

Family Charter: shared goals, shared feelings

Build a positive and more supportive home environment with this written agreement.

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The Family Charter is a written agreement everyone in the family creates together and signs to help build a positive emotional climate in the home. The charter helps identify what the family wants to feel while together, and how they will treat each other in order to feel that way. If the family commits to [the charter](#) and uses it in daily life, this written pact can serve as a powerful alternative to house rules.

Family Charter consists of 3 simple questions:

1. How do you want to feel at home as a family?
2. What can we each do in order to have those feelings more often?
3. How will we handle conflicts when they arise?

The process of creating a charter begins by asking all family members to make a list of feelings they want to experience while spending time with the family. For example, you might wish to feel valued, empowered, or respected. Once everyone has made their individual lists, each person shares their list to identify which feelings overlap or are similar to each other. Based on everyone's input, your family decides as a group which feelings to include in the charter.

Once your family identifies the feelings everyone would like to experience, discuss what behaviors everyone can commit to displaying that will consistently promote and support those feelings. It's important that these behaviors be specific. For example, instead of saying everyone should "be nice" to each other, you can specify that





everyone should smile when they make eye contact or offer to help each other every day. These agreed-upon behaviors are then written in the charter as well.

Last, the family decides on guidelines for how to deal with conflict or negative feelings. For example, guidelines could include voicing upset feelings rather than holding them in, talking challenges through in a calm voice, apologizing if you make a mistake, or forgiving the person who apologizes.

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Once the charter has been agreed upon and signed by every member of the family, it's displayed somewhere prominent, such as the refrigerator door. Many families enjoy taking the time to make their charter beautiful. To keep the [Family Charter](#) alive, it should be reviewed and updated whenever necessary. It will be most meaningful and transformative if it is referred to, explored, and fully integrated into daily life.

By working together to create the charter, each person in your family will better understand their own emotions and become more attuned to each other's needs, thereby producing a more supportive and positive environment. And, since everyone has a voice in the creation of the document, each individual is more likely to respect its value. After all, you created it yourselves.

This is part of a series about tools used in the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's [RULER](#) program (@emotionallyintelligentschools). RULER is a research-based program used by schools to develop the skills of emotional intelligence in all educators, staff, students, and their families. The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence uses the power of emotions to create a more effective and compassionate society. Check out the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's other [tools](#).

