

THERAPYWORKS

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A GUIDE TO FAMILY CIVILITY

Most homes desire to have a family that instills a "there is no place like home" feeling. We believe that the following guidelines are essential for home/family to become such a special place.

SAFETY RULE

This rule assures that each family member is physically and emotionally safe and secure -- not necessarily happy. Violations of the safety rule would include any behavior that is potentially harmful to a person or property (e.g. physical aggression such as hitting, kicking, throwing things, etc). Verbal threats are also a violation of the safety rule.

RESPECT RULE

This rule assures that each family member is viewed as worthwhile and worthy of respect by virtue of being human. Violations of the respect rule would include name-calling, put downs, and actions directed toward humiliation.

RESPONSIBILITY RULE

This rule assures that family members are accountable for their own thoughts, feelings and actions. The responsibility rule consists of two primary areas:

- 1) Responsibility to follow rules and directions;
- 2) Responsibility to carry out promises and commitments.
- 3) Responsibility to accept authority/hierarchy

Violations of the responsibility rule would include not following directions given by parents or teachers, or breaking rules at home or school. Making an agreement and then forgetting about it or putting it off would also be a violation of the responsibility rule.

HONESTY RULE

This rule assures that all family members can make decisions and solve problems based on truthful information. Violations of the honesty rule would include lying or cheating.

REINFORCEMENT POLICY:

It is very important to recognize the importance of reinforcement (reward) when it comes to teaching family members to follow the rules. Parents who "catch" their children following rules and reward them for doing so will help their children learn rules much better than parents who simply punish their children for violating the rules. Rewards can be verbal (e.g. praise) and/or more tangible (e.g. extra privileges). It is usually best to approach problem areas with reinforcement first, before using penalties.

PENALTY POLICY:

When problems persist, it is best to establish a consistent policy of administering mild to moderate penalties for rule violations. Let your children know what type of penalty will occur when they violate a rule. For example, when you hit your brother (violation of safety and respect rules), you will take an immediate 10-minute time-out. Wait at least one month before evaluating the effectiveness of a penalty. Many parents make the mistake of changing penalties because they do not bring about an immediate improvement in their child's behavior. It takes considerable time for many children to learn to follow rules, even under the best of circumstances. If a penalty does not seem to be helping the child improve their performance after about a month, then it is best to add another mild to moderate penalty in addition to the first penalty, rather than simply switching to another penalty. Your child will soon learn your "add-on" approach to penalties, and may work harder to learn rules rather than face new penalties.