

Good or Bad Parent? You decide!

Family Rules with Kids in Lockdown

To entertain your kids at home you don't have to be a professional arts & crafts teacher, drill instructor or party clown, but a bit of everything. In my previous articles I already gave a little insight of [how we deal with self-isolation](#) and about our life as [home office family](#). This one is going to be about the master task of them all: How to keep your kids busy at home all day long. Of course it helps that my husband John has been working from home full time and that I am a [stay-at-home mom](#) for over 3 years now. So we are well used to being 'locked in the house' together 24/7. I have put together 5 simple family rules that have proven to be successful for us well before self-isolation and lockdown.

Business as Usual

I am either the best mother in the world or the worst. Maybe it has to do with the way our kids are, or the family rules we raise them by. Or a bit of both. Possibly the trouble is still ahead of us when our kids reach school age. Who knows. But my life as full-time mammy of a 3-year old and an 8 1/2-months old is pretty relaxed most of the time. (A line that the majority of temporary, involuntary stay-at-home moms probably want to kill me for.)

Not even the [Covid19 restrictions](#) are going to change that. Our kids are barely affected by them. Despite the fact they are not able to see their grandparents and friends, they don't really suffer under the situation. Therefore we don't see the need to overcompensate with special activities or new toys. In our house it's business as usual with our good old family rules.

Often the Problem is Me

When days turn out to be more challenging than others it is quite often because of me. Of course the little ones have their phases, throw the odd temper tantrum or can be demanding and needy at times. However most of the time they are their usual self and act appropriately for their age. When I am more irritable, get snappy or impatient quicker, it is me who is having a bad day.

So 'rule zero' of our family rules is to "clean your own side of the street first" as they say and check your own mood. Am I putting my grumpiness on them or do I give off a vibe that makes the kids acting up? It doesn't always help to change the situation, but it makes it easier for me to not let it out on my children.

What to do with your Kids at Home?

I am not going to jump on the 'creative waggon' and give advice about what you can handcraft or invent with your children. (Others are much better at that – check out [SENSEable Tots](#) Website or [Instagram](#).) I rather want to write about how little kids need to entertain themselves and how I make life easy for myself as stay-at-home mom. So here are our (genius?) rules of (lazy?) parenting:

Family Rule # 1: Don't make the Kids the Centre of your Life

Our kids mean everything to me. I am their main caretaker and I couldn't picture spending my day-to-day life without them. Sounds pretty much as if they *were* the centre of my life and everything evolves around them, right?

In a way it does. However we (that is my husband and myself) do believe that it is important to show them that there are boundaries and they are *not* the centre of the universe all the time. They are only little now, but it is our responsibility

to prepare them for life in society later. Our family is their small society and we need to teach them how to behave socially for their own sake. It would be unfair if our family rules completely differed from the ones they have to stick to in society later on, wouldn't it?

Therefore we think it is okay to say „Hang on for a minute, Mammy and Daddy are talking“. Or „Dinner will be ready in a couple of minutes, we'll wait until everybody is at the table“. Even a simple “No you can't have/do that right now” is ok. Our 3-year old is able to understand that. Once we overcame the initial protest and moaning about it, it paid off. In return we give them many moments when they *are* the centre of attention.

Family Rule # 2: Stick to the Rules

We think that kids need a routine and above all rules. It helps them and gives them something to rely on when things around them change. Like during a pandemic for example. Family rules are easily set up. Sticking to them and enforcing them as a parent is the difficult bit.

Nobody likes to see their child crying over something. On the contrary, it actually makes me nervous seeing them frustrated. But for us that is not always a reason to give in. If they were about to do something dangerous we wouldn't give in either and let them touch the hot cooker. So why not do the same with non-hazardous things?

There are many positive ways to enforce rules, without any pressure or shouting (well, most of the time). We always try to explain things child-appropriately or tell them why it is important to obey a certain rule. Rarely we say no without any further explanation.

