

Parenting- Creating Consistent Rules

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One of the greatest challenges in parenting is setting clear, consistent rules for your children. Although the content and consequences vary by age, consistency in enforcement remains crucial regardless of the age of the child. Here are some ideas to help with setting rules that are effective and consequences that are workable for you as a parent to enforce.

Know your own rules. This seems obvious, yet how are children to know the rules if you don't have a clear idea of what is important to you. Some rules are safety issues and are never negotiable, like crossing the street without looking or leaving the home without permission. Other rules set guidelines about how to treat others or family standards. Determine for yourself if your rules involve safety issues or values that you want to impress upon your child. Most parents have rules that fall in both categories. Make a list of rules that are important to you. Make sure that the rules are clear and specific.

Define rules by specific behaviors. "Don't get in trouble" leaves too much room for interpretation by both you and your child. "Treat me with respect" can be equally vague for a teenager. Behavioral requests such as: look at me when I am talking to you, do not begin to talk until I am finished, do not roll your eyes or walk away while I am talking to you are helpful. Have conversations about rules when they are not being broken. Define the rule with your children when you are not angry and when they are open to listening. If you chose, you may even explain why you are setting a rule. Keep in mind that an explanation does not open the rule to negotiation but rather allows for understanding. Discussing a rule prior to its violation allows for clear expectations for the child and consistency in enforcement from the parent.

Set clear, simple consequences. These must also be discussed when the rules are set. There may be different levels of consequences. If a child breaks rule X, they might lose TV for a day. Subsequent violation may lead to a loss for a week or grounding (be sure to define what grounding means if you use it). Some safety rules may have more severe consequences on one violation to enforce the importance of the rule. Follow through with consequences that are set. Without this step, setting rules is a worthless exercise. Help your self in this area by not setting up consequences that limit you. Don't take away a movie if you want to see it. Determine how you will find support when enforcement is difficult. Parenting isn't easy but rule setting and enforcement can become easier if you are intentional about your rules and consequences and are clear about how rules will be enforced.