

# Making Family Rules

a newsletter for people who care about self-esteem  
Issue 65 - Volume 11, Number 5 - September - October, 1991

Dear Reader,

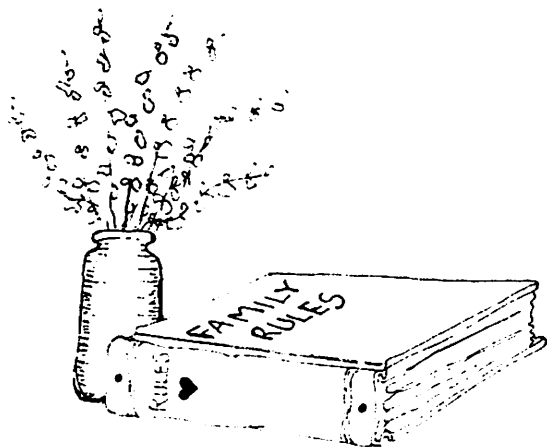
Welcome to this **WE**, a newsletter for people who get together to give each other personal support, examine attitudes, and learn new skills.

**Making Family Rules** is the topic of this issue. A rule is "an established guide or regulation for action, conduct, method, arrangement, etc." according to Webster's Dictionary.

Every family has rules — some explicit, some implicit. You can use this issue of **WE** to help you examine the importance of rules and how you make rules in your family.

Some families establish these guides consciously and deliberately, others wait for a crisis and then create rules. You can look at:

- how parents choose rules.
- your rules about rules.
- rules other people have used.
- games that help children learn rules.
- how to enforce rules.



Sincerely,

*Jan Hilday Clarke*

## RULES AND VALUES — A Family Heritage

A simple rule — **cross the street at the crosswalk**. There are many simple rules, but the reasons behind them and the history of their development are complex, and often not understood or not *in awareness*.

When we teach a child to cross at the crosswalk, is our concern safety? Order? Convenience of drivers? Is it teaching the child self-responsibility? Teaching compliance as a good in itself? Or is it that our mothers and fathers would expect us to teach this?

One way to evaluate the rules in your current families is to make expressly visible for yourselves the rules and values you brought from your families of origin.

First, list the most important rules from your childhood family. These are the rules the adults put the most emotional energy into, the rules it was unthinkable to break. Breaking them was not treated casually.

Go to church regularly.  
Don't get caught *stealing*. or,  
Don't *get caught* stealing.

Next, list the values that your family lived by. Some of these values may never have been spoken directly, but it was clear that family members were expected to put energy into these values and the goals they supported.

Do the best you can and live as well as you can. Or,  
Let what you do benefit yourself and others.

- Did your parents or the important adult who raised you agree on these family values and goals?
- If they did, what happened if a child rejected those values?
- If they didn't, how did each child in the family respond to the double messages about family goals and values?

Now, compare the values and goals of your family of origin to the values and goals you are living by or attempting to live by.



Last, compare the goals and values of your family of origin with the goals and values of other adults who are vital in your child's life: spouse, partner, close relative, other adults functioning as family members. Think about the buffet of rules and values you are offering your child or children.

Since lack of consistency in family rules and values provides confusion and double-binds for children, how can the adults in your family come to agreement and provide children with the consistency they need?

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## SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

### How Do Parents Choose Rules

The purpose of this activity is to help parents share information about rules and how to make them.

Post a poster  
with the Words:

<b>Remember</b>
<b>Borrow</b>
<b>Respond</b>
<b>Anticipate</b>

Tell the group: "Parents usually choose rules in these four ways."

1. They **remember** rules from their own childhood.
2. They **borrow** rules learned by watching or asking others or by reading.
3. They **respond** to behavior they do not like by making rules to change behaviors.
4. They **anticipate** what safety, convenience and growth supporting boundaries will be needed and make rules ahead of time. Parents sometimes engage the child as an active participant in the rule making.

Say: "We will look at how we chose some of our own rules."

Leader asks people to write their examples on newsprint for everyone to see, or invites everyone to take notes, or hands out folded sheets of paper so people can make their own "Book of Rules."

Give people time to list each category before moving to the next.

