

The Six Hour Rule

A conflict resolution tool

We encourage you to use the Six Hour Rule along with the coping cards and your child's safety plan.

What is the Six Hour Rule?

The Six Hour Rule is a tool that can be used by parents and children when they have verbal conflicts that cannot be resolved in the moment and seem to be escalating. It is a way for anyone in the conflict to pause the conversation when those involved are escalating. Because everyone's body goes through a range of physical changes during escalation, for example, increases in heart rate, adrenaline and cortisol (a hormone released when we have stress), it allows everyone time to cope and let their body return to baseline.

Why is it important?

Children often learn conflict resolution through role modeling. The Six Hour Rule is important because it teaches your child how to pause a conversation that is escalating or triggering them. It highlights the value of taking a break to cope during a hard conversation and teaches your child that there are times when disagreements cannot be settled in the moment but need to be addressed at a time when everyone is calmer.

How does the Six Hour Rule work?

When you and your child are having a verbal conflict that cannot be quickly resolved and emotions are escalating, either one of you can choose to start the Six Hour Rule. This means that everyone involved in the disagreement will take a break, stop arguing and walk away for a set amount of time that has previously been agreed upon. The 3 major parts of the Six Hour Rule are explained below.

A keyword

Use a "keyword" to start the Six Hour Rule. This lets everyone know it is time to take a break. Some families use a silly keyword to lighten the mood; this often works well for younger children. Some families use the word "pause," "timeout," or simply "Six Hour Rule."

A set amount of time

A clear expectation should be set for how long the break will last. This rule is called the Six Hour Rule because this break should not last longer than 6 hours. You can set the break for any amount of time less than 6 hours. Because it takes approximately 30 minutes for our bodies to calm and return to baseline after an escalation, the break should be at least 30 minutes.

To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit - 206-987-2055
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

An agreement to come back together to finish the discussion

Everyone involved in the disagreement needs to return to a specific location to resume the conversation at the predetermined time.

How do we start using it in our home?

Start with a “set-up” conversation to explain the Six Hour Rule and make sure that your child will commit to the rule. This should be at a time when both you and your child are at baseline and will not be interrupted.

Both you and your child have to agree to commit fully to all aspects of the Six Hour Rule or it will not work. This rule is built on trust. You trust that if you give your child some space, they will not abuse that trust.

What do we do during the break?

First, everyone must agree to give each other space and resist the temptation to talk about any aspect of the argument or conflict. Everyone must also follow all the other rules of the house (chores, respect, etc).

It helps to set an expectation that everyone should be using a coping skill during their break. This is not a time to stew about the disagreement, nag another individual, or continue to escalate. This time should be used for everyone to return to their baseline.

What do we do differently when we come back together?

After the break time, everyone involved in the argument or conflict will come back together to resolve the conflict. Make sure everyone is at their baseline. Then, you can discuss the previous issue or conflict following these rules:

- Take turns talking (always ask if your child wants to be the first to talk)
- Do not interrupt or cut each other off
- Listen carefully to what the other person is saying
- Often it helps to summarize or repeat back what you hear the other person say
- No offensive comments