

LIMIT SETTING

Since “All talk and no action” is an ineffective way to raise a child, every parent must have a clear plan for dealing with issues of discipline and responsibility. Here are some tips to help keep your home life hassle free. Teenagers will still make mistakes, test limits, and cause you worry, but having a reasonable discipline plan in place can prevent major blow-ups and angry encounters.

1. Rules should be simple and communicated to your teen. In areas where you disagree and argue about rules and expectations, sit down and calmly discuss your needs, giving your teen a chance to give his/her side of the issue. Use your listening skills. Ask for what you need so that you will feel he/she is safe, or the work gets done, etc. Remember that children have a very clear sense of what is fair. Enlist your child’s opinion in helping to solve the problem.
2. Consequences for breaking a rule should be understood in advance. Long-term punishments are worse than ineffective. They can lead to anger, resentment and rebellion from teenagers. Save restriction for a month, selling the Nintendo, etc. for severe offenses. For example, if your child steals a valuable item and is required to replace it, then selling the Nintendo may be an option your child can consider to solve this problem. In general, it’s best to keep the consequences immediate, short term (light should be at the end of the tunnel), and appropriate to the offense. Sometimes removal of a privilege for a day, making it something that can be earned back the following day with improved cooperation. e.g.. Doing the dishes as requested, is very effective because it places the responsibility on the shoulders of your child for his own choices.
3. Discuss consequences in terms of “choices” your child made. For example, if your daughter misses the curfew you and she agreed to, ask, “What is your understanding of the consequence for being late?” Your teen will remember the agreement. “I have to be home by 8:00 tomorrow.” and you can say, “Yes, that is the choice you made by being late. Next week you can return to your 10:00 curfew.”
4. Even though you may be angry and disappointed when your teen breaks the rules, don’t discuss the situation until you are calm and can stay in control. Teenagers have a difficult time staying in control of themselves. They need good role models. When adults explode, it’s easy for teenagers to tune us out and lose respect for us if they feel we have no respect for them.
5. Be prepared to pay a price as a parent. Parenting is a huge commitment. Some of the consequences you may negotiate will require you to have to give up your time to supervise a teen who made a poor choice. Don’t set consequences you aren’t prepared to enforce. Follow through is crucial. Kids will break rules and test parents who give them multiple chances and don’t stick to enforcing the consequences.
6. Consistency is the watchword. Whether the child is living in one household, or spends time between separate households, the rules need to be consistent between parents, regardless of the time-sharing responsibilities.