

CHOOSING NON-NEGOTIABLE RULES IN OUR FAMILY: R.S.V.P.



for
Women

Every family has rules, even if you never think or talk about them. Children cannot play with matches or teens cannot come home at 4 a.m. It is helpful when everyone knows the rules and understands why each rule exists.

Negotiation and compromise are good – especially with teenagers – but some rules are too important to debate. These are the non-negotiable rules.

What is a NON-Negotiable rule?

It is a “given,” something that is always true in our house. Some examples might be “no hitting” or “seatbelts on before the car moves” or “call home if you’re going to be late.”

Here are some ideas...

- sit down as a family and decide what your non-negotiable rules are: every family is different
- when you make a rule, explain WHY that rule is important for your family
- write the rules down
- not all rules are DON'Ts. Rules can be DOs. (e.g., everyone gets a hug before leaving for school)
- everyone must follow the rules: if a rule in your family is “no hitting,” then adults cannot spank children
- match the rules (and expectations) to the age of the child

Expectations change as children get older. With young children, you decide all the rules. But as they get older, there is more room for negotiation on some issues. See page 58 for ideas on negotiating with a teenager. Having a curfew may be non-negotiable, but maybe there is room for negotiation on the time.

Some things to try and avoid....

- when children do not understand what your rules are because you never told them
- when the rules change or are enforced one day but not the next
- when rules are only enforced when a parent gets angry and blows up
- when there are so many rules that children are being corrected far more than they are praised
- when children do not “buy in” or understand the reason for a rule



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Many non-negotiable rules fall under one of four categories

Respect

Safety

Valuing Everyone

Privacy

Here are some ideas to get you started....

Respect: *each of us in this family values ourselves and values the others*

- we will never call anyone names, put them down, or make them feel bad about themselves
- we will never hit, be violent or abuse anyone
- if someone says or does something that hurts me, I can tell him or her how their words made me feel

Safety: *when we are old enough, we will do our best to stay safe and not take risks, because we are each important to this family*

- we will look both ways before crossing the street
- we will always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle
- we will always wear a seat belt and make sure babies and toddlers are in car seats
- we will never get in a car with a driver who is drunk or has been using drugs
- if sexually active, we will practise safe sex

Valuing Everyone: *every single person is equally important and valued in our family*

- girls will be treated the same as boys and boys treated the same as girls: a person is not more valued or special just because of his or her gender
- we will consider everyone's opinions and needs when making choices for the family

Privacy: *every person in our family is entitled to privacy*

- we always knock before entering a bedroom or the bathroom when the door is closed
- we promise not to listen in on other people's telephone conversations
- things said at Mommy's house stay there and things said at Daddy's house stay there, unless they affect someone's safety
- we will not keep "bad secrets" from the adults who care about us



Privacy is good but some secrets are bad. Help children understand the difference between "good secrets," such as a surprise birthday party, and "bad secrets" such as sexual abuse, drug use, or illegal behaviour.



The Secret of the Silver Horse is a booklet for children about sexual abuse and bad secrets. It is on-line at the web site of the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence or may be ordered through their web site: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/