

## Effective Parent's Toolkit

### Rules

#### Core Material – Reading (Rules)

Behavior	Consequence
Destructive	Replace with Money or Work
Irresponsible	No Privileges Outside the Home
Big Messes	They are in Charge of Cleaning it Up
Poor Behavior with Others	Learn to Say Sorry
Not Obeying Babysitter	Make Them Pay You Back
Bedtime Troubles	Earlier Bedtime the Next Night
Whining & Crying	Time Away to Get Composure

Behavior	Consequence
Not Caring for Things	Things Taken Away Temporarily or Permanently
Talking Back	"Try it Again."
Spitting	Clean-Up and Time Away
Hitting	Time Out
Interrupting	Wait 5 minutes before they get to engage with you.

All consequences should be given in a calm, cool voice. Kids should be given consequences when it is a reoccurring behavior. Consequences should be accompanied with relevant scripture memorization. There should be apologies with forgiveness granted.  
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#### Establish rules for your children

It is the nature of children to test their boundaries. It is the job of the parent to hold boundaries than need to be held, know which boundaries no longer need to be held, and to help their kids navigate amongst them. Established rules and expectations are at the core of this beautiful age-old dance.

The establishment of rules is the cornerstone of effective parenting. If you have not set out rules for your children, how can you discipline or punish them for not following them? Arbitrary punishment for breaking “secret” rules is confusing, doesn’t teach a child to follow rules, and in fact, creates confusion, frustration and resentment. Rules must not only be clear, they must be communicated, understood and also have defined consequences in order to be effective.

Rules of the house should span the life of the child, be suitable for young children as well as older teens. You may have to add or fine tune rules as you go along, as situations arise, but make sure they are well communicated and clear. Your first draft of rules should be broad enough to apply to multiple situations, yet clear enough so a child knows when they have broken Always it. Here are some you can start with and build from:

- Always be truthful – No lying
- Always be respectful – No sassing
- Always remain calm – No tantrums, fussing or yelling

- Always do as parent asks right away – No defiance
- Always seek a calm solution to a dispute – No fighting

See how these rules state both the expected behavior as well as the unacceptable behavior? This helps a child see an alternative to the negative behavior. You will also need to establish clear and sustainable consequences that are appropriate for each rule. Sustainable means that it is something you will be able to keep up, and repeat each time the rule is broken.

### **Mean What You Say And Say What You Mean!**

In EVERY interaction with your child you are teaching them something, or you are learning about them. Think about that for a minute. What was the last interaction you had with your child. Somebody learned something during that interaction. Too often, we teach our children lessons we don't mean to teach them.

For example, many parents will ask their child to do something, and if it isn't done right away, they ask them again, saying something like, "I won't tell you again!" or worse, "How many times do I have to tell you?" You have just taught your child that the first time they are told to do something, they do not have to do it. They will have many warnings, until they REALLY have to do it. Even the dreaded Counting Method teaches them that you won't do anything until you get to 9 (and for some of you, 9 ½) before you are really serious – sometime just looking at you from while you count from 1 – 8 with that "look" most of you know what look I mean.

Don't teach your children that you don't mean what you say, or that you are "all talk and no action," or even that you are a liar, in the statement, "if you don't get up and do that right now, you'll be sorry," how many times do you do something that makes them sorry?

You are not alone, many parents don't keep their word in this area because of the amount of time and energy it takes to properly discipline. Don't fall for that trap.

If you have established that you are your child's friend, and not their parent, setting rules can also be problematic. The reaction to sudden rules and consequences, when they have considered themselves your peer, can be emotionally challenging to both the parent and child. Parent/friends can feel more traumatized than the child at setting the rules, as though they are being "mean" instead of the reality that they are caring enough to help them develop skills and valuable personal resources that they will need as an adult.

Children, although they will fight against them, crave rules and boundaries. By human nature, we always test the boundaries around us, it is only when we sense the boundary, that we grow stronger, smarter, and more clever to surmount the boundary, and those are exactly the skills we want our kids to learn. With no boundaries, it will make it very difficult for them to learn respect, how to deal with adversity, logic, problem-solving, maturity, and their place in the world, playground, classroom, or social gathering. You might recognize these children by their lack of respect for authority, belief that they are smarter than others, even adults, they will argue

their point, instead of taking your authority, or the authority of others, because they have not had to experience defeat, limit, or other rules that help them develop strong social skills.

