

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AS A CONSEQUENCE

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As parents we often wonder what appropriate consequences we can use to dissuade our children from repeating negative or inappropriate behaviors. We tend to use the tried and true because that's all we know. I have heard parents say that they can apply a consequence over and over, like time out or spanking, and it means nothing to the child. That is the time when you need to get creative.

You know what your child loves to do or is passionate about. That is the very activity you need to deprive the child of *but* reserve it for the most serious breaches of your family's values. As an example, If Johnny loves riding his bike and he is disobedient and disrespectful to you, hang his bike up in the garage for a week. That will probably hurt more than time out and is far superior to yelling at him.

Recently I have thought a lot about a form of consequence that is being adopted in some schools and in some State and district justice systems. It is called restorative justice. This method can be used when anything has to be restored because something was lost, stolen, defaced or broken. Let me explain.

Sally and I had an interview this week with a New Zealand politician. There is a storm of controversy in the country about how to deal with the form of graffiti we call 'tagging'. Depending on which town or city you live in you may have seen this gang writing scrawled over walls, bridges and public property. Sometimes it is even written on private property. You can never decipher it because it is coded. Like dogs marking their territory disenfranchised youth, whose families are failing to provide adequate love and support, join gangs to get what they are missing. Their parents have usually failed to help them develop an identity or to feel ownership, so they claim an object or area as 'theirs'. They deface property where it is most noticeable and daring. Such youths feel hopeless and helpless and because they feel they cannot make a mark on society through academic and professional careers they make their mark by tagging. It is their billboard!

In our discussion with the politician we suggested restorative justice. When caught the young person would be required to be involved in a meeting with their parents, a justice official, the owner of the defaced property, and maybe an official from Children's Services who probably knows the family anyway. The young person has to look the owner in the eyes and apologize. Then the child **AND** their parents have to remove the tagging and restore the property to its original state. Community service hours are awarded and the young person is required, under supervision, to remove more tagging (without their parents this time) written by others from the same gang. The child has to do this even though this is against their gang code. Justice is done.

How can this be applied in the home? Peter breaks something of yours or their siblings. Have a meeting and seek a sincere apology. Then work out how that property could be restored. If it cannot be mended then that child's allowance is garnished over a period of time until the article is replaced. He then is required to do say 2 hours cleaning up the garage or cleaning out closets, a task not on his regular list of chores.

Stella, aged 12, spends the change from a \$20.00 note you gave her to do some shopping for you. A meeting is held and Stella is required to apologize. She has to pay back the money and loses a further month's allowance. This method of consequence is proving very effective also in schools, so that instead of a child being suspended they have to come to a meeting with the principal, parents, their offended party (teacher or peer), school resource officer, student representative and maybe the parents of an offended child. The same procedure occurs and justice is done.

Try this approach in your home and see how your child is less inclined to do this sort of thing again.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.