

Rules Rule!

Setting Rules for Your Child

Within any family there must be a set of rules that are based on your family values. They help you get along, and they help your children learn to make good decisions.

If your child is usually responsible and generally makes good decisions, you will probably only need to have a few rules. However, if you are dealing with a troubled or defiant child, you may need more.

Tips to help you set rules:

1. Make rules (and consequences) with your child.

This will show you care about his opinion and give you a chance to explain why rules are necessary and helpful. Plus, he is more likely to follow rules he helped create.

2. Be specific.

~~Be home early~~ = *Be in the house by 10:00 p.m. on Sunday - Thursday nights.*

~~Clean your room~~ = *Make your bed every day before school. On Fridays immediately after school, vacuum your room. On Saturdays when you get up, put your sheets and worn clothing in the laundry room.*

You must give details so there is no confusion. Decide and describe:

- WHO** he may associate with.
- WHAT** types of activities he is allowed to attend and participate in.
- WHERE** he is allowed to go.
- WHEN** he may go and **WHEN** he needs to come back.



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3. Make sure your child understands the rules.

If your child does not know what the rules really mean, there may be misunderstandings and conflicts. Do not assume your child understands them the same way you do. Have your child write down or explain to you what each rule means until both of you agree.

4. **Create meaningful consequences.** What happens to your child when he breaks a rule should be something that would make him want to change his behavior and not want to break the rule again. Otherwise, the rule will probably be ignored. Some children may respond to being grounded but others may not care about having to stay home.

5. **Match the severity of the consequence to the severity of the violation.** (The “punishment” should fit the “crime.”) Consider these:

- ◆ *If your child does not put his dishes in the dishwasher after dinner, he will have to wash everyone’s dinner dishes by hand.*
- ◆ *If your child stays out past curfew, he cannot drive the car the next weekend.*

6. **Apply consequences immediately.** Consequences should happen before your child continues any of his normal activities. This helps him make the connection between what he did and what will happen as a result.



7. Watch over your child carefully.

Some children may not need to be watched often. Troubled children may need to be checked on a lot. Let your child know that you will be checking on him. This will show him you are open and honest. It will also show that you take rules seriously.

Ways to watch your child’s behavior include:

- ◆ Getting daily or weekly school reports.
- ◆ Randomly having him drug tested.
- ◆ Checking the mileage on his vehicle.
- ◆ Driving by where he is supposed to be.
- ◆ Talking with his friends’ parents.
- ◆ “Googling” his name for posts on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media.
- ◆ Looking at your child’s phone’s text messages and photos, even ones that were deleted.

Be aware of problems early and deal with them before they become too big. Setting rules and resolving conflicts over smaller issues such as chores, homework, curfew, dress, grooming, friends and dating are good ways to avoid bigger issues like pregnancy, substance abuse, and failing grades.



8. Do what you say you will do.

The hardest but most important thing a parent can do is be consistent. Only families who enforce their rules every time will have their rules followed.

Being consistent helps your child know he can count on you. You prove that you will do what you say you are going to do.

Don't let your child get away with breaking any rule.

A rule that is not enforced is the same as having no rule at all. The next time you do try to enforce it, your child will protest that it was allowed the first time. This inconsistency will destroy trust.

Don't let even small things "slide."

Your child likely will test you to see what your limits are. He may try to break curfew "just this time" or drink alcohol "just this time." If you allow him to bend the rules, that will encourage him to try to get away with bending them again in the future. Also, letting your child get away with some things but not others will create chaos, confusion and anger.

Do not "ease up" on consequences.

Follow through with whatever consequences were agreed to. If the consequence was being grounded for the weekend, that has to happen, even if it is your child's birthday or another important event.

TIP: Set rules early to establish boundaries. If you have not set any yet, it is never too late. Start by stressing why rules are important and how they will actually benefit your child (avoid misunderstanding, help make good decisions, keep out of trouble, learn from your mistakes, etc.). Then follow the steps in this brochure.

Help is Available...

If your child does not improve his behavior or refuses to complete his consequences, you may need to get outside help. Many families need help dealing with a child that is making poor decisions, and we are glad to assist.

**Florida Department of Juvenile Justice
Prevention Help Line
1-866-757-0634**

Please NOTE: The Prevention Helpline is NOT a counseling service number. It is to provide information ONLY. All calls go to a voice mail system that is monitored daily.

Sample Rules:

1. All family members will treat each other with respect: no name calling, yelling, etc.
2. Homework must be done before dinner.

Our Rules:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

