Natural consequences

Natural consequences are the inevitable results of children's behaviour that happen naturally, with no adult interference. The results are imposed by nature, society, or another person directly involved in the issue.
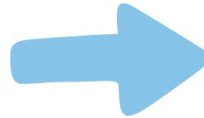
Action ➡ **Effect**

When they experience natural consequences, children learn real cause & effect and develop their own motivation to act in particular ways.
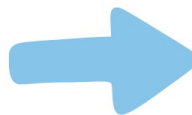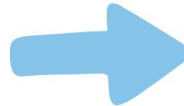
Go to sleep late ➡ Tired in the morning

Going out with no coat ➡ Get wet & cold

Throw a toy on the floor ➡ The toy is broken

How can we help?

Experiencing natural consequences can sometimes feel frustrating and upsetting for children. How do we help them manage the big feelings that arise, and build an understanding of cause & effect?

Support choice - Help them think beforehand about the effect of their choices, without judgement or frustrations of our own - just state what could happen calmly.

Empathise with an outcome that feels difficult for a child ("You are sad that your toy is wet. It doesn't feel nice to cuddle").

Make developmentally appropriate connections - For example, a developmentally young child will only process one connection so it helps to keep explanations short & simple ("You threw it. It's broken. You are sad." rather than "If you throw wooden things at hard surfaces they will break and then you can't play with them anymore").

When natural consequences can't be used

If there are safety or health-related issues it is important to intervene before your child acts.

For example, if your child is too rough with the dog it might react and bite your child. This is a natural consequence but not a safe one. Rather than talking this through, you would remove your child or the dog so that they both remain safe.