



Transcript - Episode 79

Why Most Consequences Don't Work

Consequences... Consequences are one of those topics that almost everyone agrees students need them. But we don't always agree on what they're supposed to accomplish or what they are. So today we're going to challenge one of the biggest assumptions in education by asking different questions.

Before deciding what the consequence should be, what do we actually want students to learn? Julie, why do you think this one is such an important topic? Why do you think it keeps coming up?

I don't know, but I'll tell you this. When we say the word consequence in any PD, we get immediate responses. Usually we're doing online PD, so the chat fills up immediately with people's thoughts, opinions, and feelings about consequences.

And so a lot of times people are using, we'll call it an old frame or an old way of thinking. And the reason we're saying old is because these ideas have come from behaviorism a long time ago. And the old frame is that consequences mean a human should suffer for their poor choices.

Or if they have a bad enough experience following that experience, then they're never going to do the first thing again. And so the suffering is a key to the consequence. And as you said "suffering," I thought maybe the roots go back to biblical times.

Probably. Do you know what I mean? Like I could just hear my parents and their way of thinking. But the only way I was going to learn is through suffering.

Right. And I think when people say to us we're being too permissive, or if we give in that the student isn't going to learn, but what they really mean is there's no bad thing happening to the kid.

Yeah, or it's not bad enough to make them never want to do it again.

And so the new frame that we want people to use is that consequences really are just what happens after the behavior. And the question isn't really should there be consequences because there's always something that comes after the behavior. The real question is whether those consequences help children learn or just make them uncomfortable.

Yeah. And I think that that's where the mindset shift has to come is our underlying goal can't be to make them feel uncomfortable, make them squirm, or as you said, make them suffer. We really want to think about the thing that comes after.

Even if the behavior is, quote-unquote bad behavior, a challenging behavior, we need to think about how do we actually learn from this. So we're actually here to build skills. And so maybe, Julie, now's the time.

We'll come back to what we mean by natural consequences or timely or logical. People use different words and some alternatives. But maybe we talk a little bit about what is the skill that we're trying to learn.

So what I mean by that is let's go talk a little bit about the download for this episode and let's talk a little bit about what we would be trying to teach if we're not trying to make them uncomfortable or suffer.

Well, Kristie, I guess I want to say something right before we get there. So yes, we have a really, really good download for this episode.

And I can give that link real quick. It's just going to be [inclusiveschooling.com/download79](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download79). Okay.

Okay. And what I want to say before you even open it is this. When a human is suffering or when a human is uncomfortable, they are not available for learning new information.

And so the very nature of the idea that they have to suffer enough to learn something new is actually incongruent with how humans learn, meaning we have to be in a headspace where we can learn, meaning a comfortable, safe, et cetera, headspace in order to gain the new information.

Good point, Julie, because we all say all the time a kid can't learn when they're dysregulated. But then the question becomes, of course, how do I get them to be regulated? And almost all the strategies require a form of co-regulation and connection, which is going to look like we're giving them attention or we're making their system soothe so that they are comfortable.

Well, if our mindset is, oh, they have to struggle. They have to figure it out themselves. They have to be uncomfortable.

We're actually causing them to stay in a place of being dysregulated and they won't learn the skills we so deeply want. And by the skills we want, I'm referring to things like responsibility, understanding the impact of their behavior, even empathy. Like when we force kids to say they're sorry, I think if you unpack that enough, we want people to have perspective taking or understand that someone's feelings are hurt and that's not okay.

Yeah, and sometimes the skill, like Kristie said, responsibility, it could be regulation, it could be empathy. It could also be you want the student to be able to communicate better when they're struggling or problem-solve differently. We want them to approach the problem, whatever it is.

So with an early childhood example: "He has my Lego." How do we figure out a new way to problem-solve that doesn't involve punching him, right? So what else could we do? So we're teaching those skills in a way where everybody's nervous system is much calmer and people say, well, it does look a little permissive. And our answer is do you want to teach that skill or don't you? And so I think for me, it comes down to that people use consequences as code for punishment. We haven't used that word just yet.

We've said suffering, uncomfortable, dysregulated. But I think for some, there is this idea of punishment, even though they may not use that word, right? They'll use consequence in place of it. So what we're going to do, friends, is talk through a few dilemmas: let's say a student hurts someone, damages property, or refuses, okay? Okay.

