

PARENT HANDOUT: HOUSEHOLD RULES AND STRUCTURE



ADHD Skill 1

WHAT ARE HOUSEHOLD RULES AND STRUCTURE?

- ▶ Household Rules and Structure are strategies families use to organize their daily lives, create consistent routines, and set clear expectations at home.
- ▶ Applying rules and structure at home helps children complete everyday tasks, such as sticking to a schedule, following family rules, getting ready for school or bedtime, and completing homework and chores. This helps with children's working memory, organization, and planning skills, which can be especially useful for children with ADHD. This can make life easier and happier for the whole family.
- ▶ Try some of the methods below to increase rules and structure at home and see how they work for your family.

HERE'S HOW TO USE RULES AND STRUCTURE AT HOME

- 1 Stay Organized.** Help your child organize their physical spaces by creating systems to keep things neat. For example, encourage your child to have an assigned place for every object in their room. Then, have them regularly spend a small amount of time cleaning up so that no one area ever gets too messy. Some ways to do this include spending 5-10 minutes each day straightening up their room or backpack, or going through their belongings every few months to donate or put away things that don't get much use.

Tools such as planners, "to do" lists, and calendars can also help children with ADHD. Encourage your child to use organizational aids like these to keep track of important information, such as homework assignments, due dates, and social activities. Offer a daily reminder for your child to use and check their planner. The more they write down, the less they (and you) have to remember! For ways to use these tools to help with your child's homework, see Homework Help (ADHD Skill 2).

You can also use a family planner and/or calendar to track family activities. Put important information where everyone can see it, such as on the refrigerator or near the front door.

- 2 Set Household Rules.** Decide on a short list of rules (3-5) that you want your child to follow. For example, Jack's family has these rules: "1) We keep our hands to ourselves and respect each other's personal space; 2) We speak to each other using kind and calm words; and 3) We focus on each other during meals and not our screens."

In the beginning, it may help to highlight the rules that matter the most to you (so pick your battles!). As your child demonstrates a stronger ability to follow rules, you can make them more challenging or add new ones to the list.

Review the rules as a family, then write them out and post them somewhere everyone can see them. This provides regular reminders about family expectations. Try giving your child directions, keeping the following tips in mind for maximum effectiveness: 1) give simple and clear instructions for one task at a time, 2) make sure you are giving directions when your child is undistracted, and 3) provide rewards for following the rules, and/or implement consequences if they don't. Talk to your child's primary care provider if you need more assistance with this.

HOW TO USE RULES AND STRUCTURE AT HOME (cont.)

- 3 Create routines.** Create detailed routines for your child's usual tasks, such as getting ready for school, doing homework, cleaning a bedroom, or getting ready for bed. List the steps you'd like your child to complete, in the order you'd like them done. This helps your child walk through a "checklist" to start and finish a routine. It also supports their working memory and planning skills and makes your expectations clear.

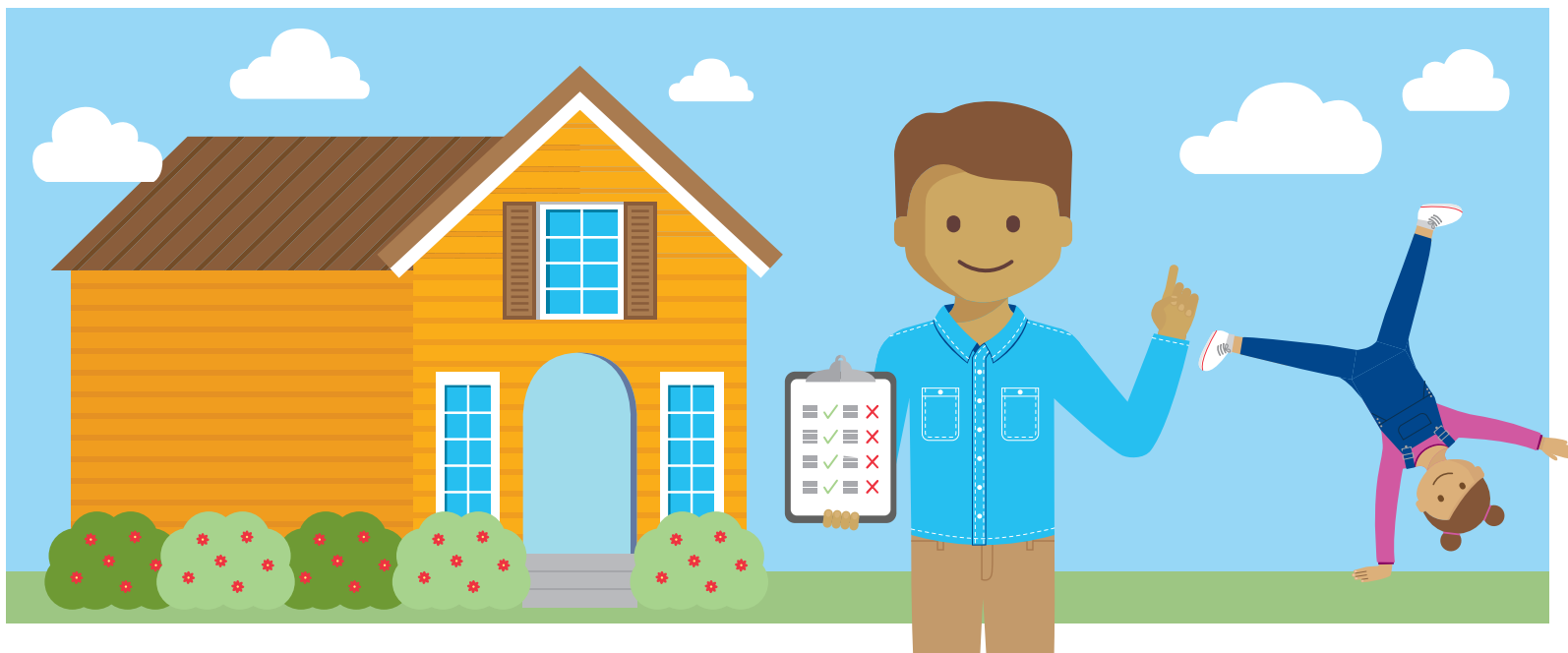
You can also create routines for those tasks your child finds challenging, such as using relaxation skills to control their energy around bedtime or using the skills in this guide. Review our example routines and then create some of your own.

