

Following the Rules

Earl the Squirrel

Once upon a time there was a little squirrel named Earl. He lived in a hollow tree with his parents and sister. He had his own room in the tree, which he liked to decorate with his collection of acorns, bird feathers, and shiny pebbles.

Earl was an incredibly messy squirrel. He left his acorn football in the hall. The floor of his room was covered in broken feathers. He couldn't find anywhere to do his homework because a mountain of pebbles covered his desk and his chair. They were piled so high that Earl couldn't see out the little window that looked out over the yard and the other trees.

One day, Earl's parents asked him to clean his room. "Okay!" he said, as he ran outside to race up and down the trees with the other squirrels. Earl's parents asked him again, but Earl spent the whole day playing in the yard and in the tops of trees instead.

The next day, Earl's parents stopped Earl from leaving. "You will not leave this tree until you clean up your room," they told him. "That's so unfair!" cried Earl, stamping his little squirrel foot. "What is unfair," said Earl's father, "is that we have asked you nicely many times to clean your room, but you have ignored us. You will not leave this tree until your room is clean." They sent Earl to his room. He decided that no matter what, he would never, ever, clean his room. He sat in angry silence on the pile of broken feathers. He was angry for a while, and then he got sad and lonely and bored, and then he got really, really angry all over again.

It was no fun to hang out in a room that was so messy, but he would never clean it! Even if he had to spend the rest of his squirrel days in his room surrounded by broken feathers and piles of shiny pebbles!

He heard some of his squirrel friends playing outside, racing up and down the tree trunks, jumping over bright green leaves, chasing each other through the yard. He cleared away some of the acorns, so he could see through the window in his room.

“Hey!” he called down to his friends. “Up here!” Earl shouted. His friends stopped running around and climbed up to Earl’s window. “Earl! There you are!” they said. “Why don’t you come out and play?” Earl said, “Can you believe it? It’s so unfair! My parents won’t let me play outside until I clean up my room! What am I going to do?” Earl’s friend, Harry, smiled and said “Well, why don’t you just clean up your room? Then you can come outside and play.” The other squirrels agreed. “Hurry!” they said and scrambled back down the three.

Earl put all of the acorns in his room in neat rows. He gathered up the feathers, leaning his favorites against the wall and throwing the broken ones away. He made a beautiful little castle out of his shiny pebbles. When he looked around the room, it was so much bigger than he realized! He looked at his collections, and admired how neat they looked. He asked his parents to come inspect his room, and they were impressed.

“It looks great, Earl,” said his father. “Very clean indeed,” agreed his mother.

Earl raced outside and jumped down to the yard, where he and his friends played chase all afternoon. Earl was feeling like a very grown-up squirrel.

MORAL: Parents have reasons for their rules and requests. It is always easier to follow the rules than to suffer the consequences of breaking them.

Tell a Story

Tell or write a story about a boy who would not follow the rule of brushing his teeth before bedtime.

Use What You Learned

Make a list of the important rules in your home or in your classroom. What happens when these rules are broken? Rate yourself on a 1 to 5 scale (1=poor and 5=great) on how well you follow each rule.
