

## Creating Clear Expectations

Of all the things we deal with as parents, perhaps the greatest cause of confusion, hurt, and frustration stems from unknown, unshared, and unmet expectations. Becoming aware of what we expect from others helps us to understand ourselves better and makes it a lot easier for others to understand us. It also helps us see if our expectations are unrealistic and, if so, how unfair we are being by holding onto them.

*If we neglect to be clear about what we expect from others, we have no right to be angry, hurt, or disappointed when they don't measure up!*

We can't possibly be aware of every expectation we have for every situation. We can, however, make it a habit to think about what is upsetting us and be clear about our expectations at that moment. Consider two examples:

Unclear "Smarten up or we will leave!" becomes "We play quiet games in a restaurant while we wait for our food."

Unclear "You are driving me crazy – stop it!" becomes "I don't like whining, please use your normal voice to talk to me."

Choose an area of your life you currently struggle with and take the following steps:

1. Write the headings of the main people involved in this task across the top of the page (myself, my kids, my spouse, the daycare provider, etc.). Ask yourself, "What are my expectations of (my kids) for this area?" Write down all your expectations under the kids' column then move to the next heading (my spouse).
2. Star those expectations you cannot/will not live without.
3. Put a check beside those that are realistic, fair, and important. For example, while a four-year-old could help wash the floor, it would be unrealistic to think he could do it by himself and unfair to think he would do a nice job. A fourteen-year-old could realistically and fairly be expected to do this job, although perhaps not to your level of expectation. If this job is not important, it does not need a spot on your list.
4. Are any of the starred expectations not checked? If so, can you adapt them to make them realistic and fair?

5. Cross out any expectations that are not starred or checked and let them go.
6. Highlight those still on the list that you have not been clear about to others. Being clear to others means knowing what your expectations are and telling others exactly what you are thinking. If you tell your child to take out the garbage but expect him to tie the back first, you have not been clear about your expectations.
7. Go through the list again and develop a plan for sharing your expectations with the people they affect. Are there any you aren't comfortable sharing with others? If so, is it fair to keep them? Decide how important they are to you and either adapt them or let them go.

Sample chart for getting out the door on time in the morning – you have a 6 year old (Sam)

| <i>Sam</i>   | <i>Hubby</i>   | <i>Me</i>   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps pack backpack</li> <li>- gets up when called</li> <li>- gets dressed</li> <li>- eats breakfast</li> <li>- brushes teeth and hair</li> </ul> | (evening before) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps Sam make lunch</li> <li>- ensures backpack items are gathered</li> <li>- helps Sam pick out clothes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- buys lunch foods</li> <li>- ensures clothes are clean</li> <li>- wakes up Sam</li> <li>- makes breakfast</li> <li>- gives 5-minute warning</li> <li>- walks Sam to school</li> </ul> |

Although it is helpful to get a clear idea on what your expected tasks are, you don't need to put yourself in the chart. I added it in just to show how a plan like this (involving hubby) might look.

Sample chart when Sam is 13

| Sam   | Hubby   | Me   |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-sets alarm and gets self up</li> <li>-prepares and eats a healthy breakfast</li> <li>-prepares and packs lunch</li> <li>-ensures homework is done and in backpack</li> <li>- walks to school with at least 10 mins to spare before bell</li> <li>- gets school notes signed the eve before</li> <li>- tells me when we are running low on lunch or breakfast foods</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps Sam with homework</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- buys groceries for breakfast &amp; lunch</li> </ul> |

If getting Sam out the door isn't a problem, you don't need a chart. Getting clear on your expectations and sharing them with others are most important when challenges are arising.