Julie will take a couple, I'll take a couple, and we'll unpack what punishment looks like. And if you want to use the word consequence, it's just what the outdated ways of consequences are. You could use the word we're perpetuating dysregulation.

That'd be fine too. That's what we don't want to do. And then we'll give you a couple of examples of what a natural or logical consequence would be because there's always a consequence.

And so Julie and I are trying to show you which ones will help the student be ready to learn communication, problem-solving, empathy, okay? So Julie, which issue do you want to pick? I'm going to start when a student hurts someone, and I want you to pick your own age level. So you might teach high school. You might teach middle school.

You might teach elementary school. Any one of those is fine. It might be preschool.

But picture the age student that you're working with because it's going to be variable, and they hurt someone, okay? So there's an injury that occurs. I want you to think of instead of a 10-out-of-10 injury, something very significant. Just for this example, think about a 4-out-of-10 injury, something that's annoying, problematic, quite concerning, but not a 10, okay? It could even be hurting someone's feelings, but not significant bullying, right? Sure, any of those things.

Okay, so if these are the non-examples, what we don't want to do. Punishment looks like go to the office. Punishment looks like sitting out for the rest of the time in a timeout, a loss of free time, a detention, a public reprimand.

Those are examples of what punishment looks like. It means you're adding on discomfort with an aim to teach something, okay? That's our non-examples. That is not what we want to do.

Well, so, Kristie, give examples of natural or logical consequences for if a student hurts someone.

Yeah, so these sound a little bit evasive or elusive because they're going to be like, ensure everyone is safe neurologically, physically, right? We're regulating our own nervous system. And it sounds like, but don't you need to do something? Doesn't it need to be an immediate consequence? But sometimes that immediate action is me lending my calm to the situation.

Maybe I even give my attention to the person who was injured because that's a priority. Then, depending on what kind of co-regulation strategies I use, I help the student

understand the impact or look to repair or look for a way to solve the problem that didn't require hitting somebody or yelling something at them. So it kind of is a little bit of a process, whereas a public reprimand is like, we don't hit our friends.

Okay. Right? That's a one and done. Now I'm like kind of a first responder, right? I'm looking at the scene, making sure everybody is safe.

I calmly join the group, check on the person that got hit. You're doing okay? You feeling okay? Need a hug? And then I can look to the other student and go, hey, I need to understand what happened here. Or I just sit with them and go, wow, there's some big feelings.

And then as we get that under control, we go to the next step. And that's harder to teach, right, Julie? Like that was much harder to say than go to the office.

Well, it's harder for so many reasons, Kristie, because usually the adult is pretty triggered by what happened.

So usually the adult human feels really upset or on behalf of the student that was injured is usually how people feel. And so what does it look like to take those personal feelings and enter a situation in a supportive stance as opposed to a power-over stance? So you come into the middle of it and you're there to support the person who hit and the person who was hit. And that's not our usual go-to based on our own feelings.

Well, remember what Julie said, and I listed a few too. If I'm trying to teach communication, you know, like I want to teach this kid that hit a different way to ask for the toy or to get the material or to have a turn, how am I doing that by sending them to the office? Right. And so many people think that public sending to the office is what's going to tell everybody else.

We don't hit. We don't hit. So if you saw that, you're going to say, oh my gosh, I don't ever want to go to the office.

And so in reality, what we've got to do is say what calms the situation quickest and what gets everybody closest to their prefrontal cortex. And then how do we respectfully and calmly teach a new skill? And there's a whole bunch of these on our download,

which is again at [inclusiveschooling.com/download79](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download79). But I'm going to pick one, Julie, that's like the opposite of like aggression that is a trigger for me.

Like let's say a student refuses. And it could just be an outright refusal or it could be, you know, kind of that internal just like rolling of their eyes or not moving towards what I asked them to do. And internally, I'm like, how do I get them to comply? How do I get them to do what I wanted? And if you were to say to me, Kristie, change your mindset and ask yourself, what is making participation difficult? Oh my gosh.

My heart softens and I become curious. I'm like, oh, they're having trouble participating. They don't understand something.

