



Establishing Household Rules

The social worker has just called and asked for placement today! The child will soon be here! Your mind is filled with a whirlwind of questions! What will the child be like? What has she gone through? What will she expect? What rules is she used to?

Not only do you have plenty of questions but, upon entering care, children also have many questions about your family and how it works. By talking over house rules, your foster children will know what you expect from them, and also what they may expect from you. Families in foster care and adoption can succeed if they know what to expect!

The Initial meeting

When first meeting with the caseworker, child, child's parent(s) and previous caretaker, discuss the special needs, strengths, and culture of that child. Talk with the team about the success of previous limits and rules. Were these useful in allowing the youth and others to be safe and did the child learn from these guidelines? Are there suggestions from the team for creating specific rules, based on previous successes or court-ordered rules?

Basic Rule Setting

As a means of preparation for meeting with the child and the team, create *basic* house rules that can be applied to most of the family. Put the rules in writing with clear and brief language that can be understood and enforced such as, "Always knock on others' doors before entering." Simple, positive words are most effective.

Depending on the age, developmental level, and culture of the foster children, the rules will need to fit their level of understanding as well as their culture. In many religions (Muslim, Jewish, and Christianity, for example), fasting or particular foods are not to be eaten during certain seasons or celebrations. In some cultures, showering or socializing for females while they have their periods is not allowed. And most black children, for example, have different hair and skin care needs than most white children.

Topics to consider when writing house rules include:

- Hygiene
- Meals and snacks
- Clothing

- Bedtime
- Use of telephones and computer
- General housekeeping and chores
- Communication

Other topics to consider, depending upon the age and issues of children that you foster include:

- Curfew/supervision
- Consequences (of smoking, or using drugs, or alcohol; running away, law violations, etc.)
- Appropriate clothing
- Dating and social activities
- Medications (Also remember that the Wisconsin foster care code says that all medicine must be out of reach or locked up.)

Sample House Rules

The following are possible topic areas to consider when developing house rules for your family and foster or adoptive placement. When creating the guidelines, consider the questions that the foster child may have about how you and your family operate. Consider rules that will meet the needs of your family, fit your parenting style and the needs of the foster or adoptive child. (Examples of rules from the fictional foster parents "Johnnie and Chris" are in italics.)

Hygiene

How many showers or baths and hair washing per week are kids expected to take? What time limit, if any, is placed on the shower or bathroom time?

"Showers or baths and hair washing will be taken at least every other day. Each family member may spend 15 minutes in the bathroom."

Meals and snacks

Where and when can people eat? Can they get snacks by asking? Can they get in the cupboards on their own?

"All family members will eat breakfast and supper together at the kitchen table. Snacks can be eaten in the TV room by asking Johnnie or Chris before snacking."

Clothing

Who does the laundry? What do family members do with dirty clothes?

"Each person will fold his or her own laundry and place clean clothes in the dresser; dirty clothes in the bathroom hamper one time per week. Johnnie will wash and dry all the laundry."

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Household Rules, continued

Bedtime

Where are the children allowed to sleep? When do they go to bed? How do they wake up in the morning? *“Bedtime is 8 pm on school nights and 9 pm on week-ends. Each person will sleep in pajamas and sleep in his or her own bed, unless there’s a special occasion (camping, sleepover where friends sleep in the living room, etc.)”*

Telephone

Who can use the phone? How often can the phone be used to talk to family or friends? Is there anyone who can’t call (especially because of a court order, team meeting, etc.)?

“The phone can be used to make calls, with permission from Chris or Johnnie, for 10 minutes each night before 8 pm. Two phone calls per night can be received from others before 8 pm. and can last for up to 10 minutes.”

Chores

What work or household chores are expected of family members? Is there an allowance? (Remember, the Wisconsin foster care code says that each child be given weekly spending money.) Can extra money be earned?

“Each person will sign up for a chore to be done each day for one week. Children will earn money for a completed chore. If a chore is not finished, there will be no payment for that day.”

Communication

If children are feeling frustrated or mad how does your family work out disagreements or fights? Where

should kids go and what should they do when they are mad or angry?

“If you are feeling frustrated, angry or upset, tell Chris or Johnnie that you need some time to talk to them alone. Try to be patient and maintain your cool if they are not available right away.”

Computer Use

Can children use the computer? What sites are acceptable? Do kids need permission before using the computer? For what purpose can it be used? (Also see FCARC’s [Internet Safety](#) tip sheet.)

“You may use the computer for one hour a day, but first get permission from Chris or Johnnie.”

Involving the Child and Family Members

Children, especially teens, can learn from talking with you about the house rules and what and why you expect certain behavior from them. Consider having family meetings where family members can discuss their needs, wants, and problems with certain rules. Don’t forget to also talk about what’s working well.

Be open to updating or removing the house rule. If it appears that your children have been complying with a particular house rule and no longer need it, by all means let them know how well they’ve done and change the rule to give them more freedom. By creating reasonable house rules that your children can achieve, you will be promoting self esteem, self control and overall success.



Resources Available From the FCARC

Lending Library:

- [Learning To Listen, Learning To Care: Activities That Teach A Positive Attitude & Positive Behavior](#) (Book)
- [Setting Limits and Boundaries: How to Say No to Your Kids](#) (DVD)
- [Positive Parenting 2](#) and [Positive Parenting 3](#) (DVD)
- [Share and Take Turns](#) (Children’s Book)
- [Be Polite and Kind](#) (Children’s Book)
- [Understand and Care](#) (Children’s Book)
- [Setting Limits Without Waging War](#) (Tape)

Other Resources:

- Promoting Healthy Families in Your Community, “Setting Rules With Teens” http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/res_packet_2008/ch_three_rules.cfm
- Tips on Creating House Rules: <http://www.2girlsandawebsite.com/AdoptNC/RuleTips.html>
- Setting Rules and Consequences With Teens”, Rules: What’s Fair?” http://circleofparents.org/downloads/circle_of_parents_teens.pdf
- Ohio State University Extension Factsheet “Setting Limits and Standing Firm” <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5317.html>