

Temporary Rules

It is frequently true that the same behavior is okay in one situation, but not in others. For example, young children need to stay right by their parents in stores but not at home. It is also true that some childish behavior can be tolerated for a limited time, but not continuously. For example, if you've told your 3-year-old to go back to bed 4 times, perhaps 5 times should be his limit. In both cases, what works best to solve this type of problem is called a temporary rule.

Examples of Common Temporary Rules

Situation: Excessive attention-seeking while parent is busy

Rule: Restrict play to specific area

Situation: Repetitive arguing

Rule: Stop talking about specific topic

Situation: Store

Rule: Stay by parent

Situation: Car

Rule: Wear seat belt

Development of the Temporary Rule

The examples below will address minor irritating actions in the home that can only be tolerated for a short amount of time. Note that in all the examples, children are being compliant and not breaking permanent rules:

1. **Arguing:** When we deny a child's request the child will often argue. There is nothing wrong with arguing. Occasionally, the child's argument will be good, in which case it is perfectly fine to accept the child's reasoning and change your mind. However, you can stop pointless arguing with a temporary rule. Follow these steps:
 - a. Explain the reason for your decision as completely as possible and as many times as you feel necessary.
 - b. If the child continues to argue, make a temporary rule: "I don't want to hear one more word about (topic). If you say one more word about (topic) before (time), you will have to sit in time-out."
 - c. Rehearse the rule with the child by asking, "What is it you are not to talk about?" Praise correct answers or give the child the answer and try asking the question again.
 - d. If the child later breaks the rule, say "Since you talked about (topic), you must go to time-out." Use a standard time-out.
 - e. After time-out, rehearse the rule again by reminding the child not to talk about (topic) before (time).
2. **Pestering:** Many times parents are busy with work, company, phone calls, or cooking and simply cannot play with or even talk to young children. Young children, however, love your attention and seem to have endless needs and requests. Read the following example of managing this typical problem:
 - a. Parent is cooking
 - b. Children request parent to play.
 - c. Parent replies: "Not now, I'm cooking dinner. Please play in the family room."

- d. One minute later the children are back. The parent repeats the request; the children obey and are praised.
- e. This cycle repeats itself several more times.
- f. The parent makes a temporary rule: "Okay, kids. If you come in this kitchen one more time before dinner, you will be sent to time-out. What is it you are not to do?" The parent praises the correct answer or gives answers if the children are not responsive.
- g. If either child enters the kitchen before dinner, that child is sent immediately to time-out. After time-out the temporary rule is again rehearsed.

Note: After dinner is served, the rule is discontinued. A permanent "stay-out-of-the-kitchen" rule is obviously absurd.

Repetitive arguing and pestering are common examples of appropriate times to use temporary rules. Many other repetitive, non-dangerous but problematic behaviors can be managed in a similar fashion.