WHAT IS IT?

Behaviors often lead to outcomes, or consequences. Although we often associate the word consequence with something negative, there are consequences for BOTH positive and negative behaviors. This strategy is all about effective and respectful ways to help children see the connection between their behaviors and outcomes, both positive and negative. This helps children weigh their options and choose actions that lead to positive outcomes rather than negative ones.

> A **consequence** is any change (good or bad) in the environment following a **behavior** that makes the **behavior** more or less likely to happen.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Some consequences occur naturally. In this case, it is our job to explicitly link the behavior and outcome:

- A child is running in the classroom. They knock down another child, who begins to cry. The teacher comforts the crying child and prompts both children to talk about what happened. "When you run in the classroom, it's easy to accidentally knock someone over. That's how they got hurt."

While other consequences are presented to a child to shape their behavior:

- "If you keep the toy on the table, then you can play with it. If you throw it, it could break or hurt someone, so you'll have to choose something else to play."
- "If we put on our coats now, we'll have more time outside. If not, we will have less time to play."

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

When you connect a child's actions to outcomes, it helps them understand the relationship between their behavior and what happens *after* it. This includes noticing how their actions make others feel. When children realize that they have control over outcomes, and choosing positive behaviors means more positive outcomes, they are more motivated to make positive choices.

Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Consequences

☑ **Keep children included.**

Some commonly used negative 'consequences' lead to children being left out, or excluded, from their peers and learning. For example, sending a child away from an activity to a "calm-down" space repeatedly, or having a child visit the director or principal, are all practices that limit the child of the time to engage in learning. These practices damage children's sense of safety and belonging in the classroom community. When excluded, children fall behind. We wouldn't send children away from a math activity as a way to "teach" them their numbers. The same is true for behaviors – children need to stay and engage to learn how to succeed.

☑ **Provide equitable experiences.**

Black children and children with disabilities are much more likely to be excluded for showing the same behaviors as White children and children without disabilities. You must continually reflect on your practice to ensure you give every child fair opportunity and support.

TIPS FOR LINKING BEHAVIORS AND OUTCOMES

Be proactive:

1. Notice and explicitly link/describe children's behavior to their outcome (both positive and negative).
   - ☑ **Positive examples:** "You cleaned your lunch up – now our table is clean and ready for the play-dough," "I see you walking down the hall – you're keeping everyone safe."
   - ☑ **Negative examples:** "You threw the toy so it broke. Now we can't play with it anymore," "You hit them, and they didn't like the way it felt. So, they want to play somewhere else."

2. Assess your practice. How often are you implementing negative consequences? Plan for ways to avoid needing to use them. For example, focus on giving children choices and options throughout the day. Make sure the things you are asking children to do are developmentally and culturally appropriate. All of which will lead to more positive behaviors.

When deciding if you need to present a consequence to a child in-the-moment…

1. Stop and think: is what you are asking them to do developmentally and culturally appropriate? Do they understand their choices, and *can* they do the things you are asking them to do?

2. Use a calm and supportive voice to describe the child's options and the associated outcomes.
   - ☑ Use "if-then" statements. Be sure to include the positives. For example, "Keeping the water in the sensory table keeps us from slipping. **If** you keep it in the table, **then** you can stay at this center. **If** you keep splashing water out, **then** you'll need to move to another center."
   - ☑ Make sure consequences are logical, reasonable, and immediate.
     - Logical: the behavior is directly related to the outcome. If you want children to make the connection between their actions and outcome, that link must make sense!
     - Reasonable: the outcome is not harsh or severe. The outcome must also be something you can reasonably follow through with.
     - Immediate: it doesn't work to use a consequence that happens a long time after the behavior you are trying to shape. (e.g., take something away the next day).

3. Follow through.
   - ☑ Acknowledge the child when they choose a positive behavior.
   - ☑ If they don't choose the positive behavior, follow through on the stated outcome. It is better to not state a consequence at all than to state a consequence and not follow through.
     - Then be sure to give them another chance to be successful as soon as possible!

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT USING CONSEQUENCES

Consequences: Linking Behaviors and Outcomes

For consequences to be effective and fair, they need to be logical, reasonable, and immediate. When possible, consequences should also be naturally occurring. *See the Linking Behaviors and Outcomes handout for more information on consequences.*

- ☑ **Logical consequences:** the child's behavior is directly related to the outcome. If you want children to make the connection between their actions and the outcome, that link must make sense!
- ☑ **Reasonable consequences:** the outcome is not harsh or severe (which can damage your relationship and lead to worsening behaviors). The outcome must also be something you can reasonably follow through with. Children learn best when you are consistent – if you cannot follow through, it is better to not state a consequence.
- ☑ **Immediate consequences:** the outcome comes right after the behavior. It doesn't work to use a consequence that happens a long time after the behavior you are trying to shape (e.g., take something away the next day).
- ☑ **Natural consequences:** the outcome happens naturally as a result of a child's behavior, rather than an outcome being chosen by an adult. When possible, it is best to point out natural consequences. For example, if a child hits a friend, that friend might not want to play anymore. If a child throws their toy, it might break.

Examples of Linking Behaviors and Outcomes in the Classroom

Activity	Example	Non-Example
Keeping water in the sensory table	"Keeping the water in the sensory table keeps us all safe—that way no one slips. If you keep it in the table, you can stay at this center. If you keep splashing water out of the table, then you'll need to move to another center."	"If you splash water, you won't be able to play here for the rest of the week."
Using toys safely	"We have to use toys safely. If you throw that toy car, then it might break or hurt a friend. Do you want to race the cars on the racetrack?"	"If you throw that toy, you will go to time out."
Coloring with crayons on paper	"We are using crayons to draw on paper, not the table. If you draw on the paper, you can keep coloring with the crayons. If you keep drawing on the table, then we'll have to put the crayons away and try again later. Do you need a bigger piece of paper?"	"If you do that, I'm going to have to tell your mom."
Cleaning up	"It's clean-up time. If you clean-up by the end of our clean-up song, then we'll have extra time for games [or other activity]! If clean-up takes longer, we'll have less time for games."	"If you don't clean-up, you will lose 5 minutes of your recess time."
Keeping hands to self	"We need to keep our hands and feet to ourselves, so no one gets hurt. If you kick the friend next to you, then you will need to move to a new spot. If you keep your feet to yourself, you can stay in that spot."	"If you do that again, I'm moving your picture to the 'red' circle!"
Lining up	"It's time to line up to go to the library! We have to line up so we can stay safe when we walk down the hall. When you are lined up, then we can go to the library. If it takes long to line up, we will miss some of library time."	"If you don't hurry, we will leave without you!"
Putting jackets on for outside play	"It's outside time, and it's cold today. If you put on your jacket, you will feel warm and comfy playing. If you don't put on your jacket, you will probably feel cold. What's your choice?"	"If you don't put your jacket on right now, we won't go outside at all."