learn
Builds self-discipline and a success identity; Makes the relationship stronger (after 24 hours)	Reinforces a failure identity; makes the relationship worse; child withdraws or is angry