Classroom Rules

ibestt
early childhood

What Is It?

Classroom rules are clearly defined and posted expectations about what is appropriate and what is not. Clear classroom rules create a framework that provide children with choices, give adults common language, and help teach children to self-regulate their behavior. Classroom rules help adults maintain clear routines and expectations for children's behavior.

When to Use It

- At the start of the school year.

- Throughout the year, especially after long breaks from school, as a review of rules and expectations.

	Steps to Implementation / How to Do It
☐	1. Ask the class to discuss and help choose three to five classroom rules. Ask for input and provide examples (i.e., vignettes, role-play scenarios). Discuss school- or program-wide expectations and what they mean in your classroom, if these exist within your setting.
☐	2. Make sure rules are positively stated (i.e., what to do, rather than what not to do) and add pictures or images of each rule.
☐	3. Post the list of classroom rules and pictures so they are clearly visible at children's eye level.
☐	4. Establish routines for different parts of the program day (beginning of the day, end of the day, when using materials, in different parts of the building or playground, etc.), and talk about what the rules mean during these routines. See the "Classroom Routines" Intervention Guide for more information.
☐	5. Speak to children individually and privately when a rule is not followed. Restate the rule positively and provide attention and positive feedback when the child engages in the appropriate behavior. Explain natural consequences for unsafe behavior (i.e., the toy is broken so it needs to be put away). Avoid public or long discussions about breaking the rules and focus instead on positive attention for how children are following rules.

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Example

Trey is a preschool teacher who was hired halfway into the school year. A long-term substitute taught their class of eighteen children the first half of the year. On their first day, the children roam around the room, use materials in unsafe ways, and seem not to have formed strong friendships. Trey wants to establish a strong classroom community and clear class rules during the first few days with the class.

At the start of the next school day, Trey sits down with the class at circle time and explains why some rules are important. She provides examples of ways some rules can help the group stay safe. She asks the children to come up with ideas for rules they think are important for their class community. Trey writes these down as the children talk. Together over a few days, Trey and the children agree on three classroom rules or expectations that apply across the day: Be kind, Be safe, Help each other. Trey prints photos of the children being kind, safe, and helping each other and creates a rule poster for the class. Throughout the day Trey refers to the classroom rules they have posted on the wall. When it becomes clear that the children would benefit from a more specific set of rules for circle time, Trey creates a poster that helps children understand what it means to be kind, safe, and help each other at circle time. Trey makes a point of noticing and commenting when children are following the rules ("I see Billie sitting on a carpet square. That is very safe" or "Shawna and Zak are helping each other clean up!"). When a rule is being broken, Trey uses it as an opportunity to redirect the child or children towards a rule (i.e., "Please show me a safe way to come to the carpet.")

How to Increase Effectiveness

- Keep rules simple and easy to understand. Use pictures to illustrate written rules.

- Refer to posted rules frequently throughout the day and especially when redirecting challenging behavior.

- Provide frequent, positive feedback and encouragement when children are following the rules (e.g., "You are being so safe with the scissors, Tamaya"; "Jordan is using kind words to ask for more milk").

- Speak with children privately (instead of publicly) when rules are broken.

Resources

Ratcliff, N. (2001). Use the environment to prevent discipline problems and support learning. *Young Children, 56*(5), 84-88.

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. (2020). Families: Let's talk expectations!

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. (2020). Behavior expectations: Strategies and posters.