

## Different Strokes for Different Folks

“But Sammy’s mother let’s them eat ice cream for breakfast.”

One of our parenting and teaching challenges is to explain the rules, not only in our own homes and classrooms, but in those places where we have no control.

As our children’s friends and relatives visit our homes, we’ll hear the phrase, more than once, “But we don’t do that at our house!” The temptation may be to defend our position, or modify our stance to mollify the protesters. All we have to remember, though, is that the rules we have in our family are the rules we have for our family. Other people in other places have different rules that meet their needs and desires. The simple statement, “These are our family rules”, should help you hold firm in what may seem a storm of complaints.

Objections to your house rules are more about children broadening their perspective of the world, and experiencing another way of living. With their complaining children aren’t asking you to change your rules as much as they are verbalizing the differences they see, and will incorporate into their lives. As children learn, here are some situations you may have to handle.

**The resistance.** “We don’t do that at our house” needs to be interpreted as either the child’s call to do it his or her way, or a request for help in understanding how to do it your way. Say, “Yes, the rules are different at our house. But when you are at our house you play by our rules.” Helping to clean up the kitchen or making your bed can look very different in a new place.

**The guilt trip.** “At Susie’s house they always go to bed at midnight.” Be wary of those phrases that use always, never, and everyone. They are the major road signs on the guilt trip. Don’t feel that you have to defend your 7:30 bedtime. Simply agree that yes, they do it differently at Susie’s house. But at our house we go to bed at 7:30 on school nights. Differences acknowledged, rules restated, and back on the road again.

**Reminders.** We all forget the rules and friendly reminders are usually all that is needed to help a child change behavior. If snacks are to be eaten at the kitchen table at grandmother’s house, a quick question can ease the transition. “Do you remember where to eat snack at Grandma’s?” Questions work better at engaging the child in the process versus a recitation of the rules.

**Changing the rules.** Sometimes we discover a new way of doing things that causes us to change. We need to model flexibility in a way that doesn’t seem capricious and arbitrary. When

we see a good idea that benefits our family, we need to be open to change. Perhaps we start to compost because of the Jones' down the street, and the rules for how we clean up after dinner change. We need to model that when a better idea comes our way, we'll try it.

**Celebrate differences.** Thank goodness not every place is the same. Toast the fact that there are many ways of living, eating, sleeping, playing, working, going to school, and on and on. How unexciting and uneventful the world would be if everyone did everything the same way.

**Celebrate similarities.** People all over the world have similar needs and meet those needs based on the resources and culture available to them. Shelter, food, clothes, furniture, transportation, and relationships will have similarities because all people have a need for affection, safety, nutrition, comfort and mobility.

Yes, the rules are different and I'm glad that someone, somewhere, get's to eat ice cream for breakfast. But at our house we...

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