

The Rules for Making Rules: Managing Your Child's Disruptive Behaviors

As parents or guardians it is common to feel frustrated with your child's disregard for rules that are set for them. We want our kids to WANT to follow the rules; to keep their rooms clean without constant reminders and do their homework without a fight. In a perfect world, kids would think like we do; they would understand the importance of following the rules. *However, this is not typical for most children.*

Most children do not have an instinctive drive for chores and instead focus on what they want to do. The guidelines listed below are designed specifically to help children stay motivated and provide a structure of support to help ensure that they follow the rules.

“REAL” RULES MUST HAVE 3 PARTS:

1. Clear statement of the expectation
2. Supervision and follow-through
3. Consistency over time

1. Clear Statement of the Expectation

- a) Parents/Guardians must agree on the rule
- b) Start each rule with the statement: “The rule is...”
- c) Include a clear description of the behavior
- d) State when the child should start, not when the chore should be finished

Example: *“The rule is...take the trash out every night before dinner. Take it all the way to the garbage can, and be sure you put the lid back on the can.”*

2. Supervision and Follow-Through

- a) Without supervision, you cannot have the rule
- b) Rewards and punishments are not supervision
- c) When it is time for a child to do a chore, parent/guardians must be in the room, and stay there until the chore is finished
- d) Do not argue or lecture
- e) Deflect the debate and come back to the rule – use the “broken record” technique by restating the rule a hundred times if needed

Example: Child: “I’m real tired from baseball”
Parent: “I understand you are tired, I would be too. *Regardless*, the rule is that you do your bathroom chores as soon as you get home.”

Child: “I didn’t make the mess”
Parent: “I know it must be frustrating to clean up after someone else’s mess. *Nevertheless*, the rule is that you pick up the toys in the back yard before dinner.”

3. Consistency Over Time

- a) Supervise and demonstrate follow-through for one month
- b) Remember: it has taken a long time for your child to get good at arguing – it will take a while to unlearn these habits.
- c) If you supervise consistently for a week, and then stop, your child will assume that the rule has been changed

USING TIME-OUTS EFFECTIVELY

To effectively use a “time-out” intervention, follow the above principles for rule-making:

- 1. Choose target behavior that will result in a “time-out”
- 2. Explain the “time-out” procedure to the child in the *absence* of conflict
- 3. State the behavior that resulted in the “time-out”
- 4. Choose a safe place for “time-out” free of distractions where parents and guardians can monitor
- 5. Use timer to become the disciplinarian – no more than 3 minutes for younger children
- 6. Be consistent