Rules that make sense

Children who understand rules are more likely to follow them. These tips will help you set limits for your youngster and encourage good behavior.

Match rules with reasons

Play this matching game to help your child understand the purpose of rules. Write each rule (“Share toys nicely”) and the reason (“So everyone gets along and can play”) on separate index cards. Let him illustrate them. Shuffle the cards, and place them facedown in rows. Take turns flipping over two cards—if the rule and reason match, keep them. When all the cards are claimed, the player with the most pairs wins.

Offer choices

When possible, give your youngster some control over his choices. He’ll feel more motivated to obey rules. Say he is allowed no more than 45 minutes of screen time each day. You could let him decide when and how to use it, perhaps watching a 30-minute video after school and spending 15 minutes playing a computer game after dinner.

Be consistent

Your child will take rules more seriously if you always stick to them. Choose a handful of rules that really matter to you like “Speak nicely to each other” and “Help to keep our house clean.” If there are too many, it’s hard to enforce them all. Remind him of the rules if he breaks one, and follow through with a consequence—every time.

What’s your idea?

Little ones are full of ideas. Encourage your child to express hers—and to try them out. She’ll stretch her thinking with these activities:

- Suggest that your youngster decorate an “idea notebook” to carry with her. Perhaps she’ll see a building she wants to recreate with blocks or an animal she’d like to write a story about. She might draw or write her idea in her notebook to use when she gets home.
- Let her be an inventor. Designing a pond for her rubber duck or making a parachute for an action figure involves coming up with—and testing—lots of ideas.

Q: Why did the boy sprinkle sugar on his pillow?
A: So he’d have sweet dreams.
Winter investigations

Your backyard is the perfect science lab for your youngster. Here’s how to explore science while enjoying outdoor winter fun.

**Mystery object.** Encourage your child to pay close attention to the attributes of natural items—their sizes, shapes, textures, and weights. First, secretly slip an object (say, an acorn) into a paper bag. Let her reach in and describe it without looking. “It’s small and round. Part of it is bumpy, and part is smooth.” Can she guess what it is? Let her pull it out to check. Now, have her put something in the bag for you to investigate.

**Activity Corner**

**Art explorer.** When it comes to art, there’s no wrong way to do it. Allowing your little Picasso to squish, splatter, cut, and paste without a plan fosters creativity. It strengthens hand muscles, too. Consider this advice.

**Provide different materials.** Think beyond crayons, markers, and construction paper. You could offer your child cotton balls, aluminum foil, macaroni noodles, and toothpicks, to name a few.

**Offer tips.** It’s okay to give your youngster a creative nudge. For example, it might not occur to him to crumple aluminum foil into a ball to make a sculpture. Show him how, then step back and allow him to do his own thing.

**Ask about his project.** Instead of telling him what to make, or trying to guess what he’s doing, invite him to tell you about his creation. For instance, ask open-ended questions like, “If you gave your picture a title, what would it be?” or “How did you get the idea for your sculpture?”

**Parent to Parent**

Money is especially tight during the holidays, so I’m always looking for ways to save. This year, I decided to get my children involved so they would learn you don’t have to spend a lot to celebrate.

Instead of buying greeting cards, the kids designed a homemade one for each person on our list. Henry, who’s 4, drew pictures and added stickers.

Jess, who’s 6, wrote greetings inside, and then they both signed their names.

We also worked together to make gifts. The children and I enjoyed baking bread and framing family photographs for relatives. And we made gift bags by decorating brown paper sacks.

With everyone’s help, we’ll be able to stick to our holiday budget. And I think it will be more meaningful for the kids to give gifts and cards knowing they played a big part in making them.