

SAFETY RECALL: Suffocation Hazard



PLAYSKOOL voluntarily recalls TEAM TALKIN' TOOL BENCH toys.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



Search ClubMom: [Log out](#) [SEARCH](#)

On My Mind: [Share or vent with other moms with On My Mind posts.](#)

For Moms. By Moms.

[HOME](#) | [YOUR KIDS](#) | [YOUR LIFE](#) | [MOM-TO-MOM](#) | [REWARDS & FUN](#) | [MY ACCOUNT](#)

[Home](#) | [Your Kids](#) | [Teens \(13-17\)](#) | [Behavior & Discipline](#)



Rating: ★★★★★ Rated by 2 Moms

[Printable Version](#)

[Email to a Friend](#)

- [Pregnancy](#)
- [Babies \(0-12 Months\)](#)
- [Toddlers \(1-2\)](#)
- [Preschoolers \(3-4\)](#)
- [School-Age Kids \(5-8\)](#)
- [Twins \(9-12\)](#)
- [Teens \(13-17\)](#)
- [Adult Children \(18+\)](#)
- [Adoption](#)
- [Kids' Health](#)
- [Learning & Education](#)

Ground Rules

Reasonable boundaries for your teen will protect your family

By ClubMom Teens Expert [Susan Smith Kuczarski](#)



Dr. Susan Smith Kuczarski is an educator who teaches teachers, a cultural anthropologist who studies family culture, a sociologist who views families as small interactive groups, and a parent who has experienced families firsthand. She has done extensive research directly related to how children learn social skills and how teens become leaders. She is the author of three books, including The Sacred Flight of the Teenager: A Parent's Guide to Stepping Back and Letting Go. She lives in Chicago with her husband and three sons.

[Learn more about Susan](#)
[Visit Susan's Website](#)
 ClubMom Members: Purchase one of Susan's books at Barnes & Noble and earn 5 Points per dollar:
[Family Bond: Inspiring Tips for Creating a Closer Family](#)
[Values-Based Leadership](#)
[The Sacred Flight of the Teenager](#)



What is the price of love?



THE HOME DEPOT Value Center
 1,000s of NEW Items
[SHOP NOW](#)

Family systems can be closed or open when it comes to ground rules. In a closed system, teens are given orders, threats, and warnings by their parents. In a totally open family, teens are allowed to do what they want, and parents often throw up their hands when the going gets tough. The first approach puts teens on a short leash, while the second puts them on one that is too long. Of course, the ideal system is somewhere in between — structured enough to promote healthy boundaries, yet flexible enough to allow for growth and exploration. There needs to be a balance between structure and flexibility. Teens need enough direction and control to guide them, yet enough room to let them breathe, learn and discover.

We want to nurture creative, independent adults, but also create a family culture where everyone is respected. Setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries helps to protect each family member's dignity (and sanity!) and to preserve reasonable harmony in your home. Delineate these boundaries by (1) setting rules and guidelines, (2) communicating and reinforcing rules, (3) executing consequences for



broken rules, and (4) upping the ante for serious or repeat offenses.

Set ground rules in place. If you haven't done so already, put some practical boundaries or parameters in place. These are the basic behaviors required by teens. Here are some that we adopted on our home front.

Ground Rules:

1. Interact and communicate with each family member (brothers in particular) with genuine compassion and kindness.
2. Complete high school and get passing grades. (If a teen is college-bound, parents may want to keep a higher standard.)
3. Check in nightly.
4. No drinking, smoking, drugs, or any other illegal activities.
5. Eat, sleep, exercise, and keep clothes clean — so we know these basics are covered.
6. Do assigned chores at home.
7. Be available to help in case of family emergencies.

Know that teens hate fixed, out-of-date, and inhuman rules with a passion. (Have you noticed?) They want to be involved in the process of establishing them. So sit down with your teens and work together on a list of specific rules for your household. Give them the opportunity to come up with ideas, add to the list, and to comment on anything related to each of the rules. Also consider special times where your teen needs an exception to a rule — a friend is moving away, a once-a-year dance is held, a final event is celebrated (e.g., graduation, end of swim team). And as teens become older, don't forget to accommodate their eagerness to stay out later. The goal is to arrive at a mutually generated and agreed upon set of rules, but one that leaves the door open for adjusting them a bit down the road. Teens want the freedom to change the rules, so listen to their input, and be open to revising the rules as it makes sense to you to do so.

As you discuss your ground rules, remember: just as teens need limits and boundaries, they need also to hear the word "no!" and the reasons why they can't do something. Try to give clear, straight answers. Be calm and firm, but hold to your point of view. For example, say "Under no circumstances can driving occur while drinking." Or, "It is imperative that we know where you are at night in case we have to reach you, so give us detailed information when you check in." Or, "If you forget to do your chores, we all suffer."

