

"This book provides a deep understanding of a teenager's needs and a practical guide for nurturing optimal development. The advice Josh shares is evidence-based, no-nonsense, and uncompromising in its practicality. These insights will teach us how we can be that one caring adult every teen needs."

—Julie Lythcott-Haims, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *How to Raise an Adult*

THE GROWN-UP'S GUIDE TO TEENAGE HUMANS

How to Decode Their Behavior, Develop Unshakable Trust, and Raise a Respectable Adult

Josh Shipp

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Setting Up Clearly Written House Rules

The Challenge

Your teen broke curfew. Again. It's 11:48 P.M. at the end of a very difficult day—and you are fuming. “Who has time for this?” you ask yourself.

“Not me,” you respond to yourself, because you are a pleasure to talk to.

“Plus, I am worried sick,” you say (to you).

“What if they are in a ditch somewhere?” you add, starting to sound a bit like your mother.

You are now a Mount Vesuvius of rage, and when that kid walks through that door, you are going to blow. You will take away the car keys, cancel the cell phone plan, ground him or her for six months, even change the Wi-Fi password while you're at it.

At 11:52 P.M., your teen shuffles in. You (understandably) yell and threaten. Your teenage human mutters a defensive excuse and heads directly to his or her room. Deflated and exhausted, you go to bed as well. And when you wake up in the morning, you find you're too weary to follow through on all those consequences you'd mentally envisioned the night before.

Sound familiar?

One thing every parent knows for sure is that teens make mistakes. But then again, so do we. Sometimes we let our emotions get the best of us, causing us to dole out consequences in the heat of the moment

and overreact in a big way. Sometimes we're just so sick and tired of the whole "parenting a teen" gig that we throw our hands up and fail to follow through at all.

I get it, and I've certainly been guilty of overreacting myself. So whether you find yourself at the end of your rope due to that D minus (in Gym? REALLY?!) or because your car was returned to the garage with nothing left in its tank but fumes and optimism, you need a new way of dealing with these frustrating—and yet totally predictable—conflicts.

Behold! A simple strategy that can radically transform your relationships, your home, and your sanity: house rules.*

Sound intimidating and legalistic? Fear not. Creating house rules simply means putting together a document that details your values and expectations as a family. And if your teenager wants privileges—which, according to Merriam Webster, are special rights or advantages—like later curfews, or access to the family vehicle, or a cell phone, they need to abide by the house rules.

House rules are effective because they take the pressure and emotion out of following through on logical consequences. Since both you and your teen agree to the terms ahead of time, they know they have no one to blame but themselves if they screw up.**

If you're dealing with frustrating power struggles with your teen, if you're tired of yelling, if you're sick of ineffective lectures, you should try this. Here's how to get started.

Your Goal

To create and implement well-constructed, clearly defined house rules that will help teens make wise decisions with or without your physical presence.

* What? Something that will accomplish all that? What kind of sorcery is this?

** "If" they screw up?! Who are we kidding? More like "when."

What to Expect

CREATE HOUSE RULES DURING A TIME OF PEACE, NOT WAR.

The time to sit down and calmly, rationally discuss hopes, dreams, rules, and consequences is not five minutes after a shouting match. If cooler heads are going to prevail, you and your teen both need to have cool heads to start.

If you sit down with your teen to discuss the house rules and it blows up, don't panic. Instead, give them two options. Say something to this effect: "It seems as if this is the best time for us to do this. So, we have two options: We can push through and get this done today, or we can postpone until tomorrow. I'm going to leave that choice up to you. But we do need to do this. What would you prefer?"

HOUSE RULES MUST BE WRITTEN TOGETHER.

The beauty of house rules is that they work because two different parties agree upon a common course of action. The key phrase here is "agree upon." This should be a productive conversation between you and your teen.

YOU'LL HAVE TO BE INTENTIONAL TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN.

Believe it or not, time is often the biggest hurdle in putting together house rules. Between school, sports, and social events, your teen is probably even busier than you are. And sitting down for a family meeting may sound about as appealing to him as shoveling up the family dog's droppings.

So, try to make it fun. You can hammer out your family's house rules at your favorite restaurant, or sandwich it in between two fun

events (ice cream and a shopping trip). But whatever you do, put it on the calendar, and make it a non-negotiable. This is important stuff.

Are you afraid your teen might balk at the idea of a parent meeting? Truthfully, he might. Try saying something like this to take the pressure off:

“Listen, I know you don’t want me to nag you all the time, and I don’t want that either. I’ve got an idea that will help you do more of the stuff you want to, while I make sure you’re taking care of the stuff you need to. Let’s sit down together and hammer out a few of the fun things that are most important to you, and then I’ll let you know what you need to do to make those things happen. After that, we’ll both have a better idea of what we expect from each other.”

