

Consistency

I. *What*

Consistency is saying something or handling a situation in the same manner each time it occurs.

II. *When or Why*

Consistency is needed whenever behavior is to be shaped or modified. When an adult is inconsistent, the child does not know what to expect and therefore would expect to continue to test limits (“try something”), do things in order to determine what is expected and what is not. If an adult was arrested for speeding in a city where no speed limit signs were posted, he would feel angry and cheated.

III. *How*

1. Decide what you want and how you will get results.
2. Set clear and reasonable expectations.
3. Follow through on what you say.
4. Wait for child to do what you have stated or demanded before going on to another expectation.
5. Then carry out your method of obtaining results the same way each time.

IV. *Examples:*

A. How to:

Mother decides that Mary is to hang up her good clothes every day after school. Mother tells Mary that she expects this job done before she goes out to play. Each day Mother checks Mary’s room. If the clothes are not picked up, Mary cannot go out to play, talk on the phone, or engage in any other activity until she has done this job. If Mother lets Mary forget a day or do the job for her, it only makes the learning process more difficult for Mary.

B. How not to:

One day John went out and played in a mud puddle. When he came home, his mother laughed and gave him a warm bath. The next time John did this he had his best clothes on and the family was ready to go to church. When he came home this time, his mother was very upset and spanked him. Most young children are unable to distinguish one situation from another and therefore will be very confused if the adults are not consistent in handling a behavior.

V. *Follow-up*

Follow-up in being consistent is to continue our handling of a situation in the same manner each time it occurs. Praise when the child is able to do what you expect to the best of his ability.