



Guiding Young Children's Behavior

Segment 4: Establishing Classroom Rules

TRANSCRIPT for Objective 2

Creating Rules with Children During a Class Meeting

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Host: Children's fascination with rules means that they can and should be involved in creating them.

Dr. Kathryn Castle, expert: Thinking and talking about rules helps children think about why rules are necessary and what would be good rules for all. It helps them to think about regulating their own behavior in relationship to the behavior of other children or what others call self-regulation. When children are engaged in thinking and talking about rules, they are actively involved in the democratic process. So, the emphasis is not on blind obedience, but on understanding why rules are important for all in the classroom. Children are more likely to understand the value of rules if they are involved in creating them. They're more likely to follow rules that they have had a part in creating because they understand the importance. They're even more likely to remind other children of the rules and help enforce the rules. At the beginning of the program or year, teachers can conduct group discussions on why rules are important and brainstorm with children on what would be some good classroom rules. Teachers can use good children's literature, puppets, or other props to read and dramatize helpful and hurtful behaviors. Teachers can then focus on helpful and hurtful behaviors, how they make you feel, and what we should do when they happen. It's important to write children's ideas for rules as they state them and then review the list with the group to discuss each rule why each might be important. Once classroom rules have been established, and are written down, and posted, then the rules can be referred to when problems occur. When rules get broken, teachers can ask the child who has broken a rule to think about what they have done, and what rule they've broken. Teachers can take the child by the hand to the posted rules and help the child find the rule in question and then review why that rule is important. Teachers can ask the child about what they might do next time. When a problem has occurred and a teacher calls the group together to discuss it, the teacher can state the problem without naming children and ask the children to think about rules that would be helpful in that particular context. It's a long-term process that can't be accomplished in just one group meeting. Rule discussions are ongoing throughout the duration of the early childhood program. But in the long term, children who are engaged in such discussions will advance in their thinking about what it means to be a good citizen, and what it means to be respectful toward others.

Host: We visited a classroom to see how one teacher creates rules with her pre-school children. The teacher had recently brought a dollhouse to school and she wanted to engage the children in creating rules for using it.

Kate: I thought we need to decide on some rules on how to play with the doll house. So, we respect the doll house. How was he playing wrongly with it?

Child: He was banging on it.

Kate: He was banging on it. I heard some of the problems we were having were people were banging on it. I heard that people were pushing around it. Is that a safe way to play and respect the doll house?

Child: I didn't do it.

Kate: Well it doesn't matter who did it. But if we have some rules in we'll know how to play over there, won't we?

Kate McHugh, Preschool Teacher: We really work a lot in our classroom on respecting materials. They're not my materials by any means even though I'm the teacher, they're our materials, it's our classroom. We talk about that a lot.

Kate: My friend Grace said she thinks it's a good idea to say that only two friends at a time can play at the doll house. Some friends are learning, you're right. Some friends are learning what two people are.

Child: I'm learning. I'm learning how to respect things.

Kate: You're learning how to respect things, and that's what preschool's for. So Grace said a great idea for one of our rules would be to have two friends, and why do you think it's a good idea? Grace. Does anyone else have an idea why is it a good idea to have only two friends play with the doll house? Cole. So, people won't fight. Do you feel like when there are too many friends over there people were fighting around the doll house? And when everyone was there you couldn't hear each other?

Children: No. It was too loud. We have to let two friends talk and then we can hear each other.

Kate: I think that is a great reason to say there are two friends playing by the doll house. So, we'll say "two" F-F- what does that start with, "F", "friends" I'll put a dot here so we know its rule number one. Good looking Langston "2 friends". Does anyone else have any ideas on rules we should have?

Child: OOOO, I know I know!

Kate: Kirsten?

Child: No jumping, no...bouncing the toys on the doll house.

Kate: Anyone else have any ideas?

Kate McHugh: I think making their own rules gives them ownership like I said, it emphasizes this is our classroom. Having ownership of the rules of the classroom and how we treat and respect materials.

Kate: What kind of hands should we use with the doll house? Gentle hands. Why do you think we should close it? You think something's going to break? It's okay.

Child: Look!

Kate: Oh, Alyssa is showing us gentle hands.

Kate McHugh: They right away, even using terminology fragile, they understand they need to be careful with it, it's delicate. They understood the gentle part.

Kate: These sound like really good rules for our doll house I think.

Host: There are several steps to creating classroom rules. We are going to take a look at all of them and then we will go over them one by one. The first step is to ask the children to think of rules. Next you combine and edit the rules, with the children's input. As children suggest rules, you ask them to tell why a rule is important and to give an example. If inappropriate rules are suggested, you should explain why they should not be added. You should also suggest adding important rules that children don't mention. Then, after the class meeting, you can rewrite the rules and discuss them with children at the next class meeting. Finally, you should review the rules on the chart throughout the year. When creating class rules, you first ask children for their ideas for rules. Then you write down the children's rules, restating them in a clear way. The rules work best when they cover things that really matter. Too many rules or rules that don't matter too much can be overwhelming. So, in step two, you can help children stick to a few really important rules by combining and editing with the children's permission. Let's think about what this might look like. One child might say "don't tear up the books." Another child might say "don't throw the blocks." And another child might say "put the caps on the markers." After writing those rules down, you might say "it sounds like what you are saying is we need to take good care of our classroom materials." Now why would you write down rules for pre-school children who can't read yet? Research suggests that children can make meaning from print even in the early pre-school years. Even though the children are not able to read the rules word for word, they will look at them for clues about what each rule says. This kind of early exposure to print is important for later reading and writing. Now we want you to practice combining rules children might suggest. We are going to give you a few sets of rules children might suggest. We want you to think about how you might combine them into one.

Activity 4A: Combining Rules

Set 1

Voiceover: How might you combine these rules into one broader rule:

- Don't hit
- No pinching anybody
- No hurting anybody
- No hurting people

One idea might be: Use gentle hands.

Set 2

Now try combining these into one rule:

- No throwing blocks
- Don't break the crayons
- Don't tear up books

One idea might be: Take care of our things.

Set 3

Now try combining these into one rule:

- Don't call someone a bad name
- No teasing people
- Don't say, "I hate you."

One idea might be: Say nice things to people.

Set 4

Now try combining the last set:

- Don't scream and hurt people's ears
- No talking too loud during a story
- Don't go, "Eeeee!" (demonstrates scream)

One idea might be: Use an indoor voice.

Host: During the next step of creating rules, you ask children to explain why each proposed rule is important and to give an example. Research shows that children are more likely to follow rules they understand. So, taking time to discuss a rule helps children to understand it and follow it more easily. There might be times when a child can't tell you why a rule is important. That's okay. You can offer ideas or help the child understand why we might not need it as a rule. That brings us to the next step. You need to help children make decisions about what rules are important and what rules are missing. If children do not add a rule about treating peers with kindness, you should suggest that be added. If a child shares an inappropriate rule, you can just explain why it doesn't work for the class. A child might say, "No talking in school." You could respond, "If we can't talk in school, how could we play?" In the next step, you rewrite the rules and edit and consolidate. Then the rules are put on a chart for posting in the classroom. At the next class meeting, the rules are discussed and if everyone is in agreement, they are posted in a special spot in the classroom. Teachers use different strategies for presenting the final chart. Some teachers have a conversation about where to post the new chart. Other teachers have children sign their name on the chart using scribble writing or letters in their name, to show a sign of agreement. Other teachers have children vote on the new rules and have further conversation if everyone isn't in agreement.