What to Do

1. **Review the House Rules Template provided below.** I’ve sketched out the big pieces to get you started. Of course, this is your family and your kid—so edit the house rules as needed to make them your own.
2. **Find out what privileges your teen wants, listen carefully, and negotiate.** Start by asking your teen what privileges she wants to include in the house rules. Listen closely without reacting—even if you think the request is ridiculous. Remember, every day that passes brings your teen that much closer to adulthood. You want her to have privileges and freedoms, because that will help her practice for independence and grow in self-governance.

Once your teen has shared his or her requests, it’s time to negotiate. Your teen might want to be allowed to stay out until 3 A.M. every night, but that doesn’t mean you’re obligated to work that into the contract. Compromise, but hold firm on the non-negotiables. You are the parent, after all.

3. **Sketch out the rules and consequences.** Now it’s your turn. Take a few minutes to review the rules you have for your teen, and the privileges she’ll lose if she doesn’t follow through. Make sure that the pun-

ishment fits the crime. Remember, this is a road map that tells your teen exactly what she has to do to earn the privileges and freedoms she wants.

4. Write it all out and have everyone sign the document. Write out the house rules and sign them together. Verbal contracts are fine for buying things at garage sales, but with something this important, you want to clearly spell things out. And if there are questions or disagreements later, you can simply review the document instead of arguing about what you think you said or what your teen thinks you meant. By signing the house rules, every family member is agreeing to the terms.

Note: If you are coparenting, do everything in your power to get the other parent to agree to one set of rules, privileges, and consequences. One set of house rules should apply, regardless of which house your teen is at. This consistency will be helpful for all parties involved, including your teen.

5. Follow through. The most crucial part of the house rules? Following through. Luckily, the prewritten, predetermined document makes that a bit easier. When your teen fails to meet an expectation, the document is there to tell you exactly what to do. Refer to it often, and when it's time to enact a consequence, simply remind (and show) your teen what he agreed to and why he will be losing a privilege. You can also remind him what he needs to do to earn that privilege back. The real beauty of this is that you are no longer the "Bad Guy."

As the adult, you must stick to the rules, just as you expect your teen to do. It's not fair to add on additional punishments because you're upset—let the document do the work for you, and kindly, but firmly, remind your teen of what was agreed upon.

Warning: There will be times when your teen won't be happy with you. Even if you're following the house rules exactly, your teen isn't going to like it when she breaks the agreement and loses a privilege. Expect a reaction, and just remember that even if she's angry, her logical side knows you're right.

HOUSE RULES TEMPLATE

Here's a basic template from which to start developing your house rules.* Feel free to edit the rules as needed to make them your own, so that they work for you and your teen.

Privileges

CAR OR TRANSPORTATION

I can use the family car to drive to my friends' houses, school, and other places I need or want to go, or I can ask my parents to drive me (as long as they aren't busy and don't play embarrassing music).

CASH

My allowance is \$___/week for miscellaneous spending. If I want more money, I can ask to do extra work around the house or find a job in town.

CURFEW

I can stay out until ___ on weekends and ___ during the week.

TECHNOLOGY:

Computer, Tablet, Cell Phone, or Wi-Fi

My parents, because of their never-ending awesomeness, will allow me to have access to a computer, tablet, cell phone, or Wi-Fi as appropriate. I understand this is a privilege and not an inalienable right protected by Article 4 of the US Constitution.

* Visit joshshipp.com/ggth to download an editable version.

OTHER PRIVILEGES (DISCUSS WITH YOUR TEEN)

Rules

THE PURPOSE OF HOUSE RULES

I understand that even though my parents can be embarrassing, they love me more than anything in the world. I understand that these rules are *not* a form of punishment. Instead, my parents care about me so much that they created these guidelines to help me become an awesome/respectable adult. **Initial here:** _____

MUTUAL RESPECT

I promise to treat my family with respect. This means no yelling, swearing, or saying anything to them that I wouldn't want to go viral on YouTube. Even when we are upset, mad, or having a heated argument, we will fight *for* each other, not against each other. **Initial here:** _____

CURFEW PROMPTNESS

Because my parents don't want to find me in a ditch or learn that I was abducted by aliens, I'll be home (in the door!) by _____ on weekends and _____ during the week. I will plan for situations and circumstances that might make me late. And I will quickly communicate with my parents if something reasonably unexpected happens. **Initial here:** _____

