

Ideas Into Practice

Segment 4: Establishing Classroom Rules

Option A: Creating Rules at a Class Meeting

With other colleagues in your classroom, plan a class meeting in which you guide children in creating rules for behavior. The following are recommended steps:

- Step 1: At a group time, ask children to name some rules that will “keep us safe and happy in our classroom.” If children have trouble thinking of rules initially, suggest one (e.g., “Use words if you’re angry; don’t hit.”)
- Step 2: As children name rules, ask them questions: “Why is that a good rule to have?” “Can you give me an example of when someone doesn’t follow that rule?” “Can you show me how you would follow that rule?”
- Step 3: After discussing a rule, record it on a large experience chart, so children can see the words you are writing.
- Step 4: Review all the rules when you have finished.
- Step 5: Later in the day, rewrite the rules, so they are clear and easy to read.
- Step 6: Review the finished chart with children one last time in another group meeting.
- Step 7: Post the rule chart in a prominent place in the classroom. As children have trouble remembering a rule during free play, show them the rule on the chart and review it.
- Step 8: Periodically, review each rule on the rule chart at group time and ask questions: “Tell me about this rule. “Are we all remembering this rule?” “Are there any other rules we should add to our chart?”
- Step 9: Take a photograph of the rule chart. Write a brief report on the strengths and weaknesses of this rule-creating project.

Option B: Analyzing Classroom Rules

Step 1: For several days, write anecdotal records on all incidents in which you must remind children of rules. Write down the child's name, a description of the undesirable behavior, a statement of the exact rule that was broken, and what you did about it. Also record how well your response to the rule-breaking worked. You may use a chart like the following:

Child's Name	Undesirable Behavior	Rule that was Broken	Your Response	How Well Your Response Worked

Step 2: With your colleagues, review your anecdotal records and discuss the following questions:

1. Which rules were most often broken?
2. Are there any rules listed on the chart that you feel aren't really necessary? If so, why do you have these rules? Can these rules simply be eliminated?
3. Which rules on your list are ones that *really matter*—that is, that you feel are absolutely crucial for keeping children safe and happy?
4. How often were rules broken in your classroom? Do you feel there were too many times when you had to remind children of rules or are you satisfied with the number of rule infractions?
5. How effective were your responses to children's rule infractions? In what ways might you adjust your responses when these undesirable behaviors are performed again?

Step 3: Write a brief report in which you discuss how you will adjust rules and your responses to them, based on this activity. Note whether you have eliminated any rules as unnecessary.

Option C: Rewording Rules to Guide Positive Behavior.

When caregivers remind children of rules, they often state them in a negative way: “**Don’t** run indoors,” “**Don’t** hit,” or “**Don’t** throw blocks.” Such statements aren’t as effective in letting children know what they *should* be doing. Many caregivers try to state their rules in positive and specific ways to better guide positive behavior.

Step 1: For a few days, jot down on a small note pad the exact language you use every time you remind a child about breaking a rule. At the end of this period, study your list of statements. How many of your statements are phrased in a negative way (e.g., “**Don’t...**”)?

Step 2: On a sheet of paper, write down each negatively phrased statement, then rewrite it, so that it is more positive and more specific in terms of how children *should* behave. The following are examples:

<u>Original Reminder:</u>	<u>Rule Rewording:</u>
“Stop, Jamal!”	“Jamal, please use a quiet voice during our book looking time.”
“Don’t hit your friends.”	“If you’re angry, use words. Say, ‘I don’t like that!’”
“If you don’t stop throwing the playdough, you’ll have to leave the art area.”	“If you want to stay in the art area, you need to keep the playdough right on the table and make something.”