1. List some of the rules you **remember** from your childhood that you currently use with your children. Give a couple of examples from your family or use the following. Example from my childhood:
  - Everyone eats dinner at six o'clock.
  - Children help with household chores but it's OK to complain about it.
  - Children never sass parents.
2. Identify some rules that you have **borrowed** by asking other parents what they do, watching other people, or by reading

Example from my reading:

- When you have a toddler, put away the breakables and let the child explore.
  - Let the child feel and talk about all of her feelings and teach her how to behave about them.
3. Share one situation where you made a rule, you **responded**, after someone had done something that you wanted to prevent from happening again. Example from my current family:
    - No putting stuffed animals in the dishwasher.
    - No throwing books through the basketball hoop.
  4. Share one rule that you made before an issue or situation came up, one that you **anticipated**. Example from my current family:
    - Use only your own toothbrush.
    - No drinking before you are legal age.

When the group has finished all four categories, ask each person to share one rule she plans to keep and celebrate or one she plans to change or make.

## Rules About Rules

What is more important than the stated rules? Carole Gesme says that the underlying rules, the often unstated "rules about rules" are the most important factors in whether rules work and are enforced or whether rules don't give support and do lead to confusion, disagreement, fights, or uproar.

The following rules about rules were collected from over thirty people. They are grouped under seven headings. You may want to add more headings and more rules.

Read them and think about:

- which ones you agree with.
- what additional ones you believe.
- what happens in a family when family member's rules about rules differ.

### 1. What are your **rules about rules**?

- Rules are for babies; if you are responsible and make a judgment, you don't need rules.
- Rules are not OK to have; they impede children.
- Rules need consistency and solid reasoning in order to work.
- Rules need to represent a sense of equity and justice.
- It is no fair to hide rules and then criticize people for not knowing them.
- Rules need to be clear and concise.
- Rules need to be identified as negotiable or non-negotiable.
- Rules need to fit the purpose.
- Rules should be simple to hear, use, understand, and keep.
- Rules are not fair.
- You can't trust rules.

- Rules are not important, what you feel like doing is important
  - Most people have too many rules
2. What is the **importance of rules** and their effects?
- Rules about safety are more important than other rules.
  - It's important to have rules, they protect children and the child within
  - When families get in an uproar about rules, it may be that the rule needs to be updated or it may be a way to avoid getting close.
  - Most of the rules that are tough on families are the ones they don't even know they are following.
  - Gelatinous rules cause havoc in a family.
  - Rules create safety when they are appropriate.
  - In order to be successful, you need to know the rules.
  - Rules have to be situational. At best, situational rules give flexibility. At worst, it is called character disorder.
  - Rules are needed as guide posts.
  - Rules give structure which gives safety and freedom.
  - Rules help you be fair and reasonable.
  - People interpret the rule so they can get you.
  - There are so many rules you can't loosen up.
  - Become aware of implicit rules that are dysfunctional.
  - Rules are important to prepare kids for the rules they will have when they are older.
  - Rules help keep society going.
  - Rules are for tricking people, playing one up and being critical, but it's OK to play by rules in games.
  - Some rules are for courtesy toward other people in the home.
3. What about **making the rules**?
- The biggest kid gets to make the rules.
  - Children need to learn early that parents make the rules and there are severe consequences for breaking them.
  - Make them ahead of need if you think it's important to success.
  - Make them when you need them.
  - Get as many people involved in making them as you can.
  - Make rules before kids get you in a tight place.
  - Parents make the rules about safety and the welfare of kids. Kids help make the rest.
  - Don't let kids debate rules inappropriate for them to decide. Let the parents be parents. Let kids negotiate what they are learning about.
  - Making rules makes you seem like an ogre to the kids so avoid making them as much as possible.
4. What about **following rules**?
- Rules are for other people to follow
  - The kids have to go by the rules but parents and teachers don't.
  - If everyone played by the rules, life would be fair. And I wish everyone would. It would be so much easier.
  - If rules aren't stupid and ridiculous, I follow them. If it is important, I don't mind adjusting to the rule.
  - A rule should be followed unless it is outdated and needs to be updated or is harmful to yourself or someone else.
  - Obey all traffic laws.
  - Demand that the rationale behind unclear rules be given.
  - Even if you follow the rules, you get accused of breaking them.
  - You are supposed to know a rule before it is even stated.
5. What about **breaking rules**?
- Rules can be broken.
  - Don't just figure out why to break a rule, figure out why to comply as well.
  - If rules are stupid and ridiculous, it doesn't bother me to ignore them.
  - You can't break rules to make things better until you know the rules.
  - If there are consequences to not keeping them, the rules state what the consequences are.
  - You have to break them to find out if people really mean them.
  - Being a rule breaker myself, unless it is consistently upheld, it is not a rule. If it has ever been broken in the past, I try to break it if it will benefit me.
6. What about **enforcing the rules**?
- Enforce the rule if it is convenient, don't enforce it if it will discomfort your children.
  - Rules should be posted.
  - Be skeptical about the source and persons enforcing the rules and comply willingly if the person(s) can be trusted.
  - If you need the rule, you need to enforce it.
  - Enforce rules to teach children, not to punish them.
  - If a rule is not enforced the rule doesn't matter.
7. What about **changing rules**?
- Rules don't come naturally. You feel awkward as you get used to new rules.
  - Rules need to change, when it makes sense, usually due to growth.
  - People should know the way to change the rules.
  - Rules change too often.