HELPING OUT

If my parents ask me to help out, I'll do it. Additionally, I will look for ways to help out—even if the task isn't my responsibility. Not because it's my job, but because (1) I want to show them how thankful I am for everything they do for me, and (2) it's proof that I'm basically a ninja and can tackle any challenge. **Initial here:** _____

RADICAL HONESTY

I promise to never lie to my parents, even if I'm embarrassed or afraid to admit a mistake. Even though their high school hairstyles suggest otherwise, they're not dummies and they will know if I'm lying anyway. Additionally, I understand that if I'm ever in a situation that feels unsafe or simply uncomfortable, I can always text the code word _____ to my parents. My parents will pick me up, and I can tell them as much or as little as I want. I understand my parents will never judge me for asking for help. **Initial here:** _____

ACADEMIC EFFORT

Because I want to have an awesome job and not live in the basement forever, I understand that my parents expect me to maintain at least a _____ grade point average in school. I promise to try my best, ask for help when I need it, and not beat myself up if I get a less-than-stellar grade. Working hard makes me and my parents proud. **Initial here:** _____

TECHNOLOGY USE

Technology is an incredible tool that helps me learn about the world, connect with friends, and even order late-night pizza. I understand that my behavior on these devices can directly impact my reputation and future, so I promise to use technology responsibly. In our family, that means _____ and _____. Lastly, I will exercise intentional restraint and not let technology interfere with my important relationships or obligations. **Initial here:** _____

NO DRUGS OR ALCOHOL

Because I respect myself, I will say “no” to alcohol and drugs and “yes” to safe, fun adventures with my friends and family. Because both drugs and alcohol can severely hurt me and my future, I will choose not to use them. My parents are not trying to rob me of a good time, but they want me to realize my full potential and not end up in legal trouble, jail, or a body bag. **Initial here:** _____

HAVE FUN

Although my parents are sometimes totally lame and pretty embarrassing, I know that they love me and want the best for me. My relationship with them will last the rest of my life. I commit to having fun with my family and seeing the best in them and myself. **Initial here:** _____

OTHER RULES (DISCUSS WITH YOUR TEEN)

Consequences

I understand that if I choose to disregard any of the above rules, there will be consequences. It’s not because my parents are jerks, but because they want to help me become a respectable adult.

THE FIRST TIME I BREAK A HOUSE RULE,

I will lose ONE privilege for _____ or until I _____.
(period of time) (way to earn privilege back)

IF I BREAK THE SAME HOUSE RULE AGAIN,

I will lose TWO privileges for _____ or until I _____.
(period of time) (way to earn privilege back)

IF I BREAK THE SAME HOUSE RULE A THIRD TIME,

I will lose ALL privileges for _____ or until I _____.

(period of time) (way to earn privilege back)

IF I BREAK THE SAME HOUSE RULE A FOURTH TIME OR IF THE ACTION IS UNLAWFUL:

Because of the severity of this infraction, and the potential (or imminent) harm this could cause to myself and/or others, we will seek the help of a local mental health care professional together for the benefit of the entire family.

I have read this document and agree to the above rules and consequences. I know that my parents created these rules out of love, and I understand that if I have any questions, I should talk to them.

Teen Signature

Parent(s) Signature

Advance Praise for **THE GROWN-UP'S GUIDE TO TEENAGE HUMANS**

"This is an invaluable guide to understanding, influencing, and genuinely helping the teenager in your life. Josh Shipp offers uncompromisingly practical tips to restore trust, build mutual respect, and expertly help teens navigate adolescence successfully."

—Rosalind Wiseman, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Queen Bees and Wannabes* and founder of Cultures of Dignity

"Research keeps telling us that committed adults make a difference in the lives of teenagers. Now Josh Shipp tells you how to be that adult. *The Grown-Up's Guide to Teenage Humans* is a must-have resource for anyone who has a heart for the next generation."

—Dave Ramsey, bestselling author and nationally syndicated radio show host

"Teenagers pose unique challenges for parents, teachers, and caregivers. This book is an essential read, providing a unique pathway to best understand, connect with, and nurture healthy, resilient teens."

—Gene Beresin, MD, MA, executive director of The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds and professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School

"This book is the training manual you never got. A must-have resource for parents, teachers, or anyone else who has to deal with teens."

—Ellen Rakleten, executive producer of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*

"The world needs this book. Few have the insight or ability to share life-changing words like Josh does. Here he provides a look at how we can all help shape the lives of the people most important to us. He does so in typical Josh Shipp fashion: with equal parts humor and heart."

—Brad Montague, creator of *Kid President*