The best way to enforce family rules still is to be a good example and stick to your own rules. This way we have taught our eldest that tidying up is part of the process and has to

be done every night. Daddy does it with the tools after working in the garden. Hence we do it with the toys inside. Some nights there is still some arguing going on about it, but together we always get it done. Be it in a playful way, as a competition or by convincing them (we try to avoid blackmail :-)!). There are exceptions to the rule, but not very often.

Family Rule # 3: Integrate them into your daily Schedule (and not the other way around)

Chicken or egg – I don't know which came first. Is it our children's character or is it the way we raise them? Probably a bit of both. Anyway, somehow we managed to match-up our boy's body clock with mine. Already as a baby he stayed in his bed after waking up in the morning and played quietly by himself. This way I have always had a chance of a lie-in. I am a night owl and like to take it easy in the morning. So it perfectly suits me that our firstborn turned out the same, which definitely contributes to making my life as a full-time mammy easier.

When we have chores to do, the kids help. Small kids love helping. Even when it meant more work for me at the beginning, it was well worth putting the extra time and patience in. Sometimes putting up one load of laundry took me forever because my little 'helper' wanted to do it himself. He took it down again or put it back in the washing machine. Over time he developed into a *real* helper though. He is now fetching the laundry basket for me, loads the machine and switches it on and off (all under supervision of course).

It was the exact opposite with outdoor chores. He never liked messy play in the garden and wasn't very keen on being outside at all. It was John who put a lot of time and effort in to making him roll around in the grass and getting his hands dirty. Now they both do garden work together on a regular basis and love it.

This way stuff around the house gets done and the kids are busy and enjoy themselves. Sometimes all it takes is a little encouragement and a gentle nudge in the bottom.

Family Rule # 4: Give them the real Stuff

This family rule is pretty much a logical consequence of the previous one. Children usually want to copy what their parents do. But do they need a toy in miniature for everything? I don't think so.

Our 3-year old loves playing 'kitchen'. Instead of buying him a toy one, we let him use the real kitchen stuff. So he just gets some pots and wooden spoons from the presses and makes 'dinner'. With socks over his hands alias oven gloves he takes out the 'hot dishes' from underneath the dinner table which serves as oven.

One day we built him a little kitchen in the garden using old boxes, sticks and stones. He was busy all afternoon cooking with water and leaves in empty plastic containers. When he was finished we just returned everything and saved us yet another toy that sooner or later gets abandoned in the corner.

Principle # 5: Let them be bored

Sometimes the kids don't need anything at all to play with. Whilst the family rules says so, they are never really bored. Not in our house anyway.

Our toddler is great at inventing his own games or a little fantasy world where we all play a part. One day he is running through the house pretending to catch wild animals. The next moment he is an ambulance driver copying the sirene or a cowboy shouting yeehaaa and throwing his imaginary hat. If he wasn't constantly talking to himself, I wouldn't even know what game he was on.

Obviously I am always around, but most of the time it is enough for him when I dip in and out of the play. Often he is

in his rooms for ages playing by himself and I just need to quietly check on him once in a while. Slowly but surely he is involving his little sister too, 'reading' to her and looking after her like he used to do it with his cuddly toys.

That is when I get time to write my blog articles! Great, isn't it? Well, until clean-up time. The kids usually turn the house into a mess, occupying each room sooner or later throughout the day. But that's fine. We just refer to Family #2 in the evening and tidy up together in no time :-).

Good or Bad Parent?

To come back to the opening question: Am I a bad parent because I don't constantly play with my children or come up with new creative ideas to keep them occupied? Because I let them be 'bored' rather than switching on the TV for them? Or am I a good parent because I try to interfere as little as possible and let them do their own thing within our set boundaries and family rules? You decide!

P.S.:

After my husband proofread this article he said that I should probably add that it took me a while to be this 'relaxed mom' I am talking about and that quite often I still worry a bit too much even though things are running smoothly. That comes with the job as a mammy, I guess. They are our *family rules* after all, so a lot of them reflect my husband's chilled manner to deal with things rather than mine. Therefore we agreed on adding © John Payne ;-).