

Hecht: Fly right and follow (some) rules

Pam J. Hecht, Special to WNC Parent Published 5:00 a.m. ET Dec. 23, 2019

Breaking rules is something that brings me joy, but I have to control myself when around children. I am, after all, supposed to be a role model and a good samaritan at all times.

This is particularly difficult in a library, where a child may have to remind me to be quiet.

At school, certain scamps oddly appear to dislike rules, particularly those designed to keep them safe and in one piece, like play nice and don't chase after a bear. They also enjoy hanging from and otherwise disrespecting stair railings. Since they are at a serious institution of learning and not a monkey jungle, this doesn't look right. Also, kids have a tendency to fall and break body parts. Strangely, even a fancy motion-activated warning system, featuring a rather crotchety automated voice hollering threats, does not easily deter these little rule-breakers.

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How rules get ignored

The best way to get kids to ignore a rule is to post a sign. For example, I have found that if you post a sign that says, "no climbing onto the roof," you will most likely find at least a dozen of them up there at any given moment.

Back in the day, rules were rules and kids had to follow them. Now, kids help make the rules and if they don't like one, we have to discuss everyone's feelings about it, which takes up time that in my opinion would be better spent having a snack.

Unwritten rules like "don't sit on your classmate's head" are particularly challenging for some children. It's also surprising the things a parent must spell out sometimes. One realizes this after coming home to find that the kids have filled the kiddie pool and placed it in the living room to enjoy a good splash while watching TV.

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It's at this point that the necessity of a few house rules comes to light. Sitting down with the family to agree on some is healthy, but make sure the first rule is to stay on topic. I don't know how, but the last time we gathered as a family to lay down some laws, the conversation turned to the topic of why we need an air hockey table in the dining room. (Actually, I may have been the one who brought that up.)

Rules pertaining to cleanliness may need attention, such as the one stating that when bugs or dust bunnies outnumber socks, it's time to neaten up a bedroom. There is no right or wrong here, unless failure to enforce the rule leads to your kid cohabitating with a family of raccoons.

It's helpful to encourage rules like being calm at the grocery store, creatively, so that kids don't know you're bossing them around and forcing them to do things against their will. Try competing to see who can find the most unusual-shaped vegetable or the prettiest can of green beans. Enjoy every peaceful moment possible because at any time, they could forgo the rules of polite and decent society and point at someone, yelling, "That man looks pregnant; I didn't know they could do that."

Older kids love to point out when the grownups fudge on a rule. For example, as soon as they learn about driving, they will notice when you go an eighth of a mile over the posted speed limit or fail to put on the left turn signal one teensy tiny time, and anyways, there weren't any other cars around for miles.

These same sticklers, however, have no problem with throwing bedtime rules out the window and will, in fact, become giddy when their parents, desperate for quality time together, allow them to stay up until past midnight.

I'm not saying I do that and I hope you won't assume so if my kid, by chance, sleeps through your class the next day. But I will say that sometimes, rules are definitely meant to be broken.

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