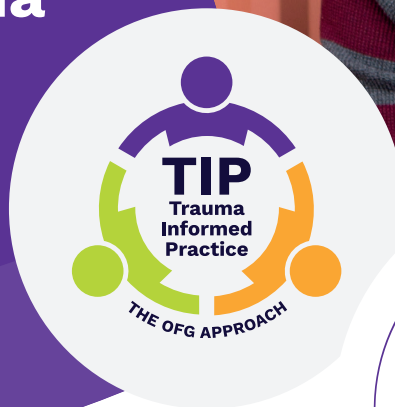


Helping Children Learn; The Importance of Natural and Logical Consequences when Working with Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

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Introduction

Our young people who present with Complex Trauma have often been exposed to abusive or neglectful early environments. They will likely have experienced a lack of boundaries, having to make their way in the world in an overly independent way and often any boundaries that were present will have been inconsistent. This means our young people have not learnt that the way they think, feel or behave has a consistent and predictable response. This can be part of the reason why young people have not been supported in making safe decisions and why they can present with risky behaviour. Helping the young people we live and learn with understand the link between cause and effect creates opportunities for them to learn.

Our young people can be very sensitive to any sense of criticism, as it can trigger shame and be interpreted as rejection; this is why traditional parenting is not effective with our young people.

We need to ensure that helping our young people learn effective and safe responses is supported in a trauma informed way. Consistent use of what we call logical and/or natural consequences are trauma informed ways of supporting our young people learn cause and effect.

All young people need to be supported to learn that behaviour has responses in order to reduce the risk of future anti-social or inappropriate and risky behaviour. It is important to note that consequences should be delivered alongside therapeutic parenting practices and in conjunction with a high level of nurture, empathy and relationship repair. The young person should be supported to develop their self-esteem and overall resilience. This approach will support the young person to learn that their behaviour is not okay but will not reinforce their beliefs of being “bad.”

The young person is supported to learn about the potential impact of their unsafe mobile phone use.



Natural consequences

Are consequences that occur in response to a behaviour, without influence from the carer. Below are some examples:

- If a young person decides to stay up late on a school night, the natural consequence is that they will be tired the next day.
- If they throw an object at the TV screen, it will break and they can't watch the TV over the next week as it is broken.

Logical consequences

Are consequences that are set by an adult. Below are some examples:

- Cleaning a room or helping to repair something that they have damaged.
- Being supported in writing a letter to a member of staff to repair the relationship following a physical assault

The consequence must be related to the behaviour, otherwise it is unlikely to have any effect. The 3 R's of logical consequences (Nelson, 1985) highlight that consequences should be:

Related to the behaviour

For example, a young person has been using their mobile phone in an unsafe way, therefore the phone is removed to keep them safe.

Not related: you stop her from going to football club.

Respectful

Towards the young person, not shameful or blaming. You have this discussion with them in private and connect with the young person first before correcting with a natural or logical consequence, demonstrating that you are being curious and accepting of the underlying need, for example their need to make friends and feel accepted and empathise with this.

Reasonable

Both in the view of the young person and carer. The young person is supported to learn about the potential impact of their unsafe mobile phone use, how they can use it and make friends in a safer way and work with you to develop a plan to earn it back. The plan should clearly outline what is expected of the young person and should be adhered to.

Tips for delivering natural and logical consequences in a trauma informed way to maintain a therapeutic approach:

- The relationship you have with the young person is a key part of the foundation for discipline. If a young person trusts and respects you, the natural and logical consequence will be much more effective, as they will want to repair the relationship with you.
 - The young person needs to know what the natural or logical consequence is going to be if the unwanted behaviour continues. This can help support learning cause and effect.
 - Remain calm because getting angry will trigger further emotional dysregulation in the young person and likely trigger shame and rupture the relationship. The young person may be “inviting” you to re-enact their past trauma (e.g. they may hold the belief and expectation ‘I deserve to be punished’ due to their early experiences) so it is important to take a break or swap with another member of staff. A child cannot make you behave in a certain way, you have control over this and make choices about your behaviour. It is important that natural and logical consequences are not given in anger as they are likely to be overly exaggerated and critical of the young person. It is fine to say, ‘I’m going to have a think and we can come back together to discuss how we support one another here’.
 - Natural and Logical consequences should be applied as soon as possible after the behaviour to help link cause and effect. However, it is important that the young person is emotionally regulated first, for them to be able to learn.
 - Consult with others in your team or professional network if you are unsure, don’t deliver a natural or logical consequence for the sake of it in the heat of the moment.
 - Natural or logical consequences become less effective when used too frequently. Children may lose their motivation and it can reinforce their past experiences and beliefs that they ‘deserve to be punished as I am bad’.
 - Natural and Logical consequences should be time limited and not open ended e.g. “you won’t be going out on your own until I can trust you again.”
- This type of consequence will not motivate the young person, instead be clear on what they need to do to earn this trust back. This can be completed by writing a contract with the young person, for example a mobile phone/ internet contract.
- Think about natural and logical consequences in relation to the young person’s trauma; your chosen consequence may be trauma triggering or shaming. For example, sending a young person to their bedroom when historically, time in the bedroom has previously been unsafe.
 - Natural and logical consequences should not involve “time out” or time away from relationships with staff due to significant attachment needs. Relationships should remain consistent and be unconditional.
 - Young people should not pick their own consequences on their own. Young people who have experienced trauma may pick harsh punishments, in line with their previous experience. Young people can input into what they believe might be appropriate to give them a sense of control and to help with discussions around learning, but this needs to be adult led.
 - Focus on providing consistent and predictable parenting, to support the young person to feel safe.
 - Make use of PACE – Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. Accept how the young person is feeling both about what led to the behaviour and the consequence. Curiosity will help you to make sense of what is going on for the young person; seeing beyond the behaviour and Empathy will demonstrate that you care and want to support the young person. Make use of playfulness when appropriate.
 - Attention from a caregiver can be reinforcing, even if it is negative. Focus on finding regular opportunities to offer positive attention.
 - Use a restorative approach to help young people learn and repair relationships – may be to do chores in the home to pay towards an item they have broken or clean the walls that they damaged. The restitution should be related to the behaviour and never be about shaming or embarrassing the child. The child needs to be supported to take responsibility for their behaviour in the most effective way.

Punitive measures do not work with our young people

Punishments will often undermine the purpose of discipline because it does not support the young person to learn and often re-enacts past trauma. It also builds up feelings of resentment, relationship ruptures and low self-esteem (Kohn, 2006). Instead of reflecting on and learning from their own behaviour or mistakes, the young person will be directed towards feelings of anger toward the enforcer. There is also the risk that punishments can be given out of our own anger, which are likely to be overly critical or unlinked to the behaviour. Our young people's projections of anger can be very powerful and it is natural that we might want to respond

in a punishing way; the process of re-enactment is powerful. Ensuring you pause, reflect and recognise this and discuss your support network is important. This can help you be in charge of your own responses.

Positive consequences

These can be used when a young person has done something particularly well, such as being kind, caring or helpful. Often young people can find it difficult to work towards an incentive, they may think they do not deserve the rewards, may be mistrusting of the person offering the incentive or have beliefs that the reward comes at a price. Unanticipated, small rewards along with praise will help to encourage positive behaviour.

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