

Building Structure

A basic routine you follow and rules you live by on most days of the week.

- You set appropriate expectations and limits for your child's behaviors.
- Your child learns how you are going to respond to behaviors that are okay or not okay.
- It's normal for children to test the limits. That's how they learn what is right and wrong.
- Kids feel safe and secure because they know what to expect.
- Parents feel confident because they know how to respond, and they respond the same way each time.

Three Main Keys to Building Structure

1. Consistency – doing the same thing every time
2. Predictability – knowing what is going to happen and how you will respond.
3. Follow-through – enforcing the consequence (“say what you mean and mean what you say”) for punishments and rewards.

Steps to creating routines/rules:

1. Identify the routines/rules.

For routines:

- Identify important daily activities and decide the order they should happen (i.e. bedtime, homework, meals, chores).
- Identify key times of the day when the activities should occur and make a routine.
- Be sure the routine works for the whole family.

For rules,

- Be as specific as possible.
- Focus on specific behaviors. Avoid vague rules like “be good.”
- Start with one or two rules and add new rules as needed. A large number of rules will be difficult to follow and enforce.
- Rules should be realistic and fit your child's age and development.

2. Explain the routines/rules.

- Make sure your child knows what you want them to do and when you want them to do it. Talk to your child about the routines and rules and have them repeat expectations back to you.
- Use charts, lists, etc. to visually display the routines and rules.
- When possible, involve your child in the creation of the routine and rules.
- Keep in mind that young children often need reminders about what to do. Rules can and should be repeated often.

3. Follow the routines/rules.

- All family members should try to follow the routine and family rules.
- Your child may not always want to follow the routine or rules, so provide reminders and support when needed to help them be successful.
- If you're tired or stressed, it may be difficult for you to follow the routine or enforce the rules, but try to stick with it as much as possible.

4. Use consequences.

- Positive consequences like rewards, praise, and attention occur when you let your child know you like the way they follow the routine or rules.
- Negative consequences like loss of a privilege, time-out, or removal from the situation occur when the routine is not followed or rules are broken.
- The consequences for not following the routine or breaking the rules should be clear to you and your child and given immediately.

Keep in mind

- Be consistent with the routine and rules, and let your child know you expect them to be followed.
- Rules are consistently enforced, routines can be flexible. If the routine changes, let your child know about the change.
- Rules should be enforced the same way no matter who is caring for your child (including grandparents and babysitters) to provide a consistent message. Routines should also be consistent as much as possible.
- Always follow through with consequences for routines or rules that are not followed.

Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/consequences/index.html>