

## Hidden Rules

Every situation that we're in has hidden rules. Hidden rules are ones that no one really teaches you directly (until now). They are the rules that everyone is just expected to know. Some hidden rules are more obvious like "don't pick your nose in public," but others require a little detective work to see and understand.

For example, one hidden rule is that when someone asks us, "What do you think of my new \_\_\_\_\_?" we're supposed to say we like it even if we really don't. Most people know that saying that they don't like the new thing will hurt the person's feelings, and we don't want to do that.

Next, we'll think of other hidden rules for different situations.

What are some hidden rules for coming into your classroom in the morning?

What are some hidden rules for when the teacher is teaching the whole class?

What are some hidden rules for working on a group project with other kids?

What are some hidden rules for eating lunch with other people?

There are so many different sets of hidden rules, with a different set for every situation. There are hidden rules in our homes, in the community, at school, riding our bikes, playing computer games, etc. Why do hidden rules matter? These rules provide a list of what are considered "expected" behaviors in a situation. When someone shares space with other people and does what's expected, others tend to feel good about that person's behavior, and this

makes people feel good about the entire person. When someone doesn't necessarily follow the hidden rules, that person is doing what's "unexpected" for the situation. This makes people have uncomfortable thoughts that lead to uncomfortable or negative emotions about that person's behavior. When someone does a lot of unexpected behaviors, it makes some people feel like they don't want to be with that person because that person isn't making them feel good.

### **Hidden rules are important to sleuth out!**

Can you figure out the hidden rules (*the expected set of behaviors*) for the following situations?

- 1. Getting ready for school:**
  
- 2. Eating dinner with your family:**
  
- 3. Asking for help in the classroom:**
  
- 4. Getting ready for bed:**

Keep thinking about the hidden rules because they exist in every situation in which people share space together!

## Hidden Rules at School

“*Social expectations*” refers to how well you share your space with others at that particular time or place. “*Sharing space*” means that because you’re near other people, people are thinking about each other and are supposed to help keep each other calm and focused on whatever it is they are doing. Whenever a situation changes in the world around us, the social expectations change as well. Most people don’t talk about these changes in social expectations; it’s simply expected that people notice the changes and adjust their behavior to them. Because the expectations aren’t usually discussed out loud, we call them the “*hidden social rules*.”

Being *social* does not necessarily mean you’re having fun with the people around you. It only means that people are having reasonably “*expected*” or “*normal*” thoughts about you, and you’re having these same types of thoughts about them—all based on each others’ behaviors, actions, and reactions within a specific situation. To help you explore this, look at the following example and then fill out the next two rows on your own. If you don’t have experience with one of these situations, cross it out and write in one with which you’re more familiar!

Complete the following:

The situation	What are the social expectations/hidden rules that go along with that setting?	What do you have to do to adjust your own behavior to the expectations? Why should you do this?
Getting ready for bed	Avoid complaining—it’s just part of the routine of the day. Change into pajamas. Brush your teeth. Say goodnight to your parents. Get in bed. Read or turn off the light. <i>(These will depend on your specific situation.)</i>	Transition away from whatever you were doing without complaining. Move through these different, familiar steps independently.  Make sure you say goodnight to your parent(s) or whatever adult you live with. <i>Why? It allows you to get some rest and keeps other people in your house feeling good when they don’t have to nag you. They’re tired at the end of a day too!!</i>
Eating lunch at school		Describe the situation          Why should you do this?

The situation	What are the social expectations/hidden rules that go along with that setting?	What do you have to do to adjust your own behavior to the expectations? Why should you do this?
Turning in your homework		Describe the situation          Why should you do this?

## Hidden Rules in the Classroom

The hidden rules in the classroom are those that all students in the school are expected to know but are ones that haven't been directly taught. The hidden rules include little things related to others' thoughts about us such as how to dress, how to act, what to do, and what not to do. They also include when to talk to someone, with whom to talk, what people to ignore, and so on. It also includes knowing 1) teachers' specific social expectations, 2) teacher-pleasing behaviors, 3) students who treat you well, 4) individuals who are likely to get you in trouble, 5) behaviors that attract positive attention from teachers and peers, and 6) behaviors that are considered negative or inappropriate (*unexpected*) by teachers and peers. (Myles, Trautman, and Schelvan, *The Hidden Curriculum*, 2004).

Because these hidden rules are not discussed out loud, we all have to be social spies to try and figure out the social expectations around us. Think about the following questions, and then take some time to be a spy as you determine what the answers are for your particular situation!

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1. How can you tell when one of your teachers is upset with someone in the class because the teacher doesn't usually say, "I am upset with \_\_\_\_\_"! What exactly does the teacher do that lets you know how he or she is thinking and feeling?
2. How does one of your teachers show you that he or she is happy with your performance?
3. How does one of your teachers communicate that he or she is frustrated with you in particular?
4. Can you joke with all your teachers or with just some of them? Which ones? How do you know?
5. Can you joke with them at any time, or are there specific times when you can joke with them? How do you know when it's okay to joke with them and when it's not?
6. Choose one of your teachers and figure out what you think this teacher thinks is the MOST important thing for the students to do in this class. Feel free to ask the teacher directly to help you figure this out. If you found out the information by observation, how did you figure it out?

7. Thinking about this same teacher, what are the things one or many students do that seem to make the teacher frustrated the fastest?
8. What are the rules in this class about talking to other students during class time? How did you figure this out?
9. How flexible is this teacher about turning in homework late?
10. Why is turning in homework important to this teacher?
11. Do you think this teacher likes you? If so, how does he or she demonstrate that to you and others?

*For more information about this concept, see Myles, Trautman, and Schelvan, **The Hidden Curriculum**, 2004.*