

# Logical Consequences and the Work Task

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The purpose of this paper is to suggest an alternate approach to logical consequences in relation to the work task. Adler distinguished punishment from logical consequences. Adler did not use the term "logical consequence," but it can clearly be inferred from his examples (Adler, 1968). It was Dreikurs who systematized and definitively explained the use of this form of discipline. Dreikurs showed that logical consequences were more effective than punishment or reward and trained others in this approach.

## **Logical Consequences**

A logical consequence is usually the action taken by the parent, teacher or other leader when the child fails to cooperate. This extremely effective method of training children has been thoroughly discussed by Dreikurs (1964, 1968, 1970). A logical consequence differs from a natural consequence because the leader intervenes in the former but not in the latter. For example, if a child leaves his (Note 1) skateboard on the sidewalk, it would be a logical consequence for the parent to put the board away for a week or until the matter could be discussed at a family council meeting. A natural consequence would allow the board to remain on the sidewalk until something happened, e.g., stolen, rusted by the rain, taken to court as exhibit "A" by an injured pedestrian, etc. The natural consequence would not result from the parent's (leader's) action.

In the case of family chores, logical consequences are often put into effect when the child fails to complete his task satisfactorily. For example, suppose that Jack has the job of washing the dishes after each meal. If he fails to wash the dishes, a logical consequence could be that mother is unable to prepare the next meal so she and father go out and eat while Jack is left at home to take care of himself. Hopefully the logical consequence will have a beneficial result, and the dishes will be washed on schedule in the future.

## **Logical Consequences and Punishment**

Often the difference between a logical consequence and a punishment is the attitude displayed by the parent (Dreikurs & Grey, 1970).

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In order for a logical consequence to be helpful in training the child, it should be administered in a firm, friendly, and cooperative manner. This means that the leader is not domineering or unkind, does not withhold his love, but neither does he give in to the demands of the child. Unfortunately parents often feel hurt or punitive toward the child when administering a logical consequence, and the child immediately feels the action as punishment, and the power struggle between the parent and child is intensified rather than diminished.

The child who is responding with goal III behavior (he feels hurt and his purpose is to hurt back), is likely to perceive the logical consequence as punishment no matter what the attitude of the parent. The child displaying goal III behavior is not rational or logical, so a logical consequence, which is seen as fitting by consensual validation, is received as unfair treatment even if the child had previously agreed to the consequence at the family council meeting. This type of child is so accustomed to punitive reactions from adults that he fails to differentiate from other adult reactions that are positive. Although an action of the parent is intended to be encouraging to the child by allowing him to realize the effects of his lack of cooperation, even children who are not displaying goal III behavior frequently perceive this action as discouraging because of the poor parental attitude. If the child's cooperation in doing household chores is very poor, parents are frequently advised to go on *strike* until there is a change in the behavior. That is, the parents stop doing their chores around the home until the children indicate that they are ready to cooperate (Dreikurs, 1970). Regrettably, many parents don't get beyond the strike because their own reeducation is not complete; therefore, nothing improves, and the gap between parent and children widens.

### **An Alternative Method**

A look at basic Adlerian theory indicates that a more positive approach with the potential for life long attitude development can be utilized. Adler (1937) stated that all of us must successfully meet the tasks of occupation, friendship, and love if we are to find meaning in life. To meet these tasks one must give freely of himself out of concern for others. Adler said, in effect, if one does not realize that his reason for existence is to serve others, he has missed the purpose of life (Adler, 1964).

Children must learn that cooperation and giving are requisites to meeting the life tasks. Such cooperation and giving should be viewed positively, not as a sacrifice. Too often through our own attitudes toward work we teach the child that this is one of life's injustices that must be met in order to survive. If logical consequences for not completing a chore come across as negative to the child we are further

reinforcing the idea that work tasks are undesirable, rather than a joy in which we have the privilege of participating. If our attitudes toward work are positive, then we are in a position to invoke a new form of logical consequence for chores not completed.

Children naturally want to help, to cooperate, and do tasks which older members seem to have mastered. This helps them to feel that they have accomplished, that they belong and have a place in the family. It enhances their self-esteem, their feelings of worth. Children unfortunately learn not to want to help around the home. This is in contrast to their basic nature which is a proclivity to cooperate.

### **Early Training**

Certainly it is going to be easier to invoke this new plan of logical consequences when the child first takes on chores, e.g., putting his toys away. If he fails to put his toys away, the logical consequence might be his losing the privilege of putting the toys away, e.g., mother has played the "putting the toys away game" with him and he is capable of this task (Note 2). The usual method of logical consequence would probably have mother put the toys away, but the child would lose the privilege of playing with those particular toys for a set amount of time.

