



What are "House Rules?"

They are the rules that apply at all times, regardless of where you are or what you are doing.

Having a set of house rules or guidelines that everyone agrees to abide by relieves everyday stress and confusion in your home. In addition, it is a great way to communicate your expectations and be consistent in your parenting. **Your home can function more effectively when everyone knows the expectations and basic policies under which they are operating.** This is often overlooked in households and creates a lot of unnecessary negotiations, chaos, and questions, let alone frustration. By having guidelines and basic expectations or policies that everyone operates under, you reduce that line your child often gives you, "Oh, I didn't know that," or "When did you say that?" You are setting up what is expected, your children know the consequences if they violate one of the rules, so you are taken out of the middle as the "bad guy." Your child has a choice—to abide by the rule or not, and they are aware of the outcome in advance. This makes your job as a mom much easier!

In some families, parents talk about the rules they want to establish and then present them to their children. You probably already have an idea of how you would like your home to run and which behavior may be unacceptable. You have some very definite ideas about what will fly in your house and what won't. However, giving the kids a chance to participate in writing the house rules via a family meeting will increase their sense of ownership and willingness to follow the rules.

In a family meeting everyone is present, there is input and discussion by everyone, and **all concerns are taken seriously.** Someone can take notes while hearing ideas from all the family members. I believe this to be the best way to include everyone in the formation of house rules, and I honestly believe that you will have greater cooperation among your family when you include them in a collaborative way. Does it mean that all the ideas your children come up with are guaranteed to go on the list? NO—but it does give your children a time to express their ideas and be validated by everyone in the family. As a family, you can then work together to come up with a list of rules that are fair, clearly laid out, and in the end saves everyone—but most importantly, you—a lot of emotional energy and conflict.

Some guidelines for developing house rules:

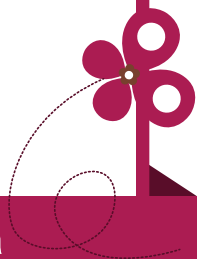
Keep Your House Rules Simple

You'll want to keep the house rules simple enough that your kids can easily recall them and even repeat them back to you. Obviously this will depend on the age level of children you have in your home.

Remember, simple is better!

Limit Your List of House Rules to 5-8 Items

A list of ten rules can be overwhelming and simply can't be memorized. The point of having "House Rules" is to communicate your expectations in a concise, succinct manner so that your kids can remember them.



Use Positive Language

Phrase your wording in a positive manner. For example, try not to start your house rules with the word “don’t.” Instead of saying, “Don’t call one another names,” try “Be respectful.” Sometimes though, you will need to be specific about what it means to be respectful by offering examples of what NOT to do.

Rules Apply to Everyone

Creating a sense of unity is critical to the success of house rules. If there are rules, they do not just apply to the kids; the rules apply to everyone—even mom and dad. Kids won’t buy into a double standard. If you have a rule that there is no eating in the living room, then it applies to everyone. Or perhaps you expect beds to be made before school; well, that includes mom and dad too! It is a double standard if you are expecting something from your children but you are not also willing to comply.

Refer to Your House Rules often

With young children, you’ll want to review the house rules frequently. Having them posted in a location that is easily accessible by all will help. When someone violates a rule, have them find the rule and read it back to you.

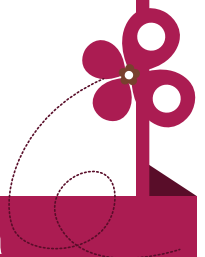


Here are some examples of house rules that families have included. Use these as a jumping off point when creating your own.

Take responsibility for your own actions. This applies to conflicts with siblings, cleaning up messes, and saying you’re sorry. In other words, if you make a mess, clean it up; if you break it, admit it; if you borrow it, return it; if you take it out, put it away; if it’s yours, take care of it. Always tell the truth. Help your children learn that they are always responsible for their actions and that you hold them responsible, no matter what the other person does. There is no excuse for poor behavior, a poor response, or blaming someone else for our problem.

Respect each other’s space and stuff. This includes knocking before entering closed doors as well as asking to use someone else’s belongings. Children need to learn to respect the property of others. In order to do this, they must have a sense of control over their things and respect the control someone else has over his things. This means if a child wants to play with something that belongs to another sibling who isn’t home to give his permission, then they must find something else to play with. Privacy is something that everyone needs; and when you begin to respect that at an early age, it becomes a habit.

Manners are a must. Always say please and thank you, say “excuse me” when you need to get someone’s attention, refrain from interrupting a conversation. Use good manners with family as well as when guests are present.





Calling names, using demeaning terms (shut up, stupid), or making unkind remarks to each other is unacceptable. If it will hurt someone's feelings, keep it to yourself. You can make an "example" list of names/phrases you would like to eliminate from your family's vocabulary. Set a goal to rid these terms from your conversation.

Family chores. Agree to abide by a family chore system. This is different for every family, but clear expectations and consequences are a must. (Example: Complete your chores and homework before you play or attend extracurricular activities.)

No arguing with parents. Value your child's opinion and input, but arguing means they've made their point more than once. It surely is seen as disrespectful.

Ask forgiveness when we offend. Sometimes it's hard for people to see the importance of restoring a relationship, especially if they can't see they did anything wrong—even if it was an accident. As a parent, set the example by apologizing when you hurt or disappoint your child—even if it was unintentional. Saying "I'm sorry" or "I was wrong" won't undermine your authority. You will be modeling behavior you want your children to develop.

Ask permission before you go somewhere. This will relieve a lot of headaches or phone calls trying to locate your child in the neighborhood!

Use inside voices and walking feet inside the house. Creating a calm and peaceful environment will be enjoyed by everyone.

These are just a few examples of areas that you could include in your house rules. **As children grow and circumstances change, so will house rules.** When you make changes, make sure to make expectations clear and allow some grace in the transition.

Susan