—Thanks to the facilitators of *Self-Esteem: A Family Affair* for their many contributions to this list.

# SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FOR A GROUP

## Your Own Rules About Rules

The purpose of this activity is to allow people to discover a variety of rules about rules and then examine and update their own rules about rules.

1. Say: "We all have rules about everything, even rules."
  - Ask: "Will several of you give some examples of rules about rules? We can start by sharing some rules about rules that we remember from childhood."
  - Write the rules on a board or newsprint.
  - Give a few examples from the **Rules About Rules**, page 2, to help people get started if you need to.
  - After you have collected 4 or 5 examples, *hand out* half sheets of paper and ask each person to write his/her current rules about rules on this paper.
2. When everyone has finished writing, ask:
  - "Will someone share an example in each category listed in **Rules About Rules**?" Ex: Rules about Rules, Importance of Rules, etc.
  - "What qualities make a rule helpful? How can you tell if a rule is a good rule?"
  - Write the group's ideas on an overhead or newsprint so everyone can see them. People will probably offer items such as:

The rule must be appropriate to the current situation.

The rule should protect the welfare of the most possible people, not be fair to one person and unfair to the other.

The rule should be understood by everyone.

It is a good idea to post rules so everyone can see them.

Parents are responsible to make the rules when the children are little. As the children grow they learn to help make the rules and help enforce the rules.

Parents should enforce the rules fairly but kindly.

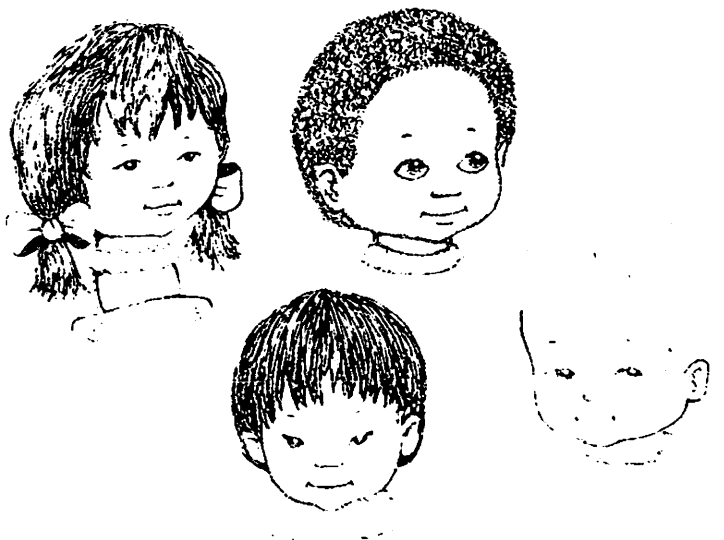
Some rules should be negotiable, some non-negotiable.

It's OK for a person who has broken a rule to be uncomfortable, but the penalty for breaking rules should not be hurtful.