Execute consequences of broken rules. Your teen will be more likely to learn something about himself if he has input, than if the consequences for broken rules are handed down from above. So work with your teen to find agreement on the consequences of breaking the rules — and breaking them repeatedly too. If agreement can't be reached, negotiate, or even try what your teen wants. I'm always willing to go along with a teen's request, or at least give it a try, if it sounds even remotely workable. I'm happy to err on the side of taking a little risk — to teach something or to allow for an even greater good.

So what do you do when rules are broken? The consequences should match the "criticality" of the rule. Rules go into different buckets — different categories. Rules involving safety, legality, threats to health, or harm to others (e.g., drinking and driving) have different consequences than rules that are good for you or your family (e.g., doing your house chores). If your teen doesn't do his chores, try talk first, like — "You don't get it. As a member of our family, your help and involvement are greatly needed. If you forget to take out the garbage, it's sitting around for one more week." (For more serious offenses, you may need to bring in a consequence right away. See below.)

Up the ante. After talk and explanation have been exhausted, if your teen still doesn't keep the rule, then you must up the ante. Remove allowance, time with friends, or anything else that has great importance in their lives. If your teen drinks while driving, the consequence is to take away car privileges. Above anything else, your teen must know where the boundaries lie.

Let's take the example of curfews and explore how to set, maintain, execute the consequences of broken rules.

Setting rules: Involve your teen in setting her night time boundaries. At 14, you may want her home at 11:00 p.m. She wants 11:30. Reach a middle point and agree on it — say 11:15. Or if she has good reasons for 11:30, go with it. You don't always have to be the "winner." (A friend's "curfew time" always enters into the picture; it is fine to not consider it, unless this becomes a compelling reason for your

teen's viewpoint. Then you should.) As your teen gets older, this arrival hour is negotiated toward an increasingly later time. For example, at sixteen, it may be 12:30 a.m. The important point is that you reach an agreement together as to this time.

Communicating and reinforcing rules: Be sure your teen knows the rules. Use more formal communication tools, like posting the agreed-upon time on the refrigerator with colorful magnets for all to see. Also use informal measures, like verbal reminders before leaving the house: "Look forward to seeing you around midnight!"

Executing consequences of broken rules: When she is late, give her the freedom and opportunity to comment and explain. Maybe unplanned events occurred, like a flat tire, or a surprise party for your teen, causing an unpredictable delay. See if you can find a solution to the problem together. Keep your discussion open. Ask her what she feels should be done. It's worth exploring a teen's "solution." I like going with a teen's idea for a first infraction of the rule. It puts the responsibility back in their court. It also communicates that you are willing to let them have one more try at their request, before moving to the next more serious step.

Up the ante: If a teen still breaks the curfew rule, let the agreed-upon consequences fall into place because talking was ineffective. Since you and your teen have already discussed these consequences, you are not forced into the position of playing the "heavy." The consequence we set up with our teens for curfew violations is one that our teens chose: If they fail to call and let us know where they are (in case we need to reach them) and the time they will be home, then they have to stay home next time they want to go out. Other parents I know do the following: ground a teen to the home front, take away car keys, or remove home privileges, including TV, computer, and telephone use. If your teen has missed curfew because drinking or drugs were involved, then the consequences are more serious. Simply enact the consequences that you and your teen agreed upon when setting up the rule. You'll find that you don't need to be heavy handed but can do so lovingly, even kidding some.

Set reasonable boundaries to protect your family culture. Give your teen a key role in setting the boundaries; communicate clearly what the boundaries are, through written and verbal reinforcements; execute the consequences of broken rules — and up the ante when necessary.

[More below...](#)

[ClubMom Sponsored Links](#)

[\(Advertise Here\)](#)

Need A Book Publisher?

Get A Free Publishing Kit Now! We Are A Random House Ventures Partner.
www.xlibris.com

Top Paid Jobs Online

Survey companies paying \$25-\$150/hr. No experience. Free to join...
www.SurveyLot.com

Copyright by Susan Smith Kuczumarski, Ed.D.

Rating: ★★★★★ Rated by 2 Moms

Rate This Story: ★★★★★
Click on a star (a 5-star rating is the best).

Moms are talking! Read what other moms are saying about this article.

ClubMom member ohleen from Keller, TX wrote on Aug 27, 2006 at 03:08 AM:
[View ohleen's Profile](#)

I was waiting nervously for my teen to come home after curfew as I read this article. It helped me to not over-react with grounding this time, but to talk about it with him--decide what should be done together. I