

What is Consistency?

Consistency and structure are beneficial both for our children and for adults. It's not something we think about a lot, but for children, what transpires during their days is largely out of their control. They don't get to determine how their day will unfold; they're simply expected to "roll with it" while we – the adults – try to balance "all the things" and keep everyone safe and fed while doing so.

Clear structure and expectations provide limits and boundaries help children not only predict how parents will react but also teach them how to behave.

Consistency means that we follow through with what we say we are going to do. It gives power to our words.

It is resisting giving our child second and third chances when he breaks a rule or behaves poorly. Giving in instead of holding our ground – even when we are tired/stretched thin/overworked – will backfire on us in the long run, because giving in teaches our children that next time they just need to push a little bit more and we will eventually let them have what they want.

Consistency allows boundaries and expectations to be set, which actually provides children with a sense of safety.

When unexpected changes occur, their safety and security is impacted, sometimes causing anxiety. While we cannot predict all changes, having consistent routines and expectations is a solid foundation that helps them adapt to changes as needed.

Structures and routines also help Children learn how to control their behaviors.

When expectations and consequences are known, children actively make the choice to behave accordingly or deal with the consequence that follows. If you are consistent with how you respond to positive and negative behaviours, children are more likely to adjust their behaviour. Consider some examples adults might face:

- If every day on your way home you drive over a pothole, eventually, you learn to avoid it because you don't want to get a flat tyre. You have altered your behaviour due to a consistent circumstance.
- If you eat lunch at 11:30 every day but today you have a meeting that runs over until noon, you will be hungry, but you will cope knowing you will be able to eat once the meeting wraps up. You have just reasoned with yourself to be able to cope with an unexpected and undesired change.

- Children are just as resilient when consistency and structure is a part of their daily life.

How do you implement consistency and structure with your kids? Here are a few tips:

- First and foremost, make sure both parents are on the same page and respond in similar ways to poor behaviour, implementing the same structure and discipline for specific behaviours.
- Children learn early on to pit one parent against the other when they vary in their standards or if they observe poor communication between them.

Start small!

- Pick a few priority behaviours to start with and implement a consistent response.
- Have a family meeting and involve the children(s) in determining the consequences for specific (not broad) behaviours. (e.g. “sitting at the table” which is specific vs. “behaving at dinner” which is too broad). This interaction will help them know and follow the rules because they know what the consequences are of breaking the rules.

Start routines! Routines help in so many ways. They:

- Eliminate power struggles
- Give kids a sense of security and develop self-discipline
- Help kids get on a schedule
- Help kids learn the concept of looking forward to things they enjoy, but also that there are things in life we need to do that are not our most favourite thing but are necessary
- Help parents maintain consistency in expectations

Choose action over talking.

- Make sure the child knows the expectation and act when it is not followed. Do not remind them multiple times. When you act instead of talk, your words have meaning/power!

Make some rules and bend SOME of them, but only rarely.

- Flexibility is important but should not undermine your consistency. Sometimes rules need to be bent, but choose those times carefully. Explain the reason for the change to the child and help them understand (for example: an eclipse might need to alter a routine but is a rare event that should be experienced).



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Following the tips above will not only put you on the path to implementing consistency and structure in your child's life but also help your child understand how to behave and how to adapt to unexpected changes.

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