



Steps for Making Family Rules

- 1 Get everyone to join in**

Suggest that as you all live under one roof, you need to agree rules for everyone. Very young children can sit on someone's lap and listen even if they can't take part. If a child won't join in, don't be put off. You can point out that they will miss the chance to have their say, and that rules will be agreed that will apply to them too.
- 2 Talk about how you want to feel in the family**

Encourage everyone to share their ideas about what feelings are comfortable and what feelings are uncomfortable for them in the family.
- 3 Share problem behaviour**

Ask everyone to talk freely – without fault-finding and blaming – about issues the family could improve. You may be surprised by what you hear; if you can listen to home truths even if they're uncomfortable, the children will be more likely to listen to what you have to say too.
- 4 Share ideas for rules**

Identify issues you would all like to have as rules in your family. Let weird and wacky ideas be included as well as sensible ones. Then choose a few important issues. For every behaviour you do not want, think of a behaviour you would like instead. Fill in the practice sheet "Our Family Rules" as you go along, and then produce your own version. Make it look colourful and fun.
- 5 Keep the rules simple and specific**

Rules need to be clear, easy to understand, and realistic. Avoid rules such as "Do be good – Don't be naughty" or "Do be happy – Don't be sad/angry".
- 6 Decide on a reward and a penalty for each rule**

When someone keeps to an agreed rule, a reward recognises their choice. When someone breaks a rule, a penalty follows their choice. For family rules such as "Do talk nicely to each other – Don't shout", children will accept the rule more readily if parents respect it too, and agree to a suitable reward and penalty for themselves. Let children as well as adults suggest rewards and penalties.
- 7 Limit family rules**

A maximum of four or five rules is plenty. Keeping the list short will help everyone remember the rules and practise them.
- 8 Drop and add new rules when needed**

Rules are not cast in concrete. When something is no longer a problem, have a rule-dropping party! The rule still applies, but the family can celebrate because everyone can keep to it. Remember to comment regularly on how much you like the new habit. If a new problem behaviour appears, repeat steps 1 to 6 to make a new rule.