



Communicating Expectations and Rules

Early, clear, and consistent presentation of rules is important for children because it sets expectations. This article includes ideas for successfully discussing rules in the classroom, home, and community.

1. State Early – Children often have difficulty reading situational cues on how to behave in a new environment. Prepare children in advance for new experiences such as going to the doctor, attending a play, or starting school. For example, classroom rules can be sent home for parents to review with children before school starts. Even if rules are not sent home, parents can prepare children for basic rules such as walking in a line, remaining in their seat during class, and listening to teachers. Teachers and therapists should set rules on the first day so children clearly understand expectations. Review what the rules are, where they are posted, consequences for following or not following the rules, and who to go to with questions about the rules.

2. Present in an Age Appropriate Format – Depending on a child's age and ability level, photographs, drawings, words, or a combination of these methods are ways to present rules. Post them in an easy to see location as a constant reminder. For new situations or difficult schedule transitions, have visual cards that remind children where they are going and what is expected. For example, when going to the library, show a picture, drawing, or a visual icon representing someone in the library following the rules. Use the visual to discuss voice, behavior, and what happens while there.



From the story, *School Rules*

3. Be Consistent – Rules and expectations should remain constant. If a rule is children must clean up before going outside to play, consistently reinforce it. When children get mixed messages, they begin to believe rules are negotiable. Avoid this by consistently enforcing rules.

4. Review Frequently – Children forget rules if they are not reminded of them. Discuss them on a regular basis (more often in a new situation or at the beginning of the school year) so children understand they are important. If the rules are posted in an easy to see place and in a format they understand, children can look at them as needed.

5. Communicate with Other People – If home and school rules are shared, they can be reinforced in other environments. Teachers should send school and bus rules home for parents to read and review with children. Parents should let teachers know what rules they adhere to at home. For example, rules about the use of certain words and specific behaviors in the home can be followed in the classroom. If families have specific concerns about rules, let teachers know so they can be followed in school. Additionally, share expectations between service providers such as teachers and therapists so behaviors are reinforced across environments and children know everyone is working together.

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