



Setting Family Rules

Most children do not like rules any more than they like most green vegetables. Fortunately, by the time they become adults they have usually developed a taste for both. We come to understand the value of good rules and the importance of learning to play or work within them. Can you imagine playing a sport without rules? Can you imagine living in a country with no rules (or laws, as we call them in the grown-up world)? We wouldn't like it for more than a day at most. So teaching our children the value of rules and the importance of living with the limits they are designed to maintain is a major part of *Active Parenting*. That's why we stress "freedom within limits" so often. *Active Parenting* is about more than making and enforcing good rules, though. It is also about teaching our children how to make and live with good rules.

Rules are important for any activity, including day to day living in families. To prevent problems and get along well in a family, everyone needs to be clear about the rules and expectations. Children often misbehave simply because they don't know what parents expect from them. They don't know where the limits are and how much freedom they are allowed. Of course, many a shrewd child will play innocent about the rules, figuring that "it's easier to gain forgiveness than permission." In either case, many problems can be prevented if you take the time to discuss guidelines and expectations before the situation occurs.

The *Active Parenting* approach to problem prevention is not about laying down the law and dictating what the rules are. A much more effective approach is to discuss potential problems with your child and decide together what solution or guidelines the situation requires. Of course, as the parent you will have certain limits that are non-negotiable, but a willingness to be flexible within those limits can go a long way to winning cooperation and avoiding problems. For example, you have some grocery shopping to do and you need to take your five-year-old daughter with you. Having a short talk with your child before you leave home can improve the chances of your outing being problem-free, which could save you a lot of time—and stress. Here are 5 steps you can use to handle potential problems:

- 1. Identify potential problems and risks.**
- 2. Share thoughts and feelings.**
- 3. Generate guidelines for behavior.**
- 4. Decide on logical consequences for violating the guidelines (if necessary).**
- 5. Follow up later.**

To learn more about these 5 steps and how to implement them in your family, visit the Active Parenting page on the [ACFC website](http://ACFC.org) to discover all of the parenting resources available to ACFC members.

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