

School and Home Rules

“Children respond to the expectations of their environment.”—William Grier, educator

It’s hard to raise good kids when they have different rules in different places. A key way to help kids grow up well is by making sure they get consistent messages. To do this, find out which rules kids have at school and see how many of those school rules you can adopt at home. Schools may have different rules concerning clothing and dress and the use of electronics because working with a large, diverse group of kids is different than raising kids at home. Focus on what you can agree on and go from there.

Try it...

For all parents

- Ask the school for a list of rules they have for kids. Your child’s teacher, childcare provider, or school office will have a list of these rules.
- Schools and childcare centers are often great at creating behavior rules that are age appropriate for kids. Once you have the list, talk to your child about the list and how you expect your child to act in those ways at school—and which rules also apply at home.
- Be consistent in enforcing boundaries. Kids not only need consistent messages about rules, but they also need consistent reinforcement to show that the rules really do matter.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Distraction is a key way to move babies away from inappropriate behavior. Once they get to be toddlers and preschoolers, however, distraction will no longer work and kids need to hear how to act.
- Check in often with caregivers about how your child is behaving at preschool or childcare. If your child is having difficulty in a certain area, work on that at home as well.
- Keep lessons simple and positive. Repeat simple rules. Avoid using threats.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Attend back-to-school open houses. Find out what teachers expect of children in the class and how they want them to behave.
- When you have parent-teacher conferences, ask about your child’s behavior and character. Then work with your child to help your child succeed.

- Be patient in working with difficult behaviors. It often can take a child a long time to learn certain behaviors, such as sitting still in a chair, doing homework every night, and learning to raise hands in class instead of just blurting out an answer. Be patient, but also be consistent.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- As children enter puberty, their classroom behavior can change (and so can their behavior at home). Periodically check in with teachers to identify which behaviors your child excels at and which ones are more difficult.
- Continue to be consistent in how you expect your child to behave. During puberty, young teenagers test their parents (and teachers) even more. Don't let them wear you down—or wear you out.
- Point out when your child acts in ways you admire. It's too easy to get locked into power struggles and have all your feedback be negative. Focus on the positive as well.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Check in periodically with teachers to see what type of character your child displays in class. Ask for feedback on how to help your child succeed from a character and behavior perspective.
- Negotiate rules with your teenager. At this age, teenagers are more willing to follow rules if they have a say in what the rules are and why.
- If you or your teenager objects to a school rule, talk about it. Encourage your teenager to write a letter to the editor of the school newspaper (or a newspaper column) if he or she thinks a rule needs to change and why.
- Be clear about what you expect and why. Teenagers are more likely to follow the rules when they understand (and accept) the reasoning behind rules.