



# Rules and Limits

*“Laying down the law” with your children*

## You & Your Child

A guide for new parents

Rules and limits for children are important. But sometimes it is hard for children of any age to know what the rules are.

Children, in general, thrive in an orderly world with a few reasonable rules.

But they can be confused by too many rules, or different rules for different places. Some rules and limits at preschool may be different than rules and limits at home. A grandmother may have rules in her house that are different than yours.

And you may not always be around to enforce a rule.

The rules should be clear

If the rules are clear, you have a better chance of enforcing them consistently.

Each time a rule is broken, you should try to respond the same way. Being clear about what the rules are helps you be consistent. It also helps other adults know what the rules are for your child and how they should respond when the rules are broken.

Being consistent with rules and limits helps children learn what they are allowed to do, what they are not allowed to do, and how they should behave.

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HOW YOU CAN SET RULES AND LIMITS IN WAYS THAT WILL HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN HOW TO BEHAVE



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# “LAYING DOWN THE LAW” WITH YOUR CHILDREN

## *Set no more than five or six house rules*

Rules and limits should depend on the age of your child.

For a young child, like a 2-year-old, you may want to start slow and set only two or three basic rules, such as no hitting and no throwing food.

For children who are 4 years or older, you can set more rules. These rules may be different than those for a younger child.

## *Set rules suited to your child's age*

Young children don't sit still too long, they have accidents, and they may not always obey you.

Only have rules for behaviors you know your child can control.

## *Let your child know what will happen if a rule is broken*

Write down what you will do if your child doesn't obey a rule. But make sure the punishment fits the bad behavior.

For example, the penalty for hitting might be a time out. But the penalty for throwing a ball in the house might be less serious, like not letting your child play with it.

## *Discuss the rules with your child*

Talk to your child. Make sure he or she understands what “hitting” means, for example, and what happens when he or she is given a time out.

You may also try including older children in setting rules and the penalties for breaking them.



# “LAYING DOWN THE LAW” WITH YOUR CHILDREN

## *Work on important rules*

Sometimes a child has trouble correcting a certain bad behavior. To help your child learn not to do it, set a rule forbidding the bad behavior and make it the only rule of the house for awhile.

Try this when the behavior you want stopped is serious, is something your child does often, or is something that requires your child to really concentrate on.

Sometimes, you can make it hard for a child to do bad behavior. For example, you might tell your child, “When you want to hit, put your hands in your pockets.”

## *You obey the rules, too*

Everyone in the house should obey the rules you set for your child. If your child breaks a rule, follow through and respond the way you told your child you would. No exceptions, no warnings. No maybes.

## *Review the rules from time to time*

Review the rules every once in awhile. If your child isn't hitting his sister anymore, for example, take that rule off the list and add another one that he needs to work on. But don't change a rule if your child has just broken it. If you think it should be changed, wait a day or two before doing so.

## *Make a list of things your child SHOULD do*

Don't just list behaviors your child should not do. Make a list of things you want your child to do, like putting away toys, being polite, or saying, “please” and “thank you.” Also list some of the good things that will happen if your child does these things. Try putting a star on the list every time your child does something you had asked.

