



Youngsters need consistency

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One of my 4C's for child rearing is consistency.

The others are communication, caring and consequences.

Today we live in a world that values and promotes imagination, variety and thinking outside the box. And these can all be valuable in dealing with kids, but it is important to keep in mind that kids need and want consistency.

Consistency is easier to recognize in some areas than in others. Meal times, bed times, shower time can be pretty predictable and easy to recognize when we are not being consistent. That doesn't mean that they are easy to maintain. The more consistent we can be in these "schedule" areas, the more a child knows what to expect and look forward to, which promotes a feeling of safety and security.

As hard as it is to maintain a routine or schedule in the frequently hectic world we live in, being consistent in how we deal with our children's behaviors, moods, emotions and beliefs is more difficult.

In addition, the older the child gets the more complicated it gets. It also is harder to recognize when we are being inconsistent. The fact that multiple people are frequently involved in parenting also complicates our attempts.

In the best of cases, mom and dad have different ways of dealing with a particular situation or a difference of opinion in what they feel a consequence for misbehavior should be. They can discuss it and agree on how it should be handled.

Divorce, other caregivers,

remarriage or anything that increases the number of significant caregivers makes the importance of establishing consistency in the schedules, rules, expectations and consequences for children even more important.

To increase the probability of consistency, be sure to establish schedules, rules, consequences and expectations that are realistic and that you are fairly certain you can carry out.

I have frequently discussed with parents that grounding a teen for a day for coming in late is more effective than grounding them for a month and giving in after a week. If we are inconsistent in establishing our rules, what the consequences are or in how we enforce the consequence for breaking the rules, our kids don't know what we expect.

Kids want and need to know what to expect. And that requires consistency. They depend on us to provide that stability. Not knowing what to expect can produce anxiety.

I frequently talk about consistency of consequences, but consistency of expectations is equally important. Certainly expectations can and should change with age, with practice, with new skills and knowledge, but they shouldn't change from day to day or based on our mood.

We should be consistent with our kids from birth, but many of the problems associated with parental inconsistency manifest themselves most noticeably in adolescents. It is at this time that peer pressure, rule testing and risk-taking behaviors are

increasing.

If a youth has not had consistent rules and expectations, it is much harder for him or her to make the "right" decisions when others may be behaving inappropriately and encouraging them to do the same.

Consistency influences behavior, feelings of safety and self-esteem and reduces anxiety and uncertainty. If caring, communication and consequences are present, but not consistently, they will likely not have the desired effect.