They're overwhelmed. They have anxiety. It's too difficult, too easy.

They need a choice. Like I wouldn't have gone there. I would have been like, why are they being, you know, this pain in my butt today? And they've got to know that I'm in charge and have to do what I say.

And so like a logical consequence for a kid who refuses might be asking them to do it later or helping them break it into smaller chunks. But I think people would freak out about that.

I think some people would and others wouldn't.

Some of you know right away that actually refusal is some of the best communication, right? I'm thinking about our friend Otto who has autism and he's an almost 20-year-old person now. And he talks about the fact that his no, his refusal was so important to his own nervous system. And when people honored it and respected it, to say, hey, can we come back to that later then? Or can I help you break this into smaller chunks? Or let's problem solve how or when we can get this done together.

Or let's create an action plan. Or why don't we work with someone else to support you? Essentially all those things were lifelines because the no was saying my nervous system says I'm not safe here. Exactly.

The goal really isn't compliance. The goal is engagement. And I like, Kristie, how you said it softens your heart a little more when you think the goal is engagement.

It doesn't have to be now. It doesn't have to be because I said so. The goal is engagement and let's see when and how we can get that to happen.

So in the handout, we give you what natural consequences are and are not. And maybe, Julie, what I'll do is give a couple of examples of what they aren't and are, you know, that contrast. And then if you want to pick another situation or dilemma, and we can see how those consequences you would suggest we use meet the criteria, okay? So Julie was talking before about like what we don't want to do, which is the punishment, which is perpetuating dysregulation, which is kind of standard practice.

Natural or logical consequences do not mean we ignore. We're not accepting unsafe things. We're not letting the kid do, quote, unquote, whatever they want.

We're not avoiding, and we're certainly not lowering expectations. So just keep in mind that when Julie and I say to use natural consequences, we're aiming to teach the student.

So we're setting clear boundaries. We're being calm. There's always a timeliness of this.

The more immediate, the better because it stays connected. It's hard to talk about something in the future. However, the timeliness of the student's readiness matters.

A natural consequence requires practice. It requires reteaching, meaning I'm going to mess up, and I'm going to need it again and again. So I've got to be consistent.

I've got to actually teach the skills that I want. So can you give us a couple examples of, Julie, of a dilemma and then something that you and I would call a consequence, but we'd also call it a natural consequence or one we want them to do?

Yeah, so let's just say a student uses hurtful words. It can be anything from swearing at to just saying something rude or problematic to someone else.

And so what Kristie is asking is, what would be the logical consequences there? You talk to the student about the impact of those words. You repair with the person who is harmed. You practice respectful language.

You might reframe what was said, and then you reenter the conversation. Now compare those logical consequences to writing 'I will be respectful' 100 times, detention, or public correction. Those don't teach anything new except to teach people to hate writing, right? And so we've got to get much more close to the skill as opposed to further away from the skill when we're struggling with a student.

So again, you can get our download at [inclusiveschooling.com/79](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/79). And the whole idea is to have this different lens that we understand that there's always going to be a consequence because it's the thing that happens after a behavior. We just don't want the consequence to be code for punishment.

Our job is to teach, and we can only teach when students are regulated. And if they're younger than 25, or they're just plain old dysregulated, they are going to require co-regulation. So natural consequences are grounded in this idea of co-regulation.

And then I would just say the last part of the handout just encourages you to do a little bit more self-reflection. I would say, what's our habit? What is our culture? What is okay? And knowing that people, how they parent, how they were raised, Julie said we call them outdated because it goes back to the roots of early behaviorism and B.F. Skinner. I brought up that it may go back to early religious teachings, not just the Bible, but others as well, that think that fear or suffering is going to be what changes people's behavior or helps them to learn.

Okay. Well, enjoy that particular download. And as you head back into your classroom or school this week, pay attention to the consequences you see and the ones you use.

So ask yourself, what is this actually teaching? For example, is it teaching embarrassment? Is it teaching resentment? Is it teaching not to get caught? Or better yet, is it teaching regulation, responsibility, repair, communication, problem-solving? Because every consequence is shaping something. And when we become intentional about the lessons we teach, then we move a little closer to creating classrooms built on learning instead of fear.

