**CONTRACTING GUIDELINES**

Making contracts with your child provides an opportunity for your child to make appropriate choices about their behavior. The idea is to help a child learn to be responsible for his/her own behavior. The idea is not to control the child, but to provide the child with the means to control him or herself. Every contract should outline what behavior is expected, the child’s responsibility to meet that expectation, and a consequence (logical, i.e. Relates to the violation and is not punitive) for not meeting their responsibility.

A contract accomplishes several things: (1) the parent and the child have a clear understanding of what the behaviors and limits should be. (2) If the child breaks the contract, the parent does not have to get angry or raise their voice. A simple, “I see that you have chosen (the consequence) instead of (name rule the violation)” will do. Children usually feel bad enough for disappointing themselves and their parents and lectures and anger only hurts them more. Remember that you are trying to teach your child how to make responsible choices, not hurt or shame them. (3) Contracts help to encourage a child, and show that you believe that they will make responsible choices.

Contracts should be negotiated in a democratic way. The child should have an equal role in the development. Ideally, parents will have several non-negotiable items such as drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, etc. The parents should work through the enclosed worksheet together and be in complete agreement on the contract proposal. If both parents cannot agree and be willing to support the contract items, then there is little chance of success.

Be prepared to compromise in some areas, so your child can feel like he/she has gained something. It is important to the success of a contract if the child believes that he/she has gained something in the process. It is not very likely that your child’s first offer will be completely acceptable, but look through it (it should be in writing) and try to find points of agreement. On the points of disagreement, let your child know of your position and why. Then ask your child why it is important to them that it be the way they are asking (you may have to help your child discern why it is important to him/her). This can be a wonderful opportunity to learn about your child. It can also be a great time to discuss values. Listen with understanding and be cautious about discounting the child’s reasoning. If you can’t agree to the child’s offer, present a compromise position. When all items have been negotiated, write it down on paper, make a copy and both the parents and the child sign and date it. Let the child keep a copy, and the parents keep a copy. When disagreements arise regarding behaviors or consequences, you can refer to the signed document to settle it (no arguing).

A contract should be negotiated with each child. Modify the contract to be age specific and be cautious about gender stereotyping. Chores offer the child an opportunity to contribute to the operation of the household. Allowances should not be connected to performance or chores, but rather a means to teach your child money management. Consider giving older (11-10+) children their allowance on a monthly basis. This allows them to buy larger ticket items, and teaches them to manage their money over a longer period. It is critically important that both parents be consistent with the administration of the contract. Inconsistency confuses children.

In blended families, both parents should be in agreement on the contract content, but the biological parent should be the one to present it to their child. Also addressthe issue ofwho is in charge when the biological parent is not available.

**USING CONSEQUENCES TO PROMOTE USEFUL BEHAVIOR**

1. Identify the child's goals.

1. Be sure that the consequence provides an opportunity to make appropriate choices,

and not just arbitrary punishment.

3. Consequences should focus on the adult gaining control of the **situation**, not the child.

4. Discuss alternatives at a neutral time.

5. Once choices have been made (by the child), stop talking and act.

6. Identify who owns the problem (the child, the adult, both).

7. Withdraw from power struggles and conflict.

Remain firm and fair

Act, don't talk

Provide choices

Assume that you and child are of equal worth and dignity.

Negotiate choices and consequences.

CONTRACT WORKSHEET

**FREEDOMS & PRIVILEGES (SOME EXAMPLES; YOU CAN SUGGEST OTHERS)**

GOING OUT

DATING

RIDING IN CARS

OVERNIGHTS OUT

OVERNIGHT GUESTS

PHONE

PARTIES

# LIMITATIONS TO FREEDOMS AND PRIVILEGES

CURFEWS

PHONE HOURS

WHAT DATING MEANS

WHAT LIMITS TO RIDING IN CARS

LIMITS TO STAYING OVERNIGHT AND OVERNIGHT GUESTS

# RESPONSIBILITIES

# BE WILLING TO NEGOTIATE IN GOOD FAITH

BE WILLING TO COMPROMISE

(COMPROMISE MEANS THAT YOU WILL NOT GET EVERYTHING YOU WANT AND NEITHER WILL WE, BUT ONCE A COMPROMISE ISMADE, IT IS ACCEPTED WITHOUT HARD FEELINGS ABOUT IT.)

HOUSEHOLD CHORES

SCHOOL AND HOMEWORK

HONESTY

CHECKING THINGS OUT

LIVING WITHIN THE LIMITS

BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE

# CONSEQUENCES

SUGGEST AND BE WILLING TO DISCUSS CONSEQUENCES FOR NOT MEETING THE INDIVIDUAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE CONTRACT.

