

5 Secrets to Family Rules that Work

Family rules are like guardrails that keep our kids from driving off the road and into a ditch. As a parenting coach and mom of 3, I know this can be a battleground of epic proportion! Kids want their freedom, parents want them to make safe, smart choices.



So what's the key to success? A proactive approach!

Surprisingly, **kids crave boundaries!** They'll deny it, but it's true. In the eyes of a child, the limits tell them, "My parents love me enough to fight for what's best for me."

Here's your 5 Secrets to Family Rules that Work:

1. Discuss which values you want to instill in your kids

- Parents, this is an adults only conversation used to decide which values you want to teach your children
- Pick only 1 or 2 character traits (respect, compassion, honesty) to start
- Choose one or two behavioral changes at a time because kids need change in small doses in order to adapt them into their routine smoothly and successfully.
- Be very clear you are in agreement. For example, you may think "respect" means saying hello to someone when they come in the house, your spouse may think it's not necessary to "greet them" each time they walk in the door. You need to be clear on how your family will define "respectful" behavior.

2. Set clear expectations of behaviors that blend with your values

- Kids need clarity. If you want them to be respectful, explain exactly what that looks like and what behaviors will meet the expectation. When kids understand what's expected, it's easier to make appropriate choices.
- Rules and expectations need to match the values you've chosen. Random rules carry less importance for kids and it can confuse them if it's not tied into the family messaging.

3. Set consequences ahead of time

This is a trick I teach in my consultations and my workshops and parents love it! How does it work?

- As you develop a new rule, decide on the consequence as well. Proactively setting this in place will help you avoid reactionary discipline in a moment of frustration
- The consequence must be directly related to the behavior
- Remember that kids who are aware of consequences are more likely to weigh that consequence in their decision making
- Kids won't be able to use "I didn't know" as an excuse for inappropriate behavior or bad choices. They will be very clear that If I choose "A", "B" will happen.

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For instance, *one family rule* might be “Put your dirty dishes in the dishwasher instead of stacking them on the counter. It helps keep the kitchen clean.”

The *related consequence* could be: “If you leave your dirty dishes on the counter, then your job for the next 3 days will be to empty and load the dishwasher as often as it’s needed without complaining.”

4. Call a *casual* family meeting (this is when you bring the kids into the conversation)

- Family meetings allow everyone to have their voice heard respectfully
- Talk to the kids about the specific behavior that needs to change and ask the kids to help brainstorm ideas to solve the problem.
- All ideas are accepted, even the funny ones (we need to keep it light so the kids are engaged in the conversation).
- No one is allowed to bash anyone else’s ideas
- It’s an opportunity for the family to *problem solve together*
- At the end, everyone understands what the expected behavior is and the consequence that will follow.

You might begin with, “We’ve noticed the kitchen has been really messy lately and we like our home to be comfortable and clean. One thing in particular we’ve noticed is dishes not being loaded into the dishwasher. ***What are some ways we can resolve this problem as a family?***”

After discussing all options, clearly define what the new family rule is: “So this next week Dad or I will give you one reminder to load your dishes. Starting the following week, if you fail to load your dishes you’ll earn 3 days of dishwasher duty. If someone is already on duty, then when their 3 days are done, you’re next in line.”

5. Catch them doing good

Casual acknowledgments when the kids behave within the new expectations will encourage them to continue following the rule. Your kids want to know you’re proud of them, it builds their confidence and self-esteem!

Something as simple as, “Hey, I really appreciate that you guys have been keeping the kitchen clean” or “I know dish duty isn’t fun, thanks for following through without griping about it” can go a long way to encouraging continued appropriate behavior.

Bonus Tip:

Using the phrase, “***In our family...***” is a powerful tool for setting expectations and boundaries because it clarifies what is expected of every member of the family. Kids are notorious for comparing your family rules to what “everyone else” is allowed to do! When you use the phrase “in our family” it reminds your kids that each family does things differently and these are the expectations in ours.

If you found this helpful, I’d love for you to join our [FB group](#)!
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