

Rules That Can Work For You

Discipline is more than punishment for misbehavior. It is the means by which we teach our children good conduct now and for the future.

Every mistake a child makes can become an opportunity for new learning. Here are four rules that can guide you:

Accentuate the positive.

Let your child know you appreciate her doing things that are important to you. For example, thank her for helping you keep the house neat by picking up her toys and clothes. If she forgets, gently remind her that it makes your work **harder** when you have to do all the work yourself. And ask for her help.

Minimize the negative.

Pay more attention to the things your child does well than to her mistakes. Without thinking, we often take for granted those behaviors of others that please us. Then we exaggerate out of proportion the things they do wrong. This approach can backfire, however, because children tend to repeat those behaviors that get the most attention. For example, the more you ask your child to stop an annoying habit such as playing with her food, the more she may do it. Try ignoring it instead. Then, when you notice her eating neatly, compliment her. It won't take long before you begin to see a change.

Explain your expectations.

Let your child know what you expect of her.

Try to keep your expectations fair, reasonable and sensible. Explain them to her. If she knows what you expect of her, it will be easier for her to please you and avoid your disapproval. You will prevent unnecessary misunderstandings and hurt feelings. For example, explain that you expect her to be in bed by a time that is acceptable to you. Let her know that she can lie in bed quietly for a short time before going to sleep. Offer to read or tell her a story. Or just talk with her during that time if she wishes. But explain that you will not want to spend the time with her if you have to remind her several times every night that it is time to go to bed. Let her know what you expect as well as what she can expect when she does not fulfill her part of the bargain.

Be consistent.

Decide what is important to you. Then try to be consistent in your expectations and responses. For example, suppose you set up a rule that you do not want your child playing on the living room sofa with her shoes on. Don't let her do **it** one day when you are feeling good and yell at her the next day because she's getting on your nerves. Try to remind her, gently but firmly, that you do not want her to do it. Ask her to leave the living room until she can do as you ask. Thank her when she remembers to take off her shoes. It's not always easy to behave toward our children, as we would want. Try to accept yourself as you are, and do the best you can. No one can be kind, considerate, fair, patient, and respectful all the time. Be as understanding of yourself as you try to be of your child. Just by trying you will succeed. And your child will learn from your example.