

# Keep Things Simple

She had been in over 20 foster homes. Each home had their own set of rules. Some were complex. Some seemed to have no rules to speak of. Then she arrived in the new home. She was loved for who she was. But she had a lot of baggage. Another new school. Her defense mechanisms were fine-tuned to kick in quickly. She had always managed to get her way when the chips were down. It was easy. Throw a tantrum and people always gave in.

How would we as the new school deal with all this baggage? The experienced teacher spoke with me. She was at her wits end after the first week. I spoke with the foster parents. They were incredibly supportive. They implemented simple but set routines. It was critical that the home and the school work together, support each other and provide consistency in approach.

“**Remember to keep it simple. Make your rules at home few but enforced.**”

We set up just a few very simple non-negotiables at school. Jane would have to respect others. She would need to follow the teacher's directions. She would need to keep her hands to herself. That was it. We felt we needed to see positive change with these simple things before we even considered looking at improving her academic focus.

Over three years with consistent reinforcement from her foster home, Jane no longer threw tantrums. She learnt that she must respect others. She had learnt to keep her hands to herself, and life was so much better when she followed the teacher's directions.

What made the difference?

We were faced with some real dilemmas when we enrolled Jane. We were given a significant list of issues. The department were very clear that we were struggling

with a long-term problem – one they had been unable to help as much as they were hoping.

Some simple strategies were put in place. The rules for Jane had to be simple. We could not address all of her issues at once. We had to focus on what was most important. Prioritize them and then consistently reinforce these few rules. Realistically we could have summarized them all with the word RESPECT. Respect others, respect the teacher and respect people's personal space.

It took time. It took lots of patience. It took lots of second chances and forgiveness. The teachers were amazingly tolerant. Her peers were less so at times, but understood the school had clear boundaries in place. The foster family were the strength that kept the whole process on track with their reinforcement of these simple rules.

Jane set new records for herself. She had been in the same foster home for over three years. An all-time record for her. Academically she was thriving. She blossomed with positive affirmation and loved being acknowledged for doing her best. She had stability for the first time in her life.

As parents we sometimes get caught up in the latest trends and innovative discipline strategies. We can make our family rules so complex that our children get confused and bewildered. Sometimes we provide too many sets of instructions at once, and then get upset when the maze of instructions does not get followed. Remember to keep it simple. Make your rules at home few but enforced. If you request something – mean it and enforce it. Have set routines that provide good life skills. Keep your enforcement processes consistent. It may be as simple as counting to three. But be consistent even as you positively and regularly invest in your relationships. God does that. He summarized everything down to two principles: love God and love others (Matthew 22:37-40). Great advice for us as parents and teachers.



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