3. After you have collected 10 or more qualities of a helpful rule, ask people to look at their own rules about rules, the ones they wrote on their half-sheets of paper.
  - Ask them to examine their rules in light of the qualities of helpful rules.
4. Ask: "Did anyone find a rule you want to celebrate?" If so, congratulate them. They may share the rule or not, as they choose.
  - Ask: "Did anyone find a rule you want to update or change?" They may share the rule or not.
  - Ask: "Did anyone find a rule you would like some help changing?" If so, ask the group for ideas or run a Suggestion Circle.
5. After everyone who wants to talk has had the chance, ask each person to celebrate silently the thought and care given to rules today.

This activity can be done individually as well as in a group.

For use with couples or colleagues, have each person identify his/her rules about rules, then compare to see where there are areas of agreement or disagreement. Celebrate agreements and discuss how to accommodate disagreements.



## What Kids Like

Kids like rules

Kids like you to be steady  
about the rules.

Kids like to test rules.

Kids like to make rules.

Kids like the safety rules  
provide.

## Why Post Rules?

Rules provide for safety, protection, and family convenience. Parents also use family rules to teach children how to make and keep their own internal rules, rules that will help them take good care of themselves and others.

In order to do that, children need clear rules, clearly stated. It is helpful to many children and parents to have the rules posted so they can read and point to the poster often to remind themselves and others about the rules.

Children need some non-negotiable rules so they will learn that there are some rules we all must obey. (In Australia everyone must drive on the left side of the street.)

Growing children also need to learn to negotiate rules. That negotiation teaches them how to think about when, where, why, how long, how much, who, etc.

Parents start negotiating a few simple rules when the child is about two by offering choices, all of which are acceptable to the parent. "Do you want to get your sweater or shall I get it?" By the time the child is a late teenager, almost all rules are negotiable. In this way, children learn to be responsible for their own behavior.

Rules may be divided as follows:

<b>Non-Negotiable</b>	<b>Negotiable</b>
Health	Money
Safety	Grades
Legality	Convenience
Ethics	Chores
Religion	Skill Level
Family Traditions	Maturity Level
Parental Preference	Social Manners
Community Customs	

Thanks to Barb Kobe for sharing the following rules for a family with a three-year-old and an infant.

### Our Rules

1. No hitting people.
2. Say "please" and "thank you."
3. Put markers and crayons away so baby won't get them.
4. Wash face and brush teeth before bed.
5. All eat at table without TV on.
6. Before bath, put clothes into laundry basket.

Thanks to Mic Johnson for sharing these rules. You can order an individual poster for \$10.00 (includes shipping and handling) or in quantity for \$5.00 each. Write or call: Michael Johnson, 18025 Hummingbird Road, Deephaven, MN 55391. 612 475-1836.

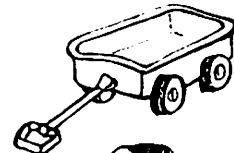
### HOUSE RULES

1. **Speak for yourself**  
... and not for anybody else.
2. **Listen to others**  
... then they'll listen to you
3. **Avoid put-downs**  
... who needs them
4. **Take charge of yourself**  
... you are responsible for you
5. **Show respect**  
... every person is important
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

There are a number of whimsically illustrated House Rules Posters available at Gift Shops and in Mail Order Catalogues. Here are some examples of the messages.

### HOUSE RULES

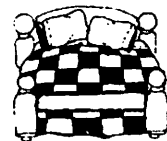
If you take it  
out, put it back



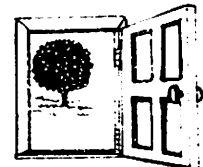
If it is hungry,  
feed it



If you sleep  
in it, make it



If you open it,  
close it



If it's dirty,  
clean it





# This home is a **HUMAN SANCTUARY**

## **In This House**

We give non-violent  
consequences.

We encourage each other.

Each person is an individual.

Everyone is responsible for  
his/her own mess and  
success.

Everyone is allowed to feel  
good about her/his own  
body, and to have a safe  
'bubble' of space.

We talk openly about feelings  
and problems.

We don't hit or hurt  
**Anyone.**

We don't put each other  
down or call each other  
names.

