

# When 'rules' become barriers to play

Often over time there are 'rules' that are established in early childhood settings that no-one really knows why they are there or where they came from, but they still guide the way that educators interact with children and can become barriers to exploration and learning.



## When is a rule a barrier?

Rules often happen subconsciously, based on the training at the time, an educator's own beliefs, an incident that happened once, etc. Rules such as "these can only be used inside" or "that never happens after lunch". These sorts of rules can create barriers to children's interests and needs



## How to identify these barriers

As you move through your day whenever you, or another educator, says "no, we can't do that" "sorry, that isn't allowed", or tells a child "that isn't how we use that" ask yourself 'why?' and if you don't know the answer chances are this is one of those rules that has evolved subconsciously.



## How to reflect on these barriers

Each time this happens we, as educators, need to challenge ourselves to consciously reflect on the rule to allow ourselves to better understand where it came from, why it is in place, and what purpose it serves currently, if any, with regard to best practice.



## What to consider when reflecting

Ask yourself questions such as "what would happen if this wasn't a rule?", "how am I preventing children's learning with this rule?", "does this rule align with my image of the child?", "does this rule support the needs of the children or make it easier for the educators?"



## How to set limits and boundaries to remove barriers

This isn't to say that the rules can just be removed completely, as this may not be safe, but there are ways to support children's safe play with limits and boundaries instead of hard and fast rules. Such as "you can take this outside while using it but it needs to go back when finished".