### SAMPLE CONTRACT FOR FOURTEEN YEAR OLD

(Used as a sample--could be modified for younger or older youth)

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , 20\_\_\_

1. **CURFEW**: Weekdays 9:30 P.M.; Weekends 10:30 P.M.; Will negotiate special times.

## *RESPONSIBILITIES*: It is your responsibility to provide the following information when going out:

## Who with; Where you are going; What are your plans; Phone numbers where you can be reached.

*CALL* - when you are going to be late. This does not change curfew consequences but it is YOUR

responsibility to keep us (parents) informed.

*GET YOURSELF OUT OF A BAD SITUATION*

1. We will come get you without questions, if you ask for help. (but we will discuss it)

2. Call a cab - we will pay for it.

*CONSEQUENCES*: - No slack.

1 minute to 1 hour late - weekday curfew applies for the following whole weekend 9:30 P.M.

Over 1 hour - No going out for 1 week.

2 or more minor (less than 1 hour) curfew violations in 1 week - no going out for the following whole weekend.

2. **SCHOOL & HOMEWORK**

Cannot go out on weekdays unless homework is done. Weekends - homework can be done

on Sunday, unless a big project requires more work.

MAINTAIN AT LEAST 'C" OR ABOVE (ABOVE PREFERRED).

3. **PHONE**

No calls after 10:00 PM - weekdays (calls in progress can go till 10:30 PM)

No calls after 11:00 PM - weekends (calls in progress can go till 12:00 PM)

*RESPONSIBILITIES*: Make sure friends know rules. Be considerate of sharing the phone.

*CONSEQUENCES*: 1/2 hr taken off next day's phone curfew. After 2 violations in a week - weekday

phone curfew applies that next weekend.

4. **CHORES:** (IT IS USUALLY A GOOD IDEA TO SPECIFY WHEN CHORES ARE TO BE

DONE)

#### Clean up supper dishes

Do own laundry.

Pick up after self anywhere in the house (always)

Clean your own room

Do misc. jobs when asked

Take garbage out & to the street

Cook when asked or (specify a schedule)

*RESPONSIBILITIES:* Do chores without being told

*CONSEQUENCES*: More chores will be added to this list.

5. **PARTIES**: Each party is negotiated as they come up.

There must be adult supervision before considered.

*RESPONSIBILITIES*: Who, Where, When, What kind, Phone numbers. Has to check out.

*CONSEQUENCES:* Can't go to the party.

6. **OVERNIGHTS**: No more than 2 nights per month - OUT

## No more than 2 nights per month guests - IN

Cannot stay overnight with a friend we do not know.

*NON-OVERNIGHTS*: No friends over unless cleared - leave at your curfew time (unless otherwise

negotiated). Be respectful of home & clean up after selves.

*RESPONSIBILITIES:* Who, Address, Phone Number, okayed from a parent. Has to check out. Respect

rules of the house & others.

*CONSEQUENCES:* If you are not where you say you are, No overnights for 3 months (first violation). 2nd

violation - privilege suspended indefinitely. Random checks will be made.

7. **RIDING IN CARS**: No riding in cars with ANY ONE that is not cleared first.

*CONSEQUENCE:* It will take longer to get this privilege. 1 week grounding.

8. **ALCOHOL & DRUGS**: We will not tolerate alcohol or drugs use by you. If we suspect

usage we will take steps to address the issue. If you are having a problem with drugs or

alcohol we are here to talk about it AND HELP YOU GET THROUGH IT.

If drugs or alcohol is suspected - a urine check will be made at the doctor's office.

*RESPONSIBILITIES*: It is your responsibility to refrain from using any drug or alcoholic

beverage. This also means the consequences of being at a party where alcohol or drugs are

present and a bust happens, YOU suffer those consequences of your choices, even if you are

not drinking or using, but choosing to be present.

## Getting yourself out of a bad situation is YOUR responsibility. You can call us without us

asking questions.

*CONSEQUENCES:* There will be NO chance of a vehicle until you reach the age of 18

years old, if you use alcohol or drugs.

1. **ALLOWANCE:** $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_per month (Paid monthly and you cover everything, (specify))

10. **CLOTHING ALLOWANCE**: $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_per year

$\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_per year match money (we will match any money

YOU spend on clothing up to $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ per year).

***HONESTY, ATTITUDE and COMPLIANCE***: Honesty, attitude and compliance shown during this contract period will determine freedoms & privileges for the next contract period.

***CONTRACT TERM***: From \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNED: (Child)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNED: (Parent(s))