For all groups to read:

Logical consequences are directly related to children's behaviors and help them to fix their mistakes.

The use of logical consequences is one part of an approach to discipline used in the Responsive Classroom. It’s a powerful way of responding to children’s misbehavior that not only is effective in stopping the behavior but is respectful of children and helps them to take responsibility for their actions.

Teachers often ask, “How are logical consequences any different from punishment?” It is a critical question because there are some basic and important differences between the two—differences that must be understood in order to use logical consequences well. Take the following example:

Six-year-old Jacob is zooming around the classroom when suddenly he trips and falls into Michelle’s block building. Michelle lets out a scream and the teacher comes over.

Using punishment

This first scenario involves a teacher who uses punishment. Feeling irritated, the teacher looks at Jacob and says loudly in front of the other children, “I have told you over and over again not to run in this classroom. Now see what you’ve done with your carelessness. Go sit in that chair and don’t move until it’s time for lunch.”

What might be going on for Jacob? He might be thinking, "I wasn’t even running. The teacher doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She’s always picking on me. Now everybody’s looking at me. I hate this school. It was a stupid building anyway.”

Now, here’s what might happen with a teacher who uses logical consequences. The teacher, although also feeling irritated, takes a deep breath and makes herself begin by describing what she sees: “Michelle is very upset right now because Jacob knocked over her building. I need to talk with Jacob first and then we’ll figure out how to help Michelle.”

The teacher takes Jacob aside and begins by asking him a question.

“What happened?”

“I just tripped and fell into it accidentally. I didn’t mean to knock it over.”
“Hmmm. So it was an accident. I did notice that you were running before it happened. Could that have been why you fell?”

“Maybe.”

“When kids run in the classroom, accidents often happen. That’s why our rule says to be safe. What do you think you could do to help Michelle?”

“I don’t know.”

“Maybe she would like some help putting the building back up.”

Jacob nods and the teacher walks back with him to the block area. Michelle accepts Jacob’s offer to help and together they build for the rest of the period.

Now, what might be going on for Jacob? He might be learning, "When I knock things down I have to help build them back up. I can fix things when I mess up. My teacher helps me solve problems. I have to remember to walk in the block area.”

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Teachers frequently ask, “Is it ever okay for a child to feel bad about their behavior?” Of course it is. When children misbehave, chances are they already feel bad. Our job is not to make them feel worse but to help them choose a better course of action the next time.

As Ruth Sidney Charney says in Teaching Children to Care, “Our goal, when children break rules, is never to make them feel ‘bad’ or defeated, although they may, in fact, feel bad. Our goal is first to help them recover self-control and self-respect. When I observe a child acting the part of the bully, or sneaking out of a job, or putting down a classmate or teacher, it is not a picture of self-control and self-respect. It is a sign of distress and a signal for help. Something needs to stop. The use of logical consequences urges respect for the rules and the people they are designed to guide.”

Adapted from Responsive Classroom: https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/article/punishment-vs-logical-consequences