

FamilyRhythm Adult Toolkit

Practical printables for making your family's operating rules visible, discussable, and easier to use consistently.

How to use these

- One adult can complete them alone. If several adults are involved, compare answers where useful.
- Split households do not need identical routines. Focus on what the child should be able to understand and rely on.
- Write working rules, not permanent declarations. Revisit them as children gain skill and judgment.
- Do not try to complete the whole toolkit in one sitting. Use the printable that matches the current conversation.

Included

Capable Kid Map • Responsibility Map • Define Done • Help Without Taking Over • Wants-to-Work Conversation • Real Choice Boundary • After a Poor Choice • Our First Family Rhythm • Adult Alignment Sheet • In-the-Moment Language Card

1. The Capable Kid Map

Use this to define what growing capability looks like in observable behavior. One adult can complete it alone; multiple adults can compare and discuss.

Things adults should still carry

Safety, essential care, legal/financial consequences, and responsibilities that are still adult-sized.

Things we currently do together

Tasks or decisions where the child is learning and still benefits from shared support.

Things the child can already own

Responsibilities the child can usually complete or decide with little or no adult intervention.

Things we want them to own next

What is one realistic next step toward greater independence over the next 6-12 months?

A useful check: If we stepped back slightly, what could the child reasonably practice without creating an adult-sized risk?

2. The Responsibility Map

Separate what already belongs to the child from shared contribution and optional paid work. Different homes may use different examples; clarity matters more than identical lists.

Belongs to the child

Personal responsibilities that are theirs because they are growing and capable.

[illegible]

Shared family contribution

Regular ways the child contributes because they belong to the family.

[illegible]

Optional / extra work

Additional work that may create extra earning opportunity.

[illegible]

Across caregivers or homes: What should remain clear to the child even if the actual chores, schedules, or rewards differ?

3. What Does “Done” Look Like?

Choose a few recurring responsibilities and define the finish line before the child starts. The standard should be visible, teachable, and appropriate to the child's current skill.

Responsibility 1

Done means: _____

Current help level: _____ If not finished yet: _____

Responsibility 2

Done means: _____

Current help level: _____ If not finished yet: _____

Responsibility 3

Done means: _____

Current help level: _____ If not finished yet: _____

Responsibility 4

Done means: _____

Current help level: _____ If not finished yet: _____

Adult check: Are we adding requirements after the work is submitted? If the standard was unclear, clarify the standard before calling the child careless.

4. Help Without Taking Over

Use the ladder to decide what kind of help fits the situation. The goal is not to withhold help; it is to give the smallest useful amount that still leaves the child doing the learning.

They do not know how

TEACH

Show or explain the skill.

They know, but need practice

COACH

Stay nearby, prompt, or break the task down.

They can do it but want rescue

ASK

Use a question before taking over.

They can do it independently

STEP BACK

Let ownership become real.

Safety or adult-sized consequences

INTERVENE

Adults keep the responsibility that belongs to adults.

Where are we most tempted to take over?

Question to try first: "What part do you want help with?" or "What do you think the next step is?"

5. The Wants-to-Work Conversation

Use this when a child asks for a discretionary item or experience. This is not a rule that children must earn everything; adults still decide what they provide as part of care and family life.

- 1 **How much does it cost?**
- 2 **What would it take to earn or save for it?**
- 3 **Is it worth that much work or waiting to you?**
- 4 **What else could those credits or dollars do?**
- 5 **Do you want to decide now, or think about it?**

Adults still provide automatically

Things children may increasingly work toward or choose for themselves

The goal is not to prevent wanting. The goal is to make cost, work, and choice visible.

6. The Real Choice Boundary

A choice is only real when more than one answer is genuinely acceptable. Use this to decide which decisions belong to the child, which need adult boundaries, and which still belong to adults.

Child decides

Adults may advise, but more than one outcome is genuinely acceptable.

Child decides within boundaries

Adults set the safe/affordable range; the child chooses inside it.

Adult decides

Safety, essential care, legal limits, major family commitments, and adult-sized consequences.

The uncomfortable question

Where are we offering a “choice” even though the adult has already decided what answer will be accepted?

Different caregivers or homes can set different boundaries. The child should still be able to tell which decisions are genuinely theirs.

7. After a Poor Choice

Use this after a safe mistake, regretted purchase, forgotten responsibility, or other low-stakes poor choice. The goal is learning and repair, not adding punishment to an already-existing consequence.

What actually happened?

Who naturally owns the consequence?

Is repair needed? If so, what would repair look like?

Does the child need information, help, or simply time?

Are we tempted to rescue because the consequence is uncomfortable to watch?

Avoid adding:

- ☐ "I told you so."
- ☐ automatic replacement/rescue
- ☐ unrelated punishment
- ☐ character labels

Try asking:

"What do you think happened?"
"What would you do differently next time?"
"Do you need help figuring out the next step?"

8. Our First Family Rhythm

Build one simple repeatable loop from the decisions you have made. Keep it small enough to practice consistently before adding more complexity.

Daily responsibilities What should happen without repeated negotiation?

Weekly reset/check-in When do we review what worked, what did not, and what needs changing?

How work gets checked Who checks? What happens when something is not finished?

How extra work works How are optional earning opportunities offered and completed?

How choices work Which decisions increasingly belong to the child?

When something goes wrong How do we respond to mistakes, regret, and repair?

What should the child be able to rely on across caregivers or homes?

What does not need to be identical everywhere?

9. Adult Alignment Sheet

Complete independently first if more than one adult is involved, then compare. For a single parent, use it to notice where stress, time pressure, or context changes your own responses.

	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Depends
Normal household responsibilities should usually be paid.	☐	☐	☐	☐
A child should sometimes be allowed to make a purchase I think is unwise.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Work that does not meet the agreed standard should be redone before payment or approval.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Children should experience reasonable consequences without automatic rescue.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Different children may need different amounts of help for the same type of responsibility.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adults should clarify the standard before holding a child to it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
A child should have some decisions where the adult would accept more than one outcome.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Extra work and ordinary family contribution should be treated differently.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Where do our instincts differ enough that the child needs a clearer shared rule?

The goal is not identical personalities. The goal is predictable expectations where consistency matters.

10. In-the-Moment Language Card

Cut or keep as a full page. These are prompts, not scripts. Use the wording that sounds natural in your household.

CLARIFY

"What does finished look like?"

INVITE THINKING

"What do you think?"

OFFER BOUNDED HELP

"What part do you want help with?"

RETURN OWNERSHIP

"What do you think the next step is?"

MAKE COST VISIBLE

"What would it take?"

MAKE TRADE-OFFS VISIBLE

"What else could those credits do?"

SUPPORT A REAL CHOICE

"What happens if you choose that?"

RESPOND TO INCOMPLETE WORK

"That isn't finished yet. Try again."

AFTER A POOR CHOICE

"What do you think happened?"

REPAIR AN UNCLEAR STANDARD

"I wasn't clear about the standard. Here's what done means."

AVOID RESCUE

"Do you need help figuring it out, or do you need some time?"

INVITE REFLECTION

"Would you make the same choice next time?"

Use fewer words than you think you need. A good question often does more work than a lecture.