

ParentBrief



Establishing rules, exercising discipline, enhancing positive child behaviour

If we think our kids haven't worked us out by the time they get to school age, we need to think again. If we think our kids don't know where they stand when it comes to home rules, we also need to think again. Seriously. Permissive, indulgent parenting isn't about to do our kids any favours –it can also leave us powerless, as in the cartoon above.

To achieve at any level, kids need structure and follow-through from us as parents. This means effective parenting that sets rules and consequences, and monitors and communicates with authority. Endlessly boring for our kids? - certainly; essential to their achievement? - definitely...

Establishing rules for effective parenting

Regardless of whether or not we, as parents, are in favour of rules, the fact is our kids need them. Rules help keep us safe, healthy, secure, law-abiding and respectful. Rules can also be flexible as a base line for compromise, negotiation and ultimately, agreement and resolution.

Rules are a tool for helping kids learn to control their natural impulses. They provide a structure for kids to live around and within, providing them with certainty and security. Rules also demonstrate to kids that we care.

Kids who grow up in a house with few rules may struggle academically and socially with issues of discipline and commitment. It can be hard to toe the line or cultivate friendships when you have no idea why you should have to do so or why it's important.

Setting rules that are developmentally appropriate

There are two basic rules for setting rules. Firstly, we need to ensure they are consistent with the needs and maturity of our child, and secondly, that we provide rational explanations or reasons for those rules.

Rules need to be:

- Short and Simple
- Age appropriate and agreed upon
- Respectful and referred to often

When the rules don't fit the child

Rules can look good on paper, or on a spreadsheet, or plastered on the back of our kid's bedroom door. But does this mean our kids are going to abide by them? Well probably not, if they think they're too harsh, inflexible, or micro-controlling.

When we set rules for our kids, we can't shirk the responsibility for enforcing them. Just as we want our kids to be accountable to us, so we need to be to them. As parents, we have the authority to establish the rules, but rules work better if our kids have input into their making. If the rules aren't reasonable, if we're too authoritarian, too indulgent or too neglectful in our follow through, we shouldn't be surprised if our kids adopt an attitude of non-compliance or just ignore us and our rules completely.

Exercising discipline for effective parenting

When we have a clear set of family rules it makes it easier for us as parents to exercise consistent discipline and age-appropriate consequences. If we don't overreact when our child breaks rules and make sure there is consistency between us as parents in the enforcement of rules... our child is more likely to be an achiever.

Achieving children demonstrate self-discipline. They have learned that in order to achieve pleasant results in the long term, they have to make sacrifices in the short term. One of the ways we can teach our kids this key foundation for achievement is through the externally imposed limits called discipline.

Four key aspects of effective discipline

1. When children are young, we set the rules. As they get older, we can be more democratic.
2. Rules need to be consistently and persistently enforced.
3. No blaming or condemning our kids when they have broken rules.
4. Encourage independence.

Discipline is vital to a child's development. Without discipline, kids may struggle with issues of relationship, respect and cooperation. Discipline supports feelings of achievement, happiness and well-being...the things we want most for our kids.