

# RULER Activity: Create a Family Charter at Home!

## What will you need?

- Chart or construction paper
- Blank sheets of paper
- Colored pencils or markers
- Time: approximately 1 hour

## Guidelines

The Charter is made up of 3 basic questions. Exploring these questions together can build understanding and empathy for the needs of every family member, and go a long way toward creating the climate you'd like to have in your home.

### Step 1: How do we want to feel in our family?

- Ask everyone to write down 5–8 feelings
- Ask everyone to think about how they would like to *feel* at home. What are the *feelings* everyone wants to have in your home?  
(For example, you might want to feel *respected, loved, connected, appreciated, and understood*).
- Combine all the feeling words on one master list.
- Discuss each word and notice which feeling words have similar meanings. For example *appreciated* and *valued*. Can we choose just one? Narrow down your list to a “top 5” list.
- Write down your “top 5” on a new piece of paper.

### Step 2: What can we do in order to have these feelings?

- For each word, discuss the things that each person can do to have that feeling.
- What are one or two specific, observable behavior(s) that each family member would need to exhibit in order to have the feeling as often as possible?
- For example, being ‘nice’ is not a real behavior. Smiling or saying ‘good morning’ to each other are behaviors that everyone can see.

## How do you start?

Given the collaborative nature of developing a Family Charter, it's important to find a time when everyone is feeling calm, focused, and ready to work together. We also suggest doing this in a comfortable area like the living room or at the dinner table. Let your kids know that you care about how they feel, want them to care about you feel, and want home to be a place where everyone feels emotionally safe.

### Step 3: How will we handle conflict when it arises?

- Encourage family members to reflect on what can happen when someone doesn't behave in ways you just listed in your Family Charter
- No matter how loving and supportive our environments, conflicts and uncomfortable feelings are experienced from time to time. For example, someone may yell or do something that leads you to feel unloved. What will you do? How will you resolve that conflict and repair the hurt that was caused?
- List all specific behaviors that will help everyone regroup and re-align with the ideal feelings and behaviors mentioned in your Family Charter.
- Choose five or so ways to both prevent and manage conflict.
- For example, you might agree that an apology note is needed when someone hurts someone else.

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## Putting it all together

- Now it's time to pull all the pieces together and create your own living document. This is often the most fun part of the project.
- **Be creative!** Use your family's talent and have fun together. There are no limits: it can be big or small, colorful, or filled with drawings.
- **What's most important is that you have a final document that includes the top 5 feelings, specific and observable behaviors, and agreed-upon ways to prevent and manage conflict.**
- Once the Family Charter is complete, **everyone must sign it!**
- We encourage you to display the Charter prominently in your home so everyone can keep these feelings and behaviors in mind throughout the day.

## Keeping the Family Charter Alive

- **Schedule weekly or monthly family meetings** to review the Charter. What's working? What's not?
- **Have each family member set a daily or weekly goal** related to part of the Charter he or she finds the most challenging to honor.
- **Be creative** – post weekly quotes, send out family emails, perform random acts to demonstrate the feelings in the Charter and show appreciation for your family members.
- **Revise the Family Charter**, as needed. It should be a living agreement.
- **Share your pride and your achievement.** Tell friends and other families about your creating the Charter and how good you feel about the changes in your home as a result!

