

Parenting Tips: Setting Limits, Understanding the Rules, Monitoring, Consistency & Consequences

Setting Better Limits

Within the family there must be a proper set of family rules, that are based on your family values. If your child is usually responsible and generally uses good judgment, you will probably only need to have a few rules. However, if you are dealing with a troubled or defiant teen you are already familiar with the need for a more defined structure.

If you want your teen to maintain good grades, again you will need to create several layers of preventative rules to assist your teen. You will need to have some clear rules in areas such as: School attendance, completing daily homework, and obtaining weekly progress reports. The key is that rather than waiting until the end of the semester to see if your child receives good grades, you set the rules and create a structure that will help your child along the way; and maximize their chances for success.

When you create several layers of preventative rules it provides your teen with the greatest amount of protection. It also allows you to be involved so that you can be aware of problems early and resolve them, before they become overwhelming.

Understanding the Rules

If rules are not completely understood, it leaves a lot of room for misunderstandings, conflicts and even manipulations. Many times parents assume that their child understands the rules the same way they are intended. Rules need to be specific to avoid misunderstandings. It is a good policy to have your child write down or repeat back their understanding of any rule or expectation.

Monitoring

Monitoring is essential in the administration of any rules. As parents, we must provide a safety net for our children by monitoring their behavior. Some teens require very little monitoring; troubled teens require intensive monitoring. Let your child know that you will be monitoring their behavior. This will do a couple of things: First, they will not be offended if, or when, they discover you are monitoring, and second, if they know they are going to be monitored, it tends to give them added incentive to follow the rules.

Monitoring may occur in many ways. For instance, in regard to academics most schools will assist you in providing daily or weekly reports, or you may choose to occasionally drop into your child's classroom and talk to their teacher. Random drug tests can assure compliance with sobriety. Use of a vehicle may require odometer checks. As a means of "cross-checking" such things as activities or curfews, you could communicate with the parents of your teen's friends, or even drive by to assure they said where they were going to be.

Consistency

The hardest, yet most important thing a parent can do is to be consistent. A rule, or understanding, that is not enforced can be the same as having no rule at all, and can undermine the well being of the family. In order for our children to feel safe, they need to know that they can count on their parents to be consistent and available.

Consequences

Consequences will vary dependent on the violation as well as the child's response to the consequence. The key is (1) to use consequences that have a significant meaning and/or deterrent value, and (2) the severity of the consequences should match the severity of the violation.