It is quite possible, and frankly doesn't take that long, to have your children do as they are told, or follow your rules, the very first time. It takes two skills – **Consistency and Follow Through**, though it takes a little effort. If you are serious about teaching your children to follow your rules, you cannot fall back on "I'm just too tired." Isn't it more tiring and frustrating for everyone to deal with the same issue over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over again?

### **A Great Method For Establishing Rules In Your Home**

1. Write down all of your rules and the consequences of those rules on a piece of paper and tack it to the refrigerator or some other conspicuous place.
2. Take your children on a tour of this paper. Go over each rule, each consequence, and take questions from them. End it with, "Does everyone understand? Good. Here's the deal. When you break a rule you're telling me that you want the consequences of breaking that rule. I'll only give you the consequences when you tell me you want it--by breaking the rules."
3. Then, when one of your children breaks one of the rules, take him to the refrigerator and show him the list, and say, "Did you break that rule?" Wait for their response. "By breaking this rule, you told me that you want the consequence."
4. Do this with almost a reluctant attitude. Get them to think that the consequences are something that they imposed on themselves...not you. You want to convince them that the resulting discipline was their own fault--not yours.
5. Doing it this way, you don't have to shout, holler, yell, or threaten. Just escort them to the refrigerator. You'll find that they accept the punishment from you much more gracefully too. Discipline becomes a simple procedure at that point. They know they broke the rule, they knew in advance what the punishment would be, and they won't resent you.

But it is so important that you train your children to believe what you say, the first time you say it.

And don't make wild threats. That is degrading and will bring insecurity to your children.

Most parents today have better relationships with their children than parents did when I was growing up. But while that's largely a good thing, there is a downside as well. If our kids don't "buy in" to the rules, the relational approach makes enforcing those rules more difficult.

So, let me share some ideas for successfully creating rules for your household. The earlier you start this process the better. If there's still time for you to do this while your children are still tweens, it will be easier than if you wait until they are old enough to drive. If yours is already in the teens, start today. Preferably before the sun goes down.

## **Have your child help you establish the rules and consequences.**

If you establish the rules unilaterally, especially if your home has been relationally focused, you'll probably face significant push back from your kids. They aren't going to understand why they have no say in the process and they'll be less likely to follow the rules as a result.

Sit down together and discuss what you think behavior in your home should look like. This is a time to turn off the cell phones, the television, and the laptop and focus on what you're doing. Talk about how your family expects to deal with issues such as dating, driving, cell phones, church, school work, friends, and media. The list goes on and on, but be sure to major on the majors. Discuss (don't dictate) what kinds of behavior fits with your family's values and which don't. Include some rules for the adults in the family as well, so the kids don't think this process is just targeting them. Talk through the reasons behind the rules that you are establishing and get everyone's opinion about what consequences should be applied for breaking the rules. You'll be surprised how tough your kids will be on themselves when consequences are being discussed, so you might have to lessen them to be realistic.

There are some warning signs that point to great trouble ahead for older kids – preteens as well as teens. Disrespect and dishonesty are two of those for which violations should have clear and steep consequences, so that your teens know what to expect if they cross one of those lines. Tackle those first. Never bend on character or moral issues, but allow some slack in other areas so your teen feels there is some give and take.

The point is this, by getting their input in drawing up this document, you are giving them a sense of ownership of the rules and foreknowledge of what consequences to expect. It allows them to weigh the consequences against breaking the rules. So, as you work through this process over several weeks, have the final document typed and printed out so that it is clear for everyone to see.

## **Allow the consequences to play out.**

Once you have laid down the rules and the consequences with your children, don't back down when it comes to enforcing them. If you have teens, you know that they are masterful at trying to get exceptions made "just this once." Parents are often afraid that if they enforce the consequences that have been set they will damage their relationship with their child. The truth is just the opposite. Kids actually want their parents to be consistent, and they can live with the consequences, so let them be involved in setting those consequences. I'm not a big fan of, "I told you so," but it's appropriate to remind them when they step over the line that they chose the consequences and will now have to live with them.

There is an old saying, "If you rescue your child from the consequences of their behavior, just once, you will have to teach them again and again." It is far better for the consequences to teach them; you don't want all the teaching to come from you. Don't give in, but don't give up either. Your child will push against every rule you have and even violate each one at one point or another. So keep at it. Keep letting the consequences work in your favor. Keep giving them unrelenting love as you go through that process with them.

## **Beliefs and values never change; rules do.**

Don't think of your rules as written in stone. That's one of the nice things about having them on your computer; they can be easily adjusted over time. Check your rules every six months to make sure they still apply to the maturity of your child.

