

## Handling Conflict about Rules Enforcement at Home

Some parents may worry that setting strict rules may distance them from their children. But this simply isn't the case. Though they may gripe and complain and get upset when you become the enforcer, they realize deep down that this shows you care. These parameters you set forth and enforce make your child feel loved, safe, and secure.

It's never easy developing and introducing rules. Parents may tend to avoid setting rules because they fear confrontation and unpleasantness. But the uncomfortable stuff isn't necessarily a reflection on your relationship with your child, it's just the nature of adolescence - breaking rules and pushing limits is a part of growing up. We tend to want to be our child's friend sometimes, and when we're laying down the law that just isn't possible. Our primary role is to protect, nurture and provide for our children.

When kids break rules, parents often overreact with harsh, disproportionate and unenforceable punishment, which undermines the effectiveness of setting rules. Instead, when you first tell your child about a new rule, discuss the consequences of breaking that rule - what the punishment will be and how it will be carried out. Consequences must go hand in hand with limits so that your child knows what the cost of breaking the rules will be. The punishments you set should be reasonable and related to the violation. For example, if you catch your son and his friends smoking, you might "ground" him by restricting his social activities for two weeks.

Punishments should only involve penalties you discussed before the rule was broken. Also, never issue empty threats. It's understandable that you'll be angry when house rules are broken, and sharing your feelings of anger, disappointment, or sadness can have a powerfully motivating effect on your child. Since we're all more inclined to say things we don't mean when we're upset, it's sometimes best to give ourselves a time-out period to cool off before we say something we don't mean.

Make the ground rules crystal clear to your child. It's imperative that you are consistent and follow through with a defined disciplinary action after each infraction, and that your child understands the reasons why.