



## Why We Need Classroom Rules

A working classroom is one where students feel free to be open, make mistakes, and even have fun. But this can only happen if there is a clear expectation of the classroom rules.

Structure and rules not only make the classroom run more smoothly, they're also essential. Trying to create responsible, cooperative students without age-appropriate boundaries is like trying to raise a goldfish outside its fishbowl. Far from squelching the spirit, rules are needed for students to flourish:

**They prepare students for the real world.** Limits provide a framework so students can understand what's expected... and what will happen if they don't comply. Having expectations, such as "no hitting" or "clean your workspace," and then enforcing consequences if those rules aren't met, will help students adapt better to new situations.

**They teach students how to socialize.** Some rules may just be about showing respect – such as raising your hand, or using polite language ("please", "thank you"). If you make it a policy to be respectful, students will not only be more pleasant to be around, but will also learn appropriate ways to behave in any situation.

**They provide a sense of order.** Certain rules help a student predict what will come next, such as "Stand in a straight line to walk down the hall." Even little students tend to cooperate better when they know what's required of them, and that helps them gain a sense of belonging.

**They make students feel competent.** Clear limits tend to reduce power struggles because students don't need to constantly test teachers to discover where the boundaries lie. This doesn't mean students won't sometimes test the limits; it just means they'll quickly realize it won't get them anywhere.

**Rules reassure students.** No matter how often students act as if they want to be in control, having too much power is frightening, especially when you're not ready. Things work better for everyone when an adult is in charge, and students count on teachers to guide their behavior (even if they won't admit it).

**They help keep students safe.** Students -- and some grown-ups -- often grumble as if rules were made by a bunch of spoilsports. The truth is that many rules, like many laws, are designed for protection: "Keep your hands to yourself" or "No running in the halls." When we insist that students abide by safety rules, we help prepare them to follow the law.

**They boost confidence.** If students gradually have limits expanded through the years, they'll become more confident about emerging independence and their ability to handle responsibility. Young students take great pride in achieving simple milestones like returning a book to the library on their own.