

House Rules

In PCIT, house rules outline clear “to-do” behaviors for serious behaviors that do not respond to planned ignoring or occur too quickly for a direct command. They are used sparingly and require immediate, consistent follow-through.

Introducing House Rules

- Explain the house rule at a calm, neutral time (not after a misbehavior).
- Example: “We have a new house rule. You must keep your hands and feet to yourself. Gentle touch is okay. If you hit or kick, you will go to timeout.”
- Review the house rule each morning for the **first three days**.

Teaching the Rule

- If the rule includes a concept your child may not understand, spend **1–3 days labeling the behavior** before enforcing the rule.
- Example: If the rule is accept parents’ decisions (no sassing), calmly label the behavior: “That is sassing.”
- After labeling, explain the rule and begin using timeout when it is broken.

Reinforcing the Rule

- Catch your child following the house rule and give **labeled praise**
- Example: “Great job saying *okay* when I said *no*.”

When a Rule Is Broken

- **No warnings** are given for house rules.
- When the behavior occurs, the child goes **immediately** to timeout until quiet and still.
- Timeout must be used **every time** the rule is broken.
- While escorting the child to timeout, say only: “Timeout for hitting.” or “Timeout for sassing.”
- Do not add discussion or explanation.

Ending Timeout

- After the child is **quiet and still** for 10–60 seconds (based on age), say: “Good job being quiet. Timeout is over.”
- Briefly **restate** the rule: “Gentle touch only.” or “Say okay when I give you an answer.”

Practice and Praise

- Return the child to a similar situation to practice the rule and earn praise.
- Example: If a child hit to get a toy: (1) Give the toy back to the sibling; (2) Coach the child to ask using words.
- Praise the child for keeping hands to themselves or using words. Praise the sibling for sharing when appropriate.

Adding Rules: New house rules may be added gradually as earlier rules improve. Children should typically have no more than 2–3 house rules at a time.