

II. Oral Language Development for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Develop Reasonable and Fair Limits: Rules encourage self-control, protect the health and safety of children, and encourage respectful treatment of others.

State Limits Effectively: Tell children what to do, not what not to do; be as positive as possible.

It is important that we develop simple rules that “encourage self-control, protect the health and safety of children, and encourage respectful treatment of others” in every setting with children. There should never be more than 3 to 5 rules – adults and children have difficulty remembering more than three to five rules. They should be stated positively – “*Tell children what to do, not what not to do.*” Remember, that young children will hear what you say and will not hear the negative that precedes it, so “Don’t run” becomes “Run!” (the exact opposite of what you want).

We must teach the rules to children and remind them of the rules over and over until the rules are internalized and children know what is expected in the setting. Children who experience a number of different settings in a day or week and those whose lives may be chaotic need more assistance and will take longer to respond consistently to the rules. **It is the adult’s responsibility to continue to teach the rules rather than punishing the child for not remembering and following the rules.**

In infant or young toddler environments the rules will be determined by the teacher and stated many times during the day. In helping teachers think about what their rules are in these environments, ask them to think about what are the essential things that will keep children safe and healthy. For example, as children develop language they may be reminded of the “rule”: “Use your words.”

In these settings, as in a family child care setting, you would not expect to see a formal list of rules posted. However, the teacher should be able to state what the rules are, how they are taught to the children, and how they are reinforced throughout the day and week.

In classrooms of older toddlers and preschoolers it is important to have the rules posted with visual reminders of the rules. Teachers must go over these rules many times to assist children in remembering them. When a new activity or material is introduced, go over the rules; when a new person is in the classroom, go over the rules; at the beginning of the day, go over the rules, etc.

Remind teachers that the rules must be clearly stated using simple wording – and telling the children what they are *to do*.

In your session: give teachers time to work in pairs and develop appropriate rules that meet the guidelines (see Session I – Social Emotional Development for the guidelines). For preschool teachers ask them to develop charts with pictures and bring them to the next meeting to share.