



Developing Rules

Simple household rules are a good way to teach your child about personal and social responsibility. Rules provide limits and guidelines that young children need. Young children thrive when there are structures and limits on what they can do. Putting reasonable rules in place or setting limits for your child is part of loving him – just like feeding, comforting, playing and responding to his wishes. Rules should be:

- **Few in number.** Pick 3-5 rules that are really important to you. Focus on rules aimed at keeping your child safe. Too many rules can be confusing and easily broken by your child. Remember that children sometimes misbehave or challenge the rules in order to force parents to show what is really important and where the boundaries are.
- **Observable.** State the behavior you want to see. What does the rule or behavior look like? For example, “Look both ways before crossing the street.”
- **Stated in a positive way.** Tell children what you want them *to do*, not what you *don’t* want them to do. For example, “Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself,” rather than “Don’t hit. Don’t push. Don’t throw your toys.”
- **Applicable** throughout the day or in a lot of situations. For example, “Say *please* and *thank you*,” OR “Use soft (or inside) voices when indoors or in the house; use your loud (or outside) voice only when outside, at the park, or on the playground.”

Try these activities to help your toddler and preschooler practice following rules:

- Play simple games like *Mother May I?* *Simon Says*, or *Follow the Leader*. These types of games help your child learn to follow simple directions.
- Play games, like *Candy Land*, *Chutes & Ladders*, or *Go Fish!* Explain the rules to your child and help her follow them. Talk about why the rules are important.
- Ask your child to help you come up with two or three “family rules.” Rules are more successful when children feel the rules are “fair” and if they have a say in creating them.
- Have your child make up a game and explain the rules to you.

Book Suggestion.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Beatrix Potter. Frederick Warne, 1902.