

What Is Your Family Teaching About Rules?

School rules, sports rules, traffic rules, fashion rules. Our children's lives are filled with rules. Groups work best when everyone knows the rules. But learning about rules and how to follow them begins at home.

All children need rules to help them feel safe and acceptable. However, participants in the Overindulgence Research Studies who told us their families had no rules, or the rules didn't have to be followed, agreed with the following statements:

- *If I fail partly, it's as bad as being a complete failure.*
- *If I do not do well all the time, people will not respect me.*
- *If you cannot do something well, there is little point in doing it at all.*
- *My happiness depends more on other people than it does on me.*
- *If someone disagrees with me, it probably indicates he does not like me.*

Do you find these beliefs surprising? It looks as if the need for rules, consistently enforced, is deep and influences learning about personal relationships and self image.

Having clear, reasonable rules and living by them is an important part of avoiding overindulging and of modeling and teaching responsibility. If children are having trouble following family rules, one underlying factor may be what we are teaching about our attitudes toward rules. Here is a short quiz to help you assess what your family is teaching.

Rules about rules

Check often (O), sometime (S), or never (N) as you think about what your family is teaching about rules and how you feel about rules.

O S N

___ ___ ___ Rules are a burden? *Oh, groan, we just got another set of rules and regulations at work. This means more meaningless paper work.*

___ ___ ___ You should know the rules without asking? *I made a mistake at work. It was something we have never done before, but I should have known.*

___ ___ ___ Rules are stupid or thoughtless in design? *What a stupid rule! I wonder who thinks up these things!*

___ ___ ___ It's OK to break rules as long as you don't get caught? *Padding my expense account gets by my new supervisor. She doesn't notice.*

___ ___ ___ Rules are to be broken, finessed or ignored? *Well, there is another rule we will have to get around.*

___ ___ ___ Rules benefit adults at the expense of children? *You know the rule. No asking questions when adults are talking.*

___ ___ ___ Rules are made to be helpful? *I'm glad there is a rule that we all drive on the same side of the street.*

— — — Rules should be evaluated? *That rule no longer seems to fit. Let's think about how to change it to be more helpful.*

— — — You value your family rules because they protect and respect everyone in the family? *I'm glad we have a no put-down rule in our family. It helps us think about how to be helpful instead of blaming each other.*

What else do you teach about rules and how you feel about them?

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In this overindulgent world in which our children live, having reasonable family rules and sticking to them helps children feel secure and helps parents avoid overindulging.

List the rules that help your family function well.

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There is a lot more information about how to avoid overindulging in the *How Much Is Enough* book.

[Jean Illsley Clarke Ph.D., Connie Dawson Ph.D., and David J. Bredehoft Ph.D. are co-authors of *How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible, and Respectful Children.*](#)

[This quiz is adapted from *Growing Up Again, Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children* by Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson.](#)