

## **www.autismhelp.info**

### **Difficulty with rules**

#### **Points to note**

- Children with autism have a strong need to control their environment. They rely on rules to give their life structure and make it predictable. This can be an advantage, as rules can be used in a positive way to promote good behaviour.
- Children with autism can be extremely rigid in the way they learn and apply rules. They may not understand that some rules can be bent or broken in exceptional circumstances, such as an emergency.
- Sometimes children with autism develop their own set of rules or firmly-held beliefs that help them cope with a confusing world. They can become very upset if other children do not play or act according to their rules.
- Some children insist on enforcing rules; they will scold other children as if they were an adult. This happens because children with autism lack social awareness. It can have a serious impact on social acceptance by their peers.

#### **What you can do**

- Teaching of rules needs to include teaching which rules must be adhered to at all times and which can be broken in exceptional circumstances. For example, rules such as respecting peers and school property should be observed without exception. 'No interrupting when the teacher is talking' can be a flexible rule, ie. the child can put his hand up if he needs to go to the toilet, or is feeling unwell.
- Children with autism respond well to visual information. Make up a poster with classroom rules printed on it. List these in positive terms, eg. "Keep you desk tidy."
- If the child is constantly 'telling on' other children, he needs to be taught when it is appropriate to seek adult help. For example, he can tell a teacher if another child is hurt or in physical danger, but not for name-calling.
- Carefully explain to the child that other children do not appreciate him taking on an adult role and constantly 'telling on' other children.
- Limit the number of times the child can tell his teacher about others breaking rules. Draw ticks on a wall chart so that the child can see when he has reached his limit for the day.
- A social story can help children with autism understand why it is sometimes OK to bend or break rules. Social stories are also helpful in teaching subtle rules of social interaction. See [Social stories](#) for more information.