



# Parenting

## *The Law*

### **WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PARENT?**

Parents and legal guardians are responsible for the care and control of their children until they are 18 years old. This means they have the right to make reasonable rules and to use reasonable force to control the behavior of their children.

The responsibilities of parents are subject to many laws. Teenage parents are subject to the same laws as any other parents. Even if you are under the age of 18 and are living with your parents, you have the right to make the decisions about your child's life and are responsible for caring for your baby.

The responsibility to take care of their children means that parents must provide necessary shelter, food, clothing, medical care, education, and other care and supervision necessary for the child's physical, mental, and emotional health. Parents don't have to buy everything their children want, but they must provide for the things that are really needed and that they can afford.

### **WHAT RULES ARE REASONABLE?**

Parents can set rules about things like:

- When child must be at home
- Where child can go
- Whom child associates with
- School attendance
- Chores
- Employment
- Participation in after-school activities, such as sports

### **WHAT IS REASONABLE FORCE**

Parents may use reasonable force to restrain or correct their children. The law does not say exactly what reasonable force means. It depends on:

- The age of the child
- How often the punishment happens
- The type of physical punishment
- Whether there are signs of punishment such as bruises, cuts, etc.
- Parents who use excessive force can be charged with child abuse.

### **WHAT IS ILLEGAL?**

It is illegal for parents to

- Use unreasonable force or cruel discipline
- Intentionally deprive a child of food, clothing, shelter, health care, or supervision
- Knowingly permit continuing physical or sexual abuse of a child



- Intentionally or recklessly place child in a situation that is likely to cause harm to the child
- Knowingly permit child to be present where any person is selling or possessing drugs
- Abandon their child

### **WHAT ABOUT KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE?**

As part of parental responsibilities, parents must keep their children safe. They must:

- prevent exposure to dangerous or threatening conditions
- prevent exposure to involvement in criminal activity
- prevent exposure to substance abuse
- prevent physical injury caused by hazardous conditions
- prevent risk of harm due to domestic violence
- prevent abandonment
- provide for a child's special needs

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF PARENTS DON'T DO THESE THINGS?**

The state will step in to take care of the child. This might happen through services offered through county agencies, court-ordered placement in another home, permanent termination of parental rights, or other actions. All decisions are made in the best interest of your child. Decisions that involve the court system are handled in juvenile court.

Portions of this law sheet were taken from "Your Rights with your Parents or Guardians," published by Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis.



d. prevent physical injury caused by hazardous conditions

e. prevent risk of harm due to domestic violence

f. prevent abandonment

g. provide for a child's special needs

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## *Activity: What do you think?*

You are a teenage parent living with your parents. Who do you think has the responsibility to make the final decision in each of the following cases? Put:

**TP** FOR TEEN PARENT

**AP** FOR ADULT PARENT

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Your baby has a fever and you think that you should take him to the doctor. Your mother thinks you should wait until morning and just treat the baby with Tylenol until that time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. You and your baby are invited to spend the weekend with Jerome, your baby's dad. Your mother does not like Jerome and does not want you to go there for the weekend.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. You need a break from your baby and want to send him with his dad for the weekend. Your parents do not feel that his dad takes proper care of him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. You want to go to the mall with your friends and you want to take your baby. Your mother has given you permission to go, but she doesn't think that you should take your baby.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Your baby is having a hard time going to sleep at night. You think you should go in every few minutes and let the baby know you are there. Your mother says you should just let the baby cry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. You and your mother disagree on what foods to feed the baby. You are trying to follow the doctor's orders. Your mother says the doctor doesn't know what your baby needs and insists on giving the baby foods that are not approved by the doctor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Your parents think that you should be stay home on school nights. You feel that since you are a parent yourself, you should be able to decide when you got out.

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## *Activity: Your Turn*

It can be hard to live with your parents if you have a baby of your own. Write down as many possible conflicts as you can think of. For five of the possible conflicts, figure out a solution. Remember that both you and your parent must agree on the solution, which means you and they may have to compromise.

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### Conflicts

### Solutions

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.