

Using Rule Cards to Promote Social and Emotional Development

“Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.”
– Robert Fulghum

The development of social and emotional skills is crucial to a child’s success in school and an integral part of school readiness. Recent research indicates that these skills may be more important to children’s later success than the academic and cognitive skills they develop during their preschool years.

The Private Industry Council, Inc. (PIC), Westmoreland and Fayette Counties, Greensburg, PA, was one of the Centers of Excellence funded by the Office of Head Start in 2010. During their five-year grant, they modified concepts and strategies from the Incredible Years Curriculum. They were then adapted into a PIC-administered Head Start program. The updated curriculum was designed to develop social and emotional skills to ensure that each child succeeds when he or she begins kindergarten.

The Rule Cards can be used with preschool children to help them learn expected behavior in a group setting. There are eight cards in the set, but we have selected seven of these for the preschool age group. To make the Rule Cards more relevant in the classroom, children can be involved in developing the rules! The teacher or caregiver might wish to take pictures of children in the class being “caught” demonstrating the rules.

By posting the rules, you are clearly communicating the expected behaviors, shaping positive behavior, and establishing clear expectations. You might display poster-size versions as you introduce Rule Cards with behaviors that are especially relevant to the children. Review them in a small group from time to time. It is important to model the rules, or expected behaviors, and have the children show what that behavior looks like. For example, the “Walk” rule may prompt a group walk around the classroom with the teacher leading. The teacher may point out that walking feet are quiet and slow. Children share where to use your walking feet. When focusing children’s attention or reminding them of appropriate classroom behaviors, the teacher might say, “Give me five,”—meaning all of the rules.

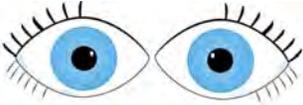
Use smaller versions of the Rule Cards to help an individual child who is encountering difficulty remembering a particular positive behavior. Sometimes children respond more easily to a simple visual prompt that helps them regain control of their behavior. The adult may not even have to say a word. Children may respond to this strategy and control impulses that could escalate into a challenging situation.

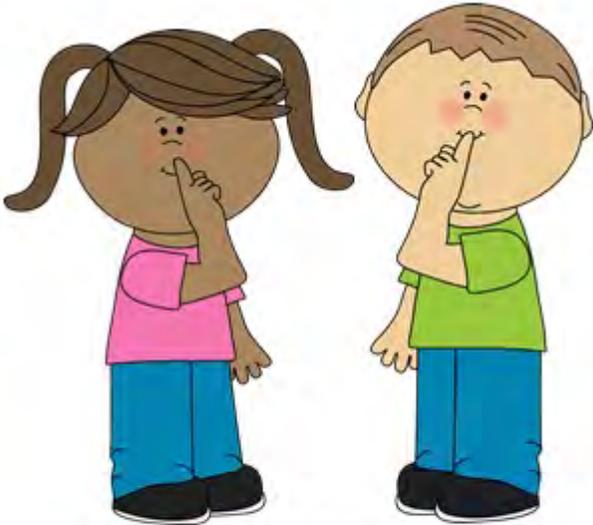
After classroom rules are identified, it is a good practice to periodically review the poster-sized cards with the children. A smaller version may be used as a redirection technique during the daily routines and experiences. For example, there’s a child in the block area, screaming to his

friend across the room playing in the kitchen area. The teacher could take the small “Inside Voices” card to the child and use it as a quiet cue to remind the child of expected behavior. Have the child explain where “quiet voices” are used and talk about why quiet voices are better in some instances. The teacher and child might identify the playground as an acceptable place for loud voices.

Learning in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment helps reduce children’s aggression. It also increases their social competence, setting them on a path of positive expectations. Using visual prompts focused on managing classroom processes and behavior provides direction and support to the teachers and children, as well as parents and other adults interacting with young children.

Rule Cards

| Rule Cards | Learning the Behavioral Cues |
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|  <p>Give Me Five</p> | <p>The “Give Me Five” image signals children to stop, think about their behavior, and remember the class rules. This cue can be used as a signal to the whole group that everyone needs to pay attention to the speaker. A teacher or caregiver also may show this cue as part of routine transitions to help children focus and prepare for what’s next.</p> |
|  <p>Eyes on Teacher</p> | <p>Use this image when trying to bring focus to the speaker. It means stop talking and get ready to listen. It helps improve turn-taking that fosters positive interaction. It can help foster learning, sharing, and cooperating with others. This works with individuals and small and large groups.</p> |
|  <p>Walk</p> | <p>Walk, don’t run! Use this card to teach and reinforce orderly movement, safety issues, and respect for others. Teachers can ask children to demonstrate appropriate behavior when inside. Talk about where walking is important and appropriate and where children can run and play!</p> |

| Rule Cards | Learning the Behavioral Cues |
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|  <p>Hands to Self</p> | <p>Learning occurs within the context of relationships with peers and warm, caring adults. For small group activities children are often sitting together. When young children are in close physical proximity with one another, they may have challenges controlling their impulses to touch reach out and touch others, or infringe on another's personal space. Often in such situations this simple reminder, "Hands to Self," is sufficient to help a child regain control over impulses to touch others.</p> |
|  <p>Inside Voices</p> | <p>This image reminds children to use their inside voices when in the classroom or other indoor environment. Listening and learning how to behave in small and large groups are important for young children. Being too loud inside can disturb others in the area and interfere with their learning. Use this cue as a reminder to consider others and their needs.</p> |

| Rule Cards | Learning the Behavioral Cues |
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|  <p>Listening Ears</p> | <p>Children learn to engage in and maintain positive interactions with other children and adults by listening and giving attention to others. They are often excited by their social experiences, play, and conversing, and may forget to take turns and listen to others. Sharing toys, playing together, and other learning experiences help children practice the turn-taking that is essential to building positive social interactions with others. The simple reminder of the image on this rule card helps a child focus on others' participation and contributions.</p> |