

STEPS TO WRITING A CONTRACT

From Parenting Your Out-of-control Teenager by Scott Sells

1. Create a list of the most important problems.
Is this a safety concern?
Is this important to me or can I let it go?
What might happen if I do?
2. Convert problems into rules. Write concrete definitions of behaviors.
3. Create a well written consequence.
Top Ten Consequences:
 - Money
 - Telephone
 - Freedom
 - Clothing
 - Car
 - Loosening Restrictions
 - Trust
 - Appearance
 - Materialism
 - Spending Time
4. Use positive and negative consequences.
5. Write the contract.
6. Include teenager's input and expertise.
7. Be consistent in following through.
8. Catch your teenager doing something right.

POINT OF ENTRY: WHY TEENAGERS HAVE PROBLEMS

Teenager In Charge and Drunk With Power

A mixed-up hierarchy exists in which the teen is in charge and more powerful than the parents. Whenever the parents try to restore their authority, the difficult teen will use extreme behaviors such as running away, becoming truant, or threatening suicide to intimidate the parents into giving their authority back to the teenager.

Misuse of Outside Forces

Parents often turn to outside forces (judges, police, counselors, medication, hospitals) to stop their teenager's problem behavior but in the process inadvertently undermine their own authority and effectiveness.

The Protective Function of Behavior Problems

A teenager's behavior problems are often a conscious or unconscious attempt to shift their family's focus off more threatening problems such as marital conflict, depression, or alcohol/drug abuse. As long as parents or other family members remain focused on the teen's problems, other issues may be ignored.

The Pleasure Principle

The teenager operates on the basis of the pleasure principle, or whatever feels good at the moment. The teenager would rather suffer the consequence than give up immediate gratification the misbehavior brings.

Thinking Two Steps Ahead

Difficult teenagers often possess what is called "advanced social perception." This is the ability to think two steps ahead. They foresee the sequential steps necessary to unravel any rule or consequence.

Button-Pushing Skills

Teenagers are more skillful than their parents during confrontations. They know how to push their buttons through words or actions so that the parents become angry and lose control. By determining the general mood or direction of the argument, the adolescent is able to maintain a status quo position of authority.

Potential of Stumbling Blocks

Rules & Consequences Not Clearly Outlined

Teenagers are extremely literal and will continue to get into arguments about the interpretation of rules or consequences. Therefore, rules and consequences must be clearly written down in a contract format beforehand.

Rules Clear and Mandatory

A mandatory rule is one that the teenager must obey. If the rule is not clearly stated it becomes optional and ineffective.

Too Many Rules At One Time

Rather than focusing on their time and energy on the most important issues, parents often want to correct every negative thing the teenager does at one time.

Consequence Not Effective

Consequence or punishment is not severe enough. Therefore, the teenager has no reason to give up the extreme behavior.

Parents Not Consistent

Parents do not follow through on a consistent basis or function “off the cuff” and change the rules and consequence as they go along.

Rules Not Predetermined

Rules and consequences not predetermined in a contract format. As a result, both parents and adolescent get confused as to what was said and how the rules was to be enforced.

Listing Top Three Problem Behaviors

Mother’s List	Father’s List
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Son will not go to school #2 Son is disrespectful by swearing and not doing what I ask him to do the first time. #4 Son will not come home on time for curfew. #3 Stealing #1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Son sulks, always in a bad mood #4 Will not listen to me #2 Does not appreciate us as parents #3 Lying #1
Combined Relevant Behavior List (rank order of priority)	
<p>#1 Son will not go to school. #2 Stealing #3 Son will not come home on time for curfew. #4 Son is disrespectful by the following behaviors: swearing, lying, and not following directions.</p>	

Questions to Keep in Mind When Developing Problem Behavior Lists...

- Is this behavior really important?
- Can I let this behavior go?
- What would happen if I just waited?
- Can I lose by doing nothing?

SAMPLE SIMPLE CONTRACT

I agree to the following terms:

HOUSE RULES:

1. No drug or alcohol use, in or outside of the home.
2. Curfews to be the following:
Sun-Thur _____ Fri-Sat _____
3. Full attendance at school to include no tardies, skipping or unexcused absences.
4. Chores to consist of the following:
 - a. Take out the trash by _____pm Tuesday.
 - b. Clean dinner dishes on M-W-F.
 - c. Room to be picked up before leaving house in the morning.
5. Mutual respect within the home.

CONSEQUENCES:

1. First dirty test – attendance at _____more weekly 12-step meetings.
Second dirty test – inpatient treatment at either _____ or _____.
2. Reduce curfew twice the amount late for next 2 nights for first 30 minutes. Over 30 min., reduce twice the amount late for 5 of next 7 days, 2 of which are weekend days.
3. Weekend curfew to be 6:00 pm.
4. a. Reduce allowance by _____.
b. Clean weekend dishes.
c. Loss of phone privileges.
5. No use of computer games for 2 days per occurrence.

PRIVILEGES:

1. Phone use until _____pm daily.
2. Allowance of \$ _____per week.
3. Computer use not to exceed _____ hours per day