### **Older Children**

With the older child the introduction of this new method of logical consequences is going to be more difficult, but not impossible. It is common to have parents react very hesitantly when this new method of logical consequences is suggested to them. A helpful response to the reluctant parents is to ask them: "What have you got to lose?" The typical parent spends more time attempting to coerce the child into doing his chores than it would have taken to do them himself. This new method also removes the tension that usually ensues between parent and child and which results in the parent being tense and upset. It is also helpful to ask the hesitant parent: "What is the worst thing that could happen from attempting this method?" The parent's fears usually center upon the child reverting to doing nothing in the present and being a shiftless bum in the future. Probably the worst that would eventuate is a child who does very little in the present but develops a positive attitude toward work in the future.

### **The Case of Robert**

A couple of case examples may illustrate this method with older children. A family with one child, Robert, age 7, decided to grow hens for laying purposes. During the family council preparatory to purchasing the chicks everyone volunteered for the chore of his choice.

Robert volunteered to feed the chickens and gather the eggs. For the first two weeks all chores were completed on schedule. Then Robert failed to feed the chicks one morning. At the next family council it was *agreed that if someone* missed his/her chore, he/she would not be allowed to have that task until after the next council meeting. After several days Robert again failed to feed the chicks one morning. The following morning when he began to feed them his mother stated: "I'm sorry that it did not work out yesterday. I will be feeding the chickens for the remainder of this week." During the following year, Robert rarely forgot to feed the chickens or to gather the eggs.

### **The Case of Fred**

Fred, age 12, has a very poor history of completing chores about the home. He would often volunteer for a given chore and then work at it for only a couple days. When the family acquired a new riding mower, Fred stated his eagerness to cut the grass as a weekly chore. It was suggested that the new form of logical consequence be utilized. This method was so effective that Fred suffered the loss of his chore only once during the next five months. It should be borne in mind that this change in behavior came from an extremely discouraged boy who rarely did any chores.

With both of the families in the above examples the new form of logical consequence was enacted whenever a new chore was acquired by the child. Gradually a majority of the chores fell into this form of discipline. It was suggested to both families that only new chores be attached to this form of logical consequence. This worked well with these families, but it is not known how the method would work if the formerly acquired chores were also immediately fitted to this approach. The crucial variable is the parent's attitude.

### **Poor Attitudes Toward Work**

A discouraging situation exists today. For most of us our waking hours each day are given largely to work tasks; yet, most adults complain and dislike the occupation or the necessary chores to be done at home. Whether one works in or out of the home or both, it is quite probable that he will need to work much of the time. It is common to see workers wishing the day away so that they can find the evening hours which are free from work. Wednesday afternoon brings a sigh of relief since it indicates that the week is half completed and the weekend's freedom is not too distant. Then the weeks as a whole are tolerated because summer will bring a couple of weeks vacation from the punishment of the work task.

Many factors have fostered this attitude. Perhaps pampering in childhood, one of a variety of discouraged life styles, boredom, the

feeling of not belonging, or the feeling of nonsignificance are important contributors. However, much of the dislike for the work task can be directly traced to the development of negative attitudes toward work from the beginning of one's life. These attitudes dichotomize work and play with the former assigned to the bad category, and the latter to the fun category.

### **The Need for Reassessment**

Reappraisal of the work task and child rearing responsibility points to a different procedure. Parents believe that they are kind when they ask less than an hour's work from their child and allow for three hours play and TV each day. In reality, kindness is giving the child a greater opportunity to contribute, to feel that he belongs in the family. Three hours of work and one hour for play and TV is much more favorable to the child's self-esteem; preparation for independence and happiness.

Those who were raised at a time when children were necessary contributors to the family, as was true in rural America and during the depression and the ensuing war, grew into strong confident adults. Unfortunately they don't wish for their children or their grandchildren to work as hard as they had to when they were young. Their early leaned negative attitude toward work made that task unpleasant. They don't realize that the negative attitude is unnecessary nor do they realize that it was their daily work which gave them courage, belonging, and concern for others.

### **Conclusion**

By having faith in children and their basic innate tendency to cooperate, by recognizing the intrinsic reward of work tasks, and by displaying positive attitudes toward work themselves, parents can employ a positive form of logical consequence and train their children to enjoy, not dread, work. For as one Zen Buddhist master said, "If one can not find the meaning of life in washing his gruel bowl, he will not find it" (Watts, 1957, p. 157).

### **Notes**

1. The use of "his" and other like pronouns is not intended to be sexist.
2. See Dreikurs' discussion of this method of training (Dreikurs, 1948).

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