



Survival Skills for the Real World

By Charles Fay, Ph.D.

Are kids facing more life-or-death decisions than ever? Are they being challenged, at earlier ages than before, with scarier choices about drugs, alcohol, sex, and violence? Clearly, most children are growing up in a much more challenging world than we ever imagined. And the consequences of mistakes are more serious than ever!

Of great concern is the fact that many children are not being equipped with the survival skills necessary for making wise decisions about these pressures. More and more seem to believe that bad things can't really happen until after their second or third poor decision. What do I mean? Perhaps an example will best illustrate this point.

Not long ago, I took my son to the movies. As we sat through the multitude of previews and ads for giant-sized, butter-flavored popcorn, I noticed two boys sitting near the front, throwing ice. Their parents were seated about three rows behind them. Mom walked up to them and said something like, "You stop that. I mean it. That's one."

A minute or two later, the ice once again began to sail. This time Dad approached them and said very loudly, "Mom told you to stop that. Now that's two."

Soon, the popcorn began to fly. Dad rushed back down to them and said, "Stop that. If you keep doing that we're going to have to leave!"

Finally, after three or four warnings, these parents put some action behind their threats and took the kids home. What happens when we give children two or three warnings before we deliver a consequence? We condition them to believe that they always can make at least two poor decisions before anything unfortunate happens.

Does this give kids a strong defense against peer pressure? Absolutely not! Why? Because down deep they start to develop "tapes" inside their heads that say things like, "I can smoke crack (or have sex, drink and drive, carry a gun, etc.) at least two times before anything bad happens."

I had a friend in high school with this view. His parents always warned him at least three times before they actually followed through. He lived for a short while believing that nothing bad could happen unless he'd been warned at least twice. Then he died—the first time he went to a party, got drunk, and tried to drive home in a mountain snowstorm. Love and Logic parents know that kids need to understand that bad things can happen after the first poor decision—without repeated warnings.

How do they teach this? They set limits once and follow through with meaningful consequences rather than more warnings.

What's this look like in the movie theater? Mom or Dad walks over and whispers "Are you guys going to

