

STEP 2

cool tools for family rules

Use these cool tools
to make your own Family Rules

Why?

Children need to make good decisions to stay safe. Having family rules can help. They can make sure that both parents and children know what can and can't be done – especially if parents aren't there.

But good rules are not just about telling children what to do. If you want your children to accept and follow the rules, then you need to include them in **MAKING** the rules. These **Cool Tools for Family Rules** can help your family work out some ways to help your kids make confident, safe and responsible decisions – whether or not you're around.

what territory kids say...

"Having rules can make you feel safer."
(boy aged 10)

"Rules can help you know what you can do and
can't do." (girl aged 11)

"Rules can make it fair for everyone."
(girl aged 8)



1. Include your child when making your family's rules.

Kids are much more likely to follow rules they have helped to make.

2. Keep the rules simple and clear so everyone understands them.

It's no good just saying "Be careful". The rule needs to be something like: "Only answer the door if an adult is home".

3. Make your rules positive.

For example: "You can watch TV when your homework's done", rather than "Don't watch TV".

4. Give good reasons for each rule.

Kids are more likely to follow rules that have good reasons.

5. Have just a few rules and stick to them.

Too many rules can be confusing.

6. Be clear about what will happen if your child doesn't follow a rule.

Your child could help decide this when the rule is made.

7. Put your family's rules up where you can all see them.

This is especially important with any rules for when kids are at home on their own.

story

leaving the house

George is at home with his little sister Stephanie when his friends come around and ask him to play footy in the park. George really wants to go, but he has a problem. His parents have told him not to go out if they're not home. He's also been told to look after his little sister.

George now has to decide what to do.

We'd like to think that George will do what he's been told to do. But it can be hard for kids to say "NO". They can feel pressure to forget all the rules and just do what feels good at the time.

Why should I have to stay here all the time?

They always tell me what to do!

My friends will think I'm a baby if I don't go.

I hate having to look after my sister!



I'll just go – they don't even have to know.

Will I leave them a note?

Will I call them and ask?

We made this rule so that mum and dad would know where we are and that we're OK.



Nah, I'll just tell my friends I'll see them at school tomorrow.



If George has been told by his parents to stay home and look after his little sister, he might feel bossed around and resentful and ignore the rule.

But if George's parents have followed the **Cool Tools for Family Rules**, George will have helped make the rule and will know why it's important.



parent tips

Teach your children HOW to say "NO" to friends. For example, look at the friend and say something like: "NO. I don't want to. Let's do ... instead".

Here are some ideas to help your children practise. Make up some more with your children and discuss them.

- You're playing on the computer and your friend says: "Let's try a chat room". (Your Family Rule says "NO" to chat rooms.)
- Your friend says: "Let's microwave some noodles". Your Family Rule says "NO" to cooking when your parents aren't home.

story

answering the door

12-year-old Rosie is at home when a man comes to the door. Rosie's mum is fast asleep and her dad is out. She has seen this man at her house before. He says: "Your Dad asked me to put this box inside". Rosie feels a bit scared about letting the man in, but she's worried she'll get into trouble if she says "NO".

What Rosie does next could keep her safe – or maybe put her in danger.



parent tips

1. A family rule about answering the door could help Rosie make a safe and confident decision.
2. Help your children PRACTISE what to say and do if someone comes to the door. Think of different "stories", such as someone who says they're looking for a kitten or their car's broken down.
3. Teach your children that it's OK to say "NO" to ANYONE who wants to come inside when an adult is not at home or available. This includes people in uniform, such as police, Australia Post workers or meter readers.
4. Teach your children what to do if someone pressures them to let them in. Maybe they could ring someone, or call for help.
5. Praise your children when they follow the rules. For example, if Rosie follows a rule to keep the door closed, she will stay safe – even if her dad has asked for the package to be delivered.
6. Try not to be too harsh if your child breaks a rule. Talk about it and about why the rule is important.

make your family rules

In the kitchen

For kids to be safe in the kitchen when adults aren't around it's a good idea to provide food that doesn't need much preparation or any cooking. This can help to prevent cuts, burns and scalds.

