



Developing and Displaying Rules

Developing Rules

There are several guidelines that teachers should follow when they craft rules for early childhood settings. Rules should:

Be positively stated: It is always more desirable to tell children what *to* do rather than what *not* to do. For example, a rule stating “Use gentle touches” is more appropriate than one that simply says “Don’t hurt other children.”

Be few in number: There should be no more than five rules for each setting. Rules also should stay the same across settings, when possible.

Be simple and specific: Rules should be stated clearly, in as few words as possible, and use developmentally appropriate language

Be measurable and observable: Teachers need to make sure that any adult working in the setting can determine whether the rule is being followed. To do this, teachers need a clear definition for what each behavior looks like in his or her classroom. For example, “Use kind words” is more easily observed and measured than “Be respectful.”

Develop with children’s input. The type of involvement children will have depends on their developmental abilities. Below are several strategies for involving children in developing and introducing the rules:

- Lead a class discussion about the importance of having rules and ask children help generate the rules.
- Tell the children the rules and then instruct them to demonstrate each one through role-playing. This can be done when the rules are first introduced and then throughout the year as a reminder.
- Involve children in identifying the visuals that will be used to illustrate a rules poster. The children could help decorate the poster.

Displaying Rules

Once the rules are developed, they need to be displayed so that teachers and children can refer to them throughout the day.

There are two key guidelines for displaying rules in early childhood settings. Rules should:

- Be posted at children’s eye level: Rules should be posted at children’s eye level so they can easily see and reference them when needed.
- Include a visual to illustrate each rule:
 - Young children, who typically are not yet reading, need to be able to quickly reference the rules, without being expected to memorize them.
 - Children who are dual-language learners might especially benefit from visual supports.

Visual supports can take many forms (e.g., photographs, picture symbols, written words, clipart, line drawings, and objects). There are also commercially available software programs and apps that can assist with illustrations. The type of visual support used should be based on the needs and abilities of the children in the class. Some children respond better to photographs of themselves and their peers engaging in the rules, while others prefer line drawings. Teachers can combine different types of visual supports (e.g., photographs and line drawings) to accommodate a variety of needs and abilities.

Pre-Literacy Hint: Teachers should handwrite or print each rule next to the corresponding visual. This helps promote early literacy skills.

Individualization Hint: Teachers can also include the home languages of children on the rules poster, something that demonstrates respect for the child’s home language and supports dual-language learning.

Reference:
IRIS Center Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN
<http://Iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/ecbm/cresource>