SHOW NOTES

Consequences are one of those things almost everyone agrees students need. But what are we actually trying to accomplish when we give them?

In this episode, Julie and Kristie challenge the long-standing belief that students need to suffer, lose something, or feel uncomfortable in order to learn from their behavior. They explore the difference between punishment and natural or logical consequences, and why regulation, connection, and skill-building matter far more than making students "pay" for their mistakes.

Through familiar classroom dilemmas, including hurting others, refusing work, and using hurtful language, they invite educators to shift from asking, "What consequence does this behavior deserve?" to "What do we want this student to learn?"

Because every consequence teaches something. The question is whether we're teaching responsibility, communication, and repair, or embarrassment, resentment, and fear.

Key Takeaways

- **Consequences and punishment aren't the same thing.** A consequence is simply what follows a behavior. Punishment intentionally adds discomfort in hopes of changing behavior.
- **Students can't learn new skills when they're dysregulated.** Co-regulation and connection create the conditions for learning, responsibility, and repair.
- **The goal is learning, not suffering.** Effective consequences help students practice the communication, empathy, problem-solving, and self-regulation skills we want them to develop.
- **Refusal is communication.** Rather than demanding compliance, get curious about what's making participation difficult.
- **Accountability doesn't require punishment.** We can maintain boundaries, address harm, repair relationships, and hold high expectations without shame or exclusion.
- **What happens next matters.** Sending a student to the office may end the immediate disruption, but it doesn't necessarily teach a safer or more effective way to respond next time.

Episode Download / Handout

Natural & Logical Consequences Decision Guide: A Practical Guide to Teaching Responsibility, Repair, and Self-Regulation

When a student hurts someone, refuses to participate, damages materials, or disrupts learning, what should happen next?

This six-page guide helps educators move beyond automatic punishments and choose responses that actually teach.

Inside, you'll find:

- A five-question Consequence Decision Filter to guide your decisions.
- Eight common educator dilemmas with side-by-side examples of punishment versus natural or logical consequences.
- Practical alternatives for situations involving aggression, refusal, hurtful language, incomplete work, and more.
- Clarification about what natural and logical consequences are, and what they are not.
- Reflection questions to help teams examine whether their current practices support learning or perpetuate punishment.

Why download it?

Because knowing what *not* to do isn't enough. Educators need practical alternatives that maintain safety, preserve dignity, and help students develop the skills they're still learning.

👉 Get the handout at: [inclusiveschooling.com/download79](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download79)

Practical Moves for Your Classroom or School

- Before deciding on a consequence, identify the skill you want the student to learn.
- When someone is hurt, attend to everyone's physical and neurological safety before moving to problem-solving or repair.
- Replace "How do I make them comply?" with "What is making participation difficult?"
- Build opportunities for students to practice new skills instead of relying on removal, lost privileges, or public correction.
- Examine your school's most common consequences. Are they connected to the behavior? Do they teach something useful?
- During team conversations, ask whether the response will help the student become more capable tomorrow than they are today.

Additional Resources

[The Inclusion Podcast, Episode 50: Praise and Rewards](#): Julie and Kristie take a closer look at the traditional behavior systems educators have relied on for decades, including sticker charts, clip systems, praise, rewards, and punishment. They examine why these approaches often prioritize compliance over learning and share practical alternatives grounded in connection, co-regulation, and intrinsic motivation. A natural companion to Episode 79 for teams ready to rethink their behavior management practices.

[The Inclusion Podcast, Episode 71: Less Praise, More Learning: 7 Reasons to Shift Toward Intrinsic Motivation](#): Even when our intentions are positive, constant praise can unintentionally teach students to seek adult approval rather than develop their own sense of competence. Julie and Kristie explore how to shift from evaluative praise to meaningful acknowledgment, reflection, and feedback that builds independence and internal motivation. Especially useful for educators looking to move beyond both rewards and punishment.

[The Inclusion Podcast, Episode 61: F%\\$# You! Now What?](#): When a student swears, lashes out, or uses hurtful language, it's easy for adults to feel that an immediate punishment is necessary. This episode explores what to do instead, including managing our own reactions, maintaining boundaries, and responding without escalating the situation. A practical companion to Episode 79's discussion of responding to harm through regulation, teaching, and repair.