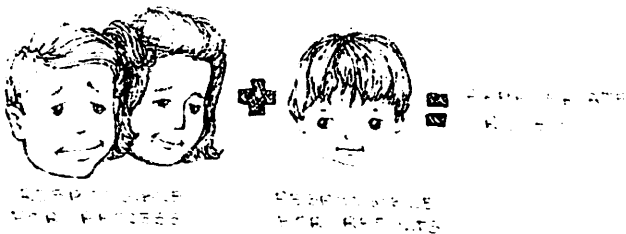
No one is unfavorably  
compared to someone  
else.

No one is 'rescued' from  
learning the important  
lessons of life (unless they  
are in danger of harming  
themselves or others).

No one is to be tricked,  
forced or trapped into  
unwanted sexual touching.

Big problems are never a  
'secret' to be swept under  
the rug.

Parents are responsible for the process; children are responsible for the results. One part of the process is making appropriate rules, following them and enforcing them.



Setting rules is a matter of process, not prescription.

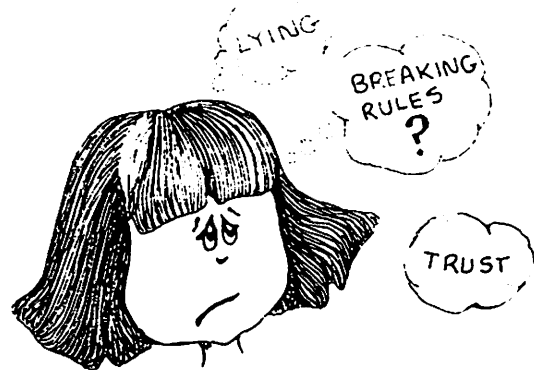
The process includes:

- what do they need?
- what do I need?
- what does the situation need?

Sometimes what they need is to learn about values and what I need is the opportunity to teach my values.



When a child has lost your trust by breaking a rule and lying about it, make clear to the child what exact behaviors he will need to show you to regain your trust. Make the time frame for doing that appropriate to the child's age and maturity level.



## References

**Without Spanking or Spoiling** by Elizabeth Crary. This well known book is an old friend to turn to or a new friend to make when parents are considering rules, structures and discipline. Crary's **Pick Up Your Socks** is equally helpful. Both contain a mix of theories and applications to help parents parent better. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 1979 and 1990.

In **Family Rules** Kenneth Kaye compares permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative types of parenting with many examples of each. He suggests ways to turn soft, permissive parenting or harsh, authoritarian parenting into firm, loving authoritative parenting. He discusses making and enforcing rules appropriate to different age levels. The importance of building competence in all ages and special problems at certain ages are also addressed. New York: Walker and Company, 1984.

You can read more about rules in the Structure section of *Growing Up Again* by Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson.

## ERRATA

The July-August 1991 issue of WE on Handling Stress contains an error. The love affirmations at the bottom of pages 4 and 5 should read:

I love you  
and I care for  
you willingly.

I love you  
when you are  
active and  
when you are  
quiet

You can  
become  
separate from  
me and I will  
continue to  
love you

I love who  
you are.

I love you  
even when  
we differ;  
I love  
growing with  
you.

My love is  
always with you.  
I trust you to  
ask for  
my support.

Your love  
matures and  
expands.

You are  
lovable at  
every  
age.

# Games You Can Make

## Helping Children Learn Rules

By Lawrence S. Shapiro

There are many games you can make to help children learn about rules.

### The Rules Game

Ages 4 - 10

Materials Needed: Ten 5" x 8" index cards, markers, Polaroid camera (optional), 2 shoe boxes

Object: To teach children the most important rules in the home or classroom and, the importance of following them.

### The Importance of Rules

Many of the problems that children have at home and in their classroom come from a lack of structure. Some children are extremely intuitive when it comes to understanding what adults expect from them but, others (typically the ones who are labeled as having "problems") are not. They need very specific guidelines as to what they can and cannot do. In other words, they need clear and consistent rules.

Rules, like everything a child learns, are understood differently at different ages. By 18 months, children have already begun to learn many rules which often fall in the category of the one word "no." By the time a child is school age, they have already learned a complex system of do's and don'ts. But many times adults are not clear exactly what the rules are, or they are inconsistent in enforcing them. The better that these rules are articulated, the easier it will be for a child to learn and follow them.

