

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, the children in your home 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 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



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- 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, keeping in mind that the Wisconsin foster care code says that all medicine must be locked up.

If your children have been complying with a particular house rule and no longer need it, let them know how well they've done and change the rule to give them more freedom.

spend 30 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?

"We expect everyone to eat breakfast and supper together at the kitchen table. Snacks can be eaten in the TV room, but please ask us first."

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."

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 the children in your home and your parenting style.

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?

"We expect you to shower or bathe at least every other day. Each family member may

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 weekends. 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

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order, team meeting, etc.)?

“Feel free to call your friends and family every day, but no calls past 9:00 please.”

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 us that you need some time to talk to us alone. Try to be patient and maintain your cool if we’re 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 and [The 411 of Social Media](#).)

“You may use the computer for one hour a

day, but please ask first. If you get stuck, ask for help.”

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.



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