

The Process of Negotiating the Rules with your Child

We all know as parents that discussing and negotiating the rules with our children is never easy. Children are all very different, and what might need to be a rule for one, may not even be an issue for another. That being said, there are many parameters that we set as parents that are the hard and fast rules - those with no 'wiggle room.' Those are the rules set forth to protect our child's health, safety and well-being. These rules and their consequences should be very clearly defined and it should be understood by all involved that they are there for a very important reason and that they are 'all or nothing.'

Rules that keep our children safe are of the utmost importance. These could include everything from teaching youngsters not to touch the hot stove to teaching your school aged child the importance of obeying the laws while riding their bicycle. Children need to understand these rules are to be followed to the letter and there is no room for negotiation here.

For adolescents and teenagers, such rules should include expectations about drinking, the use of illegal drugs, or safe defensive driving. These rules are also imperative to a child's health, well-being and safety. There should be no room for experimentation or relaxing the rules in specific social situations.

There are rules that can be fairly and equitably negotiated with your children as well. Rules regarding how many hours per week can be spent on video game playing, what time a child is expected home for dinner, what time each night homework is to be completed, or how late a teenager is allowed to stay out on weekend nights are all rules that can be discussed openly and honestly between you and your child. These should also be consistent, however. Don't allow 11 p.m. one weekend night and then tell your teenager 9:30 the following weekend night when going out with the same group of friends. If your teenager broke the 11 p.m. curfew the weekend before, the consequence of losing the privilege of going out that weekend should be strictly enforced. Don't bend the rule just because your teenager seems genuinely sorry and promises never to do it again. Consequences should be consistent, fair, and always followed through.