

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

Rules, Responsibilities and Routines

As we move into the second half of the Incredible Years Parenting Programme, there's a shift in emphasis. Before half term we were focussing on promoting positive behaviour, now we are moving on to reducing inappropriate behaviour. All children need big doses of love and acceptance, combined with clearly defined limits and one of the ways we can encourage this is by having rules, responsibilities and routines at home. Here are some things to think about ...

Having a few simple rules at home means that everyone knows where they stand. Children feel safer if they know what is expected of them. Discuss what rules you might want to have as a family; everyone is more likely to follow them if they have been involved in the process. Keep the rules to the really important things that you won't budge on. This is especially important because if rules get broken we have to be prepared to follow through with appropriate consequences. If we have too many rules about things which we aren't that bothered about, we won't follow through with consequences and the rules become irrelevant. Frame rules in a positive way; rather than saying "no hitting" we can say that we will "use kind hands". Some families like to write or type up their rules, perhaps get everyone to sign them and stick them on the fridge. Remember, everyone has to agree to follow the rules once they have been agreed and that includes the grown-ups!

Even very young children can have small responsibilities around the home. This promotes team work, a sense of family and teaches children good habits for the future. Children can be encouraged to put their dirty washing in the washing basket, tidy away their toys, make their beds, help set or clear the table. The earlier we start this, the better; it's really hard to encourage a teenager to start helping around the house when we've always done everything for them. When my children were all living at home we had a "Housework Night" once a week, when we all did different, age-appropriate jobs around the house. I had to be prepared that the Hoovering might not be done as well as if I did it myself, but at least it got done! Once we had all completed our chores we shared a big bar of chocolate together.

Whether we like routines or not, we can all appreciate that getting ready for school on time or getting ready for bed, runs much more smoothly if we have effective routines in place. It's helpful to assess our routines from time to time. Are things still working as well as in the past? Do we need to think about changing the order in which we do things? Would a "visual timetable" help us all to remember what we need to do next? Could we use a reward chart to reinforce children following a routine? Do we just need to get up a bit earlier? Are our routines so rigid that there is no room for flexibility when circumstances change or things go wrong?

Having well established rules, responsibilities and routines should make for happier families but it's really important that as well as putting these crucial systems in place, we continue to hang out with our children. If we are spending regular "Special Time" with our children and remembering to praise them, they will be far more likely to follow rules and to comply with our requests.

Need any help or advice? You can e-mail me at parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk

