

Using Practice Sessions as a Logical Consequence

Her Kindergarten year, Kylie was having a hard time with getting ready for school most mornings. It seemed that no matter what her mother tried, Kylie moved at a snail's pace. When asked to get her shoes, she would disappear into her room, and her mother would find her in there playing with her toys with her shoes sitting a few feet away from her. When her mother asked her to put her clothes on, depending on her mood, Kylie might dance instead, otherwise play around, or act like putting on clothes was a heroically unfair struggle she had to endure. Kylie's mother tried everything she could think of: cajoling; breaking the tasks down into steps; reminding; praising when Kylie was dressing at a more reasonable pace; and even taking away privileges when it took way too long, which only appeared to work intermittently.

After hearing from another parent about how she successfully used practice sessions, the next morning one of these slow motion dressing episodes happened as expected. This time after Kylie's mom was sure it was taking way too long again, she said, "Ohhh, this is looking like practice."

"What practice?" asked Kylie.

"Don't worry about it now," her mother answered. Kylie shrugged. Her mother decided to her to take her time getting dressed for now. In fact, they were a couple minutes late for school. That afternoon after when her mom picked her up, Kylie asked as she often did if she could play on the playground with her friends. It was an uncharacteristically sunny day.

"Remember when I mentioned practice this morning?" Mom asked.

"Yeah?!" Kylie replied, with a tone that said, "What's that got to do with anything?"

"Well before anything fun happens this afternoon, we need to go home and have you practice getting ready for school."

"Now?!?" Kylie exclaimed.

"Anytime before anything else fun happens," said her mother.

When they arrived at home, Kylie asked how many times she has to do this "dumb practice."

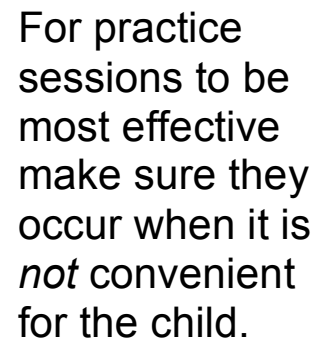
Her mom replied, "Well, I'm hoping five times of getting ready for school quickly might do it." Kylie did a couple rounds of practicing getting dressed for school quickly, which her mother praised. On her third round, Kylie tried her slow motion routine out to see what would happen. Instead of getting angry, her mother just said sadly, "Oh this is a bummer. That one was too slow."

"You have to count it!" Insisted Kylie

"I'll count every one where it looks to me like you're dressing quickly." Despite Kylie's annoyance with her mother she got through the five repetitions. Afterward, her mother invited her to see if she'd like to have some time to play outside. Kylie enjoyed a bit less playtime than she usually got that day, but had fun in any case.

That night as she was being tucked in, Kylie wondered aloud, "If I'm slow again tomorrow, will I have to do five more practices?"

After a pause, her mom said, "You're on the right track. But if five wasn't enough to help today, would you guess we'd do five again, or maybe a few more?"



For practice sessions to be most effective make sure they occur when it is *not* convenient for the child.

“Five?” tried Kylie
“Nice try. Won’t it be fun to find out?” Her mom kissed Kylie on the forehead. The next several days were the smoothest mornings they’d had in weeks.

Three Variations on *When to Practice*

Immediately following problem behavior: This is especially useful for younger children. It can also be useful on those days you need to get it out of the way because of time limitations that get in the way of delaying the consequence.

Before doing anything else: This timing can be very useful if the child announces that they aren’t going to do the practice session. *Well Hon, you don’t have to do it now. You can hang out in timeout and let me know when you’re ready.*

Prior to doing the next related enjoyable event in your child’s life: For example, if your child needs to practice responding to you when you call them when they’re watching television, you can require the practice to be done before the next time they watch a TV show (and, it goes without saying, at a time that is relatively convenient for you).

Advantages of Practice Over Other Consequences

- ❑ Practice, unlike many other consequences, doesn’t just deter kids from the behaviors we don’t want them engaging in. It actually helps them *practice* the behaviors that we do want.
- ❑ As it involves repetition, practice sessions make it more likely the child will “get” or master the wanted behavior.
- ❑ Practice is about as logical as a consequence as you can get, helping children to see their misbehavior or poor choice as the “bad guy” rather than seeing us in that role.
- ❑ When the child is practicing and doing the behavior appropriately, you can actually praise the appropriate behavior, which can sometimes be harder to “catch” them doing at other times.

Some Tips on Using Practice Sessions

- ❑ When letting your child know she’ll be practicing, make sure to describe the behavior to be practiced in the positive: “You’ll be practicing eating with good table manners, using your fork and knife, and eating over your plate.”
- ❑ Make sure that the practice occurs when it is *not* convenient for the child. Some kids are happy to practice just about any behavior if they were bored to begin with. It simply becomes a form of attention when the timing is convenient for them.
- ❑ If one repetition of practice doesn’t go well, as hard as it can be, refrain from lecturing and merely report with sadness that that repetition won’t be counted.