

Why kids need rules

here's a checklist to help.

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Whether it's your toddler who's deliberately dumped their lunch on the floor or an older child who can't stop whining for one more game on their iPad before bedtime, it seems children repeatedly challenge the boundaries we as parents set for them. It's what kids do who are growing up and becoming independent. So many parents I work with get discouraged about establishing, and enforcing, family rules and boundaries, and even question if it's really worth the all the hassle & effort.

It's tiring, exhausting and challenging raising kids but it's also one of the most important jobs you can do in the world.

Structure and rules not only make bringing up a happy, confident well behaved child easier, they're also essential. Trying to raise a responsible, cooperative child without age-appropriate boundaries is setting your child up for failure, unpopularity & stress because a well-balanced, self-regulated adult, starts with a child able to follow your rules first until they can self-regulate their own behaviour. Setting your own family rules is really important & far from squelching your child's spirit, rules are needed for kids to flourish & bloom.

I think it helps if you know **why** rules are important.

Rules prepare your children for the real world as your limits & boundaries provide a framework so your child can understand what's expected of them and what will happen if they don't comply. Having clear family expectations, such as "no hitting each other" or "all your toys need to be picked up before bedtime & tidied away," to "we all brush our teeth after breakfast" and then enforcing consequences if they break the rules, will help them adapt better to new situations, perform better at school and fit in easily at work & in society generally.

Rules teach children how to socialise. Some rules are just basic manners, like saying "please" & "thank you" or "excuse me" before interrupting. If you make it a policy to use polite words at home, your child will not only be more pleasant to be around, but they'll also learn appropriate ways to get what they want & need. Respect is the key energy of any happy home.

Rules provide a sense of order. Certain rules help a child predict what will come next, such as "Washing their hands before dinner" or "Holding your hand when they cross the road." Even little ones cooperate better when they know what's required of them, and that helps them gain a sense of belonging & security.

Rules make kids feel capable & competent. Clear, consistent, fair limits reduce power struggles because your kids won't need to constantly test you to discover where your boundaries lie. This doesn't mean your kids won't ever test you; it just means that after the hundredth time they'll realise it won't get them anywhere. You can't be worn down! Take the longer-term view, not the short term quick easy way out!

State your rules in the positive – "We eat in the kitchen at the table" rather than "No running about with food" & praise them and catch them doing something right – rather than moaning and nagging and shouting when they do something wrong. Get your kids to make positive posters of your family house rules so they buy into them. (And be clear and consistent on the consequences if they break or forget the rules!)

Rules reassure kids. No matter how often children act as if they want to be in control, having too much power is frightening. It's a bit like giving the keys to your 4x4 car to the kids and letting them

drive – they haven't passed their test yet & they're out of control! They intuitively know that they need an adult to be in charge, and they count on you to guide, nurture and steer their behaviour.

When your 6 year old comes out of their bedroom repeatedly at bedtime, they need you to take consistent, repetitive, predictable & decisive action instead of giving half-hearted warnings that carry no weight. Speak in commands "Back to bed" don't appeal in begging tones "asking" them to go back to bed – appealing to their better selves! There's no need to shout, or get angry simply take them back each time as you calmly state your rules "You're to stay in your room and go to sleep after your story." Then reinforce your consequences "If you come out again, you won't get your sticker, go to the sleepover at Grandma's" or whatever you have set up as the consequences in your house.

Rules help keep kids safe & encourage good behaviour & citizenship. Children, and some adults, often complain as if rules were made up randomly but the truth is that society, work places & schools run efficiently around rules, as rules and regulations are designed to protect your kids & keep them safe. Be mindful of how you speak about rules as your kids are learning your values from how you talk about rules.

Rules boost confidence. Gradually (& age and maturity appropriately) expand the limits placed around your child, they'll become more confident about their own emerging independence and their ability to handle responsibility as you help them to become more independent and autonomous.

Establishing Rules

Make sure the limits you set are in line with your child's development and support their natural drive to explore, learn, and practice new skills.

Here are some guidelines:

Don't be too strict. In an effort to be firm and avoid spoiling, & indulging their kids some parents sometimes set too many boundaries; without meaning to, they end up severely restricting & trying to control their child's behaviour. I worked with a lovely Mum who had 35 rules written up on the back of the kitchen door! The little 5-year-old was so angry all the time – he had a special cushion in the kitchen to punch! We got it down to 5 or 6 realistic house rules. Don't expect your toddler to sit for an hour at the table every evening while you all eat dinner with Grandma or to never to run in the house – you are setting up your child to fail as your rules aren't realistic. You could also damage your child's self-esteem as your high expectations could make them feel that they're incapable of ever getting things right or ever pleasing you.

Try to: Keep your child's age and abilities in mind when you're making your family rules and try and give an explanation for your reasons. You can't expect your 2-year-old to put their toys away without being told to.

"Talk & Teach" your kids your rules and encourage and praise them when they do remember!

Don't be too easy going. Empty threats prevent your child from learning to act responsibly and the message they learn is that your rules don't matter.

Give commands don't ask questions. Children respond better to commands rather than questions & react better the more specific you are. "Put the towel on the rack, put the toothbrush in the pot and close the door."

Be consistent. When you allow a certain kind of behaviour one day and then overreact to it the next, you're confusing your child. Your mixed messages will only encourage your child to test you more to find out where your real boundaries really lie.

Create fewer rules that you can enforce consistently, rather than lots of rules erratically.

Give your child a say. Sit down and have a chat about how a happy home runs on everyone pulling their weight, joining in, and doing their bit. Let your child have some say in what your house rules are as well as what the consequences for breaking them should be as this will motivate them to be more cooperative. They will feel more responsible, engaged and part of your "We Team" & you may be pleasantly surprised to find out just how good their ideas are.

Pause To Ponder

Chaos and disaster happens without rules. But they need to be good rules & age appropriate rules. So, you need to consciously think about your family rules, explain them to your kids and then you need to enforce them consistently.

Rules are important so allocate some serious time and thought to creating them & pause to ponder what do you want to accomplish by having them.

Here's a simple checklist

- Create rules to keep your children safe.
- Create rules to help teach your children right from wrong.
- Create rules that will teach your child self-reliance & independence.
- Create rules so that your children learn self-control.
- Create rules to nurture the safe, structured environment in which your child can thrive.
- Create rules around technology, bedtime & homework