Keep the following points in mind when deciding on your rules for kids in the kitchen.

- Kitchen knives are the cause of most cuts to fingers that need stitches.
- Toasters can be dangerous for kids if they press a wrong button or the bread gets stuck. Make sure they know what to do if this happens. Sandwiches might be a safer choice.
- Think carefully about whether you want your kids to use the stove or oven, especially if younger children are around. If a pot's knocked or hot food's spilt, it can cause serious burns or scalds.
- Microwaves might seem a safe choice, but food can get very hot, especially if it's cooked too long. Lots of kids in the NT end up in hospital with burns to their mouths or bodies from cooking and eating 2-minute noodles.

Computer, TV, Video/DVD

Think about having a rule for if things stop working, so kids don't try to fix things themselves. This could be dangerous.

Water safety

The NT has one of the highest rates of drowning in Australia. Even kids who are good swimmers have drowned. Kidsafe NT recommends that children are not allowed in the pool or spa when parents are not around. Kids might try unsafe tricks and it's not safe to expect older kids to look after younger ones in the pool. Make sure you have isolation fencing and secure gates. Check out the Northern Territory regulations with a Pool Safety Advisor on **1300 301 059** or email watersafety@nt.gov.au

parent tips

Have a look at the "Parent Tips" (see left).

Now get together and take a look at the "Our Family Rules!" chart (see over) or make up your own. Have a talk about each item and:

- Decide with your children what the rules will be.
- Talk about the reasons why each thing is OK or not OK to do.
- Decide what will happen if a child doesn't follow a rule.
- Mark off each box to show which things each child IS allowed to do. Kids might like to use stickers or stars – you could have a different colour for each child.
- Talk about rules that might be different depending on whether adults are at home or not.
- Write down any extra rules for your family.
- Look at the rules again as your children grow older.

This chart is now part of your family's **7 Steps to Safety**. Put it up where everyone can see it!

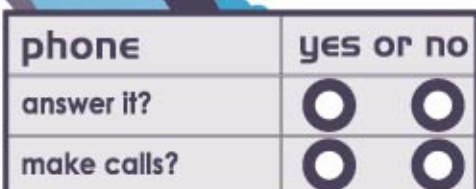
Now you'll all know
"YES or NO – What's the GO?"
for kids around your house.



yes or no – what's the go?



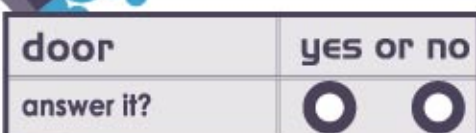
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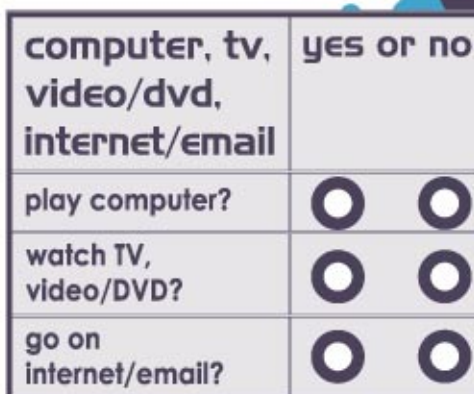
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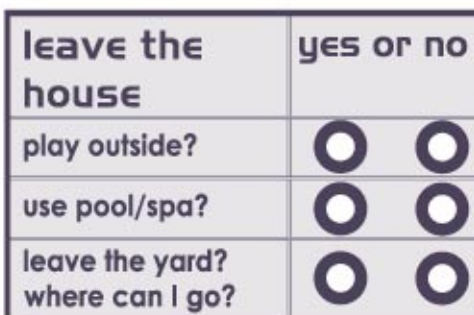
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Acknowledgements

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Sources

7 Steps to Safety was developed in consultation with Northern Territory parents, children and service providers and from current Australian and overseas literature. Kit developed by Meron Looney, Project Worker, "Family Safety Plan Kit". Editorial assistance by Ros Moye. For further information contact Office of Children and Families, Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services, Australia on 1800 005 485 or email families@nt.gov.au

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