The games that follow can be played in the home or in the classroom. They are intended to help both the adult and the child identify the rules that are important, and to *remember* them.

Before beginning, the adult should have a frank discussion concerning rules with the child. Why are they important? What are the rules that the child already knows? What does the child think should happen when rules are broken? Adults must stress the value of having rules which everyone follows (What would happen if there were no traffic lights? What would happen if no one paid his/her taxes?).

### Making the Game

Begin by sitting down with the child and deciding on the ten most important rules in the child's life. In the classroom you will want to make this a class discussion. In the home you may want to include other members of the family. Write these ten rules down on a piece of paper in the order of their importance including the consequence

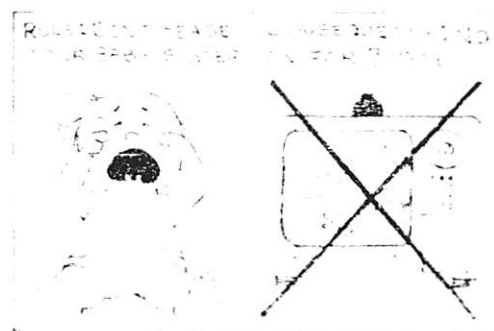
of what happens if the rules are not followed. Consequences can be ones that occur naturally (Rule: Go to bed by 8:00 p.m. Consequence: You'll be tired in the morning, and have to be on time for school anyway) or they can be punishments for serious rule infractions (Rule: Don't tease your baby sister. Consequence: No TV for 3 days if this happens).

RULES	CONSEQUENCES
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____

Now take ten 5" x 8" index cards and draw a line down the middle of the card on each side. On one side of the 10 cards, write the numbers 1 to 10, repeating the number twice (see illustration).

1 1

On the other side of each card, write the corresponding Rule and Consequence on the top part of the card. Put the three most important rules on cards 1, 2 & 3. Beneath each rule and consequence, draw a picture representing each rule and each consequence, or take a Polaroid of the child doing something which represents the rule and the consequence if the rule is broken, and paste the photo in its appropriate place on the card.





Now cut each card in two, so that you have 20 cards (10 rules and 10 consequences) each with a corresponding number on the back.

For classrooms, have each child make up a deck of Rule and Consequence Cards for her/himself. Have each child initial the back of each card. When playing in groups, each child should contribute 2 or 3 pairs of cards to a "group" deck.

### Playing the Game

There are many games that you can play with your deck of rule cards. Here are a few, you may think of many more.

#### 1. First Things First:

It is important for children to learn that some rules are more important than others. Shuffle the 10 rule cards, and have the child select Rules 1-3 and recite them without turning the cards over. Turn the cards over to see if he/she is right. When this can be done 100% of the time, repeat this with the first 3 Consequence Cards.

#### 2. Remembering Rules:

Shuffle the cards and then lay out all 20 cards with the picture sides up. The child now has to match each rule with each consequence. Just turn over the cards to see if the match is right (the numbers will match; for groups, the numbers and initials will match). This game can be played by 1-4 children. The child with the most matched pairs is the winner.

#### 3. Flipping Over Rules:

More active children need more active games. Take 2 shoe boxes and label one Rules and the other Consequences. The child(ren) should take the deck of 20 cards, picture side up, and from 3 to 5 feet away should flip the Rule and Consequence Cards into the appropriate box. After all the cards are flipped, remove the cards that have landed in each box, and the child gets a point for each pair of cards with matching numbers on the back. Too easy? Move back a few feet.

