

# THREE GOOD REASONS PARENTS DON'T SET OR MONITOR RULES

February 23, 2017

Last week I ran a seminar for parents at a local primary school. I had almost got to the end of the night and we were discussing rules for kids. As parents, we know that part of our job is to set, monitor and enforce rules for our children. We have to do this to help them manage life, stay safe, build relationships with others, cope with school and learn skills.

But doing this rule setting, monitoring and enforcing work as a parent is sometimes exhausting and difficult. At the end of this seminar last week, with just minutes to go, a parent put up their hand and said something like this: "I've really tried to set rules, but I just can't seem to make them work. Any ideas?".

My brain went into overdrive as I started trying to think about what I could say in 3 minutes which would be useful. Which concepts, reassurance, advice could I give quickly to give her something to go away with? I decided to skip the theory and go straight to what I think is the heart of this stuff.

I started with reminding her that she was entirely normal. We all feel the same. It's a lonely job as parents, but it's a mistake to think that we are alone in our struggles.

Second - I asked her to take a minute to reflect on what was the hardest aspect for her personally in setting up, monitoring or enforcing rules with her kids.

I told her that in my experience there are three very good reasons as parents we fail to either set, monitor and enforce rules. Here they are.

1. **Doubt.**
2. **Fear**
3. **Fatigue**

Knowing which one is playing a part in our decision making can be really helpful. Let's look at them in more detail.

## DOUBT

As parents we are often uncertain about whether a rule is reasonable, useful or important. When setting or enforcing a rule becomes difficult (and when is it easy???) we start to second guess ourselves. "Maybe this isn't important after all? Maybe I'm being unreasonable?" Kids and teens are often very persuasive and they are pretty talented at making us doubt our decisions when they don't like a rule!

## FEAR

Maybe we have no doubt about the appropriateness of the rule. We are convinced that it's going to be beneficial for our child in the long term. However, the idea of actually monitoring and enforcing it worries us. What if I do this and my child/teen gets so upset they get hurt somehow? Maybe I'm ruining their childhood? Maybe they deserve a break? Maybe they will have such a huge meltdown that they'll have some kind of nervous breakdown? Maybe I will!? Fear and concern stop us from following through.

## FATIGUE

And finally, there's fatigue. Sometimes there's no doubt, no worry or fear - but honestly, we are just SO. TIRED. So very tired. We know that the rule will become another fight, another battle and we just don't have it in us to follow it up. Fatigue convinces us to ignore the issue.

## DOUBT, FEAR AND FATIGUE: REASONS TO RECONSIDER?

Should we always 'power on through' doubt, fear and fatigue and set, monitor and enforce rules anyway? Sometimes. But sometimes not. I believe doubt, fear and fatigue are all good reasons to take a second look at the rule we are trying to set or enforce.

It may actually be that the rule we are considering or struggling with is not a useful one. In which case we should revise it. It's okay to back down or change our mind about rules. As parents we do make mistakes,

On the other hand, maybe we DO need to set the rule we are considering, or have another go at monitoring and enforcing an old one we already had.

If this is the case, we probably need to take some time to reduce doubt, make a plan to deal with fear or find a way to reduce fatigue. There are ways of doing each of these things. However, that's another article for another day.

For now, just start with this. Next time you find yourself failing to set a rule - or enforce it - just stop to notice why. Is it doubt, fear or fatigue?

This may help you decide what to do next.