

# The Importance of Rule Setting for Your Teen

Rules don't alienate kids. Rules about what's acceptable — from obeying curfews to calling in to tell you where they are — make children feel loved and secure. Rules are also a key ingredient in substance abuse prevention. But rule setting isn't always easy.

Need help setting limits with your teen? Keep these four tips in mind:

1. When kids break rules, parents often overreact with harsh, disproportionate and unenforceable punishment, which undermines the effectiveness of setting limits. Instead, when you first tell your child about a new rule, discuss what the punishment will be and how it will be carried out. Consequences must go hand in hand with limits so that your child understands the cost of breaking the rules. Punishments should be reasonable and related to the violation. For example, if you catch your son and his friends smoking, you might ground him by restricting his social activities for two weeks.
2. Punishments should only involve penalties you discussed before the rule was broken. Also, never issue empty threats. Since we're all more inclined to say things we don't mean when we're upset, it's best to cool off before discussing consequences.
3. Insist that your teen be in adult-supervised situations after school. Encourage her to get involved with youth groups, arts, music, sports, community service and academic clubs. Research shows that adult supervision of adolescents after school is a key factor in substance abuse prevention. An example of an appropriate consequence for violating the after-school adult-supervision rule is loss of an activity of "freedom," like a parent-free trip to the movies or mall.
4. Make it clear that you do not ever want your child to use marijuana. By emphasizing your no-tolerance rule for drug use, you reduce the chances for substance abuse now or later in life. Also, if your teen knows she can always blame you, she will have an excuse to fall back on when tempted or urged by friends to make bad decisions.

The key to preventing substance abuse is setting limits for teens when it comes to drugs and alcohol. If they clearly see the consequences for using these substances, and view them as fair, they are more apt to follow the rules that you have created for them.