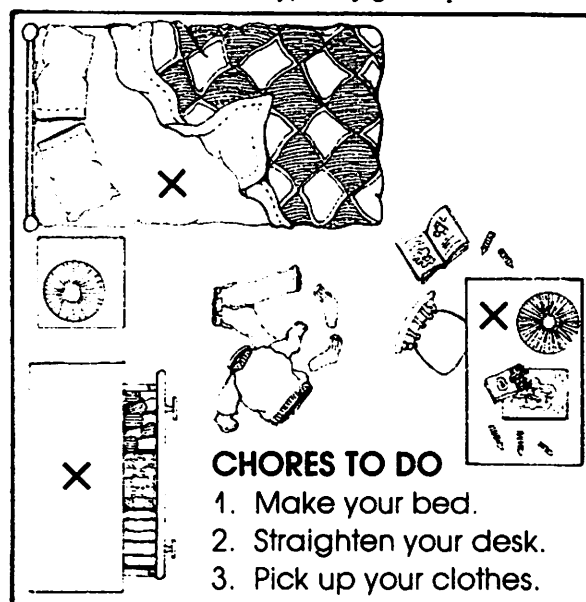
#### 4. Exploring Rules and Consequences:

This game is for more verbal children who enjoy telling and hearing stories. Shuffle the deck of 10 Rule Cards (more Rule Cards can be added for groups of larger children), and have the oldest member of the group draw a card. He/she should then tell a "fairy tale" story about someone who broke that rule and the magical things that happened to the hero in the story. The story should end with an appropriate consequence and a moral. Each player gets 5 points for telling a story, 5 points for coming up with a fitting consequence, and 5 points for the moral or lesson. When everyone has had a turn, everyone who has at least 10 points should get a small reward or prize.

Perhaps you can think of other games that can be played to help children follow rules. There are just two basic elements in a good "learning" game: it should be goal oriented and it should be fun! Once, I was consulting with a mother who couldn't get her seven-year-old daughter

Betty to do any chores. She tried every kind of punishment and every reward she could think of, but to no avail. I suggested that she make the chores into a game, and recommended one of my daughter's favorite's, The Secret Treasure Map Game.

Every day Mrs. M. drew a treasure map, which showed the room(s) where the chores were to be done. At the exact place where the chore was to be performed, Mrs. M. marked an "X" on the map, and there she hid a clue. For example, if Betty had to make her bed, the map showed an "X" where the bed would be, and there would be a clue under the bed. The "clues" were really simple problems to be solved: math problems, riddles, trivia questions, etc. Betty wrote down the answer to each problem on the back of each map, and gave it to her mother *after each chore was done*. At the end of the week, if all the clues were solved correctly, Betty got a special treat.



As you can see, the game was really a variation of what Mrs. M. had already tried to do; namely, reward appropriate behavior. But the game made it fun! The game *reframed* an adversarial situation into one of cooperation and play.

.....

These five games are just a few of the ways that you can help children remember and follow rules. But the real value of any game regarding rules is to bring up this important issue for discussion. Each game should be an opportunity for children and adults to talk about the importance of rules and how they affect all of our lives.

### Behavioral Hints:

Always be consistent with children. Reward improved behavior, even if the improvement is a small one. Take the time to talk to children when they misbehave. Even if they have nothing to say, they should know how you feel and how their behavior affects others.

Permission to reprint given by Larry Shapiro, The Center for Applied Psychology.

## Workshops

### Facilitator Training

A weekend workshop for experienced and confident

- Facilitate the Self-Esteem: A Family Affair parenting class
- Improve group leadership skills for working with grown education or support groups
- Receive advanced training in the use of Transactional Analysis in educational settings
- Practice ways of inviting people to change

**June 22-26, 1992**  
**Seattle, Washington**

#### Reminder:

Facilitators who have already taken the workshop anywhere may repeat it in Minneapolis for half price.

### The Professional Tool Box Body Work Proficiency Workshops

**Power and Identity**  
**November 9, 1991**  
**Minneapolis, Minnesota**

**Transactional Analysis 101**  
**March 13, 14, 1992**  
**Minneapolis, Minnesota**

A Friday evening and all day Saturday overview of TA theory and practice.

Write to **WE** for details on the workshops.

Edited by Jean Illsley Clarke

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- Ideas and activities or materials to use individually or in support groups.

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*newsletter for people who care about self esteem*

## Opening Activity

for focusing on family rules

Hand out name tags

Choose a partner. Make a name tag for her and ask her to tell you about one rule that her family of origin valued that was helpful to her.

Introduce your partner and tell the group what her family rule was if she is willing for you to share that information.

## Closing Activity

At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.

- Ask several people to share the most important thing they learned or were reminded of about rules.
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.

**RULES**

**BULK RATE**  
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