Sometimes parents don't adjust the rules and they make the mistake of holding a 16 year old to the same exact rules they had for him as a 12 year old. This can be exasperating for an older teen. I'm not suggesting you let him do things that are wrong. But some things that are procedural can be relaxed as they mature. For instance, bedtime and curfew can be moved to a later hour, more independence, and decision making can be transferred, and more responsibility can be added.

There are obviously limits, however. Take heed to the old saying that "nothing good ever happens after midnight". When our kids got older, we moved their curfew, but we never moved it past midnight. It's a positive thing when you show some flexibility. The problem some parents have is that they aren't willing to change on anything. The world has changed, and we want to be sure we're only holding on to the things that are worth holding—and not holding on to things just because "that's the way it was when I was growing up."

Above all else, work diligently to keep your relationship strong. Rules are really important, but the relationship you have with your child is even more important. Take the time to involve them and help them take ownership of the rules. You'll find the fights decreasing and the relationships and harmony in your home increasing. It's worth the effort!

## **Parenting Teens Rules & Boundaries**

Getting a late start in setting rules and boundaries? It is not too late!

Family rules and boundaries can provide a sense of stability to teens who are struggling to decipher relationships, roles, and even their own personalities. Although they may protest loudly against being required to live up to certain standards, when they have a hand in crafting those standards, and when those standards are demanding but fair, teenagers will flourish. Having something steady, firm, and predictable in a head spinning world is like being handed a map, with NORTH plainly marked. Clear boundaries and standards are the gauge by which all other information is measured.

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Disciplining teenagers is difficult, but it is critical if teens are to learn that their behavior has consequences.

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Some of the odiousness of enforcing rules can be eliminated by engaging children in the process of setting the rules and assigning consequences before the rules are broken.

When parents include teenagers in establishing clear rules about appropriate behavior and consequences, the arguments over rules and punishment end. Children can no longer claim that punishments or expectations are unfair, and parents can take on the role of calmly enforcing the pre-arranged consequences instead of having to impress upon the child the seriousness of the problem and scramble to find an appropriate punishment.

The temptation to react emotionally when children break rules is alleviated because a breach of the rules is no longer perceived as an assault on parental authority, since it is by the authority of the family, not the authority of the parents, that the rules were established. Helping to set the rules may not dissuade teenagers from breaking them sometimes, but it can help parents to avoid a power struggle with their teenagers.

Another big trap in parent-teen relationships is the confusion of psychological control (the opposite of psychological autonomy) with discipline. Demanding a certain level of behavior of children does not exclude allowing, or even encouraging them to think and express opinions different than one's own.

Too many parents get caught up in focusing on controlling their child, believing that controlling the way their child thinks will translate into controlling what their child does. By using guilt, withdrawing love, or invalidating feelings or beliefs, the parent hopes to make the child see things the parent's way, ensuring compliance with parental expectations.

There is a fine line here; one of the roles of parents is to help children make sense of the world by offering explanations or interpretations of events. It is when these parental offerings take on the tone of exclusiveness -- when parents cannot respectfully consider and discuss a teenager's interpretation of his or her own experience -- that psychological control has taken over.

Parents should also be aware that it is the teenager's perspective on the forcefulness of the suggestion which counts. Psychological control is damaging if it is perceived by the teenager, regardless of parental intention. While a parent may feel that a discussion has taken on the tone of a healthy debate, to a teenager the same interchange can feel absolutely crushing.

Interestingly, boys are more likely to report that their parents squelch their psychological autonomy than are girls. Whether this is a difference in the way parents actually relate to teenage boys versus teenage girls, or whether it is a difference in perception of boys versus girls is unclear.

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When discipline becomes a matter of calmly enforcing family rules about behavior, many of the problems associated with psychological control are alleviated.

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When children have a problem with delinquency, parents generally tend to respond to it with less behavioral control, and more psychological control as time goes by. This appears to set up a vicious cycle, as teenagers respond to both lack of monitoring and the presence of psychological control by acting out, or becoming more delinquent.

If parents can break this cycle by treating delinquent behavior with increased monitoring rather than attempting to control it by inducing guilt, withdrawing love, or other means of psychological control, teenagers are more likely to respond with better behavior.

In short, parents who concentrate on trying to control their child's behavior rather than trying to control their child are going to have much more success and a lot less grief.

## **Summary and Review Questions**

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## **Action Steps – Putting it All into Action**

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