The more consistent a routine is, the easier it is to follow. Once you create a routine that works, encourage your child to practice it and stick with it.

- 4 Discuss with your child.** Be sure to review any new household rules or changes in routines with your child. Go over each one to make sure you're on the same page. The clearer your expectations are, the better your child will be able to meet them.
- 5 Provide positive feedback.** Remember that it can be hard for children with ADHD to follow rules, complete daily routines, and stay organized. As you use the strategies in this packet, be sure to praise your child's efforts. Frequent encouragement will help your child feel good about working hard.

Some children benefit from an extra push to follow rules and routines, such as earning rewards or privileges for a job well done. Rewards that are free, easy, and simple are best (e.g., extra time on a fun activity). Many families use a behavior or sticker chart to track their children's progress toward earning a desired reward.

- 6 Evaluate and adjust as needed.** Every few weeks, review your household rules and structure to evaluate what's working well and what needs tweaking. Get your child's feedback and incorporate their ideas for improvement. They can provide valuable insight into how rules are working or suggestions for improving routines.
- 7 Be patient.** Remember it can take time to learn new habits. Your child may not be able to follow a routine or rule correctly every time, especially when it is new or challenging. Offer your child encouraging reminders until new routines and rules become easier. Be patient with your child and yourself, and show your child you are confident they can do it.





HOW CAN HOUSEHOLD RULES AND STRUCTURE HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ Children with ADHD can find it hard to control their attention, energy level, and/or desire to act on their urges. This can make it difficult to behave appropriately or get things done.
- ▶ Children with ADHD often respond more positively to environments that are structured (i.e., organized and predictable). Families who use consistent rules and structure at home often find that their children are better able to follow directions, stick to routines, and get along with others.
- ▶ Caregivers also frequently notice that as their children's skills and independence increase, they all feel less frustrated. When there are clear guidelines for behavior and regular household routines, children are better able to do things on their own. This leads to fewer arguments and can make your home more positive for the entire family.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

We completed the routine worksheet, but my child keeps forgetting to use it.

Try giving your child gentle reminders to help them remember routines. For instance, you can give verbal reminders, such as prompting your child when it's almost time to start a routine, or visual reminders, like putting notes around the house for them to see. You can also come up with creative ways for them to remember the steps in a routine, such as acronyms or rhymes. As your child makes progress toward memorizing their routines, be sure to offer lots of praise!

When my child breaks a family rule or can't complete a routine, they get frustrated or down on themselves.

Children can feel badly if they have a harder time than their siblings or peers. When your child gets discouraged, cheer them on by praising their effort and highlighting their successes. Go through the How to Feel Good About Myself worksheets (ADHD Skill 9) together, and see if those strategies help your child identify their strengths and feel better about themselves.

Your child may also benefit from practicing coping skills to manage negative thoughts and emotions. For example, they can try to problem solve, use relaxation skills, or challenge overly negative thoughts. Practicing skills like these can help children take active steps to feel better and more in control. Talk to your primary care provider if you would like more guidance in this area.

Even with a lot of structure and routine, my child has a hard time staying on task and getting things done.

Some children find organization and routine more challenging than others. Try some of the other strategies in this guide to improve your child's working memory, organization, planning, and time management. Building these skills may help your child respond better to structure and routine. Your child's teacher may also have suggestions based on what they've seen work well in the classroom.

My child doesn't like to follow rules!

Some children respond to rules by acting out, and this can occur more often when a child has ADHD. Try using some of your parenting "tricks", such as giving your child clear and simple directions and using rewards and/or consequences to motivate them to make better choices in response.

If your child's ADHD symptoms make it difficult for them to do the things they want or need to do, they may need additional support, such as medication and/or therapy. Check in with your child's primary care provider about medication and whether a referral to a behavioral health specialist could be helpful.