

Big Rule, Little Rule

What You Do



SE09 All Interest Areas

Objective 3

Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations

b. Solves social problems

Related Objectives: 1b, 3a, 8b, 9a, 11b, 12b

Background: A classroom community is a safe place where children should be protected from physical and emotional harm. Therefore, the group needs a few basic rules that will create such a safe community. Involving children in deciding on the rules is a powerful way to convey a shared responsibility for life in the classroom community. Children are more likely to understand and follow rules that they helped establish.

- 1. Before you discuss classroom rules with the children, think about what rules are absolutely essential to you. These rules may include maintaining physical safety, respecting the rights and feelings of others, and caring for the classroom environment and the objects and materials within it.**
- 2. Lead a discussion with children that guides them to think about possible problems and identify some key classroom rules as solutions.**
- 3. Restate children's ideas in positive terms so children know what to do rather than focus on what not to do.**

A child says, "No hitting or pushing." The teacher restates, "So we should make sure we touch people gently."

4. Limit the number of rules to three or four and keep them simple, e.g., be safe, be kind to others, take care of the classroom.

5. Post the rules in the meeting area, where you can review them with the children.

6. When enforcing the rules, use the "big rule, little rule" strategy. This strategy pairs one of your three or four main classroom rules (the big rule) with a specific behavior (the little rule) you want to encourage.

"Be kind to others. Use a quiet voice in the Library area."

"Be kind to others. Keep your hands to yourself when you're feeling angry."

"Be safe. Keep your bottom in the chair when you're sitting."

"Be safe. Walk inside the building."

"Take care of our classroom. Put the puzzle back on the shelf when you've finished using it."

Additional Ideas

When enforcing classroom rules, pair the "big rule, little rule" strategy with gestures and visual cues, e.g., "Take care of the classroom and put the books back on the bookshelf, please," says the teacher as she points to the books and then the shelf. Pairing these strategies is especially helpful for children with limited language skills.

English-Language Learners

- Maintain eye contact and ask the child questions she can respond to with either *yes* or *no*. Make sure to give the child enough time to understand the question and answer it.
- Write the classroom rules in children's first languages as well as in English.
- Post pictures with the rules to provide context.
- Demonstrate the rules with gestures and body language.

Including All Children

- Use social stories or provide dramatic play activities to increase the child's understanding of a situation and suggest some appropriate responses.
- Record appropriate responses on a child's communication device.

Questions to Guide Your Observations

- Was the child able to contribute constructively to the discussion? (3b)
- How did the child express her understanding of rules? (1b)
- Did the child listen to others when they shared their ideas? (3a)
- How did the child express his ideas? (9a)

Teaching Sequence

YELLOW	<p>When leading a discussion about rules, keep it short and concrete. Ask specific questions that encourage children to think about your rule categories.</p> <p>"How should we treat each other at school?" "What should we do with our toys and materials when we've finished playing with them?" "How can we stay safe in our classroom?"</p>
GREEN	<p>When leading a discussion about rules, invite the children to talk about what rules are and their purposes.</p> <p>"Our classroom has to be a safe place for everyone. I think we need some rules to make sure that everyone feels safe in our classroom. Does anyone know what a rule is?"</p>
BLUE	<p>As children share their ideas for rules, sort them into your main rule categories as you write them, e.g., maintaining physical safety, respecting the rights and feelings of others, and caring for the classroom environment and materials. Read the lists in each category and label the category with the children's help.</p>
PURPLE	<p>"'Walk inside the building,' 'throw balls outside,' 'wash your hands after you use the bathroom,' 'slide down the slide,' and 'walk up the ladder' are all rules that help us keep our bodies safe. I'm going to write 'Be safe' so we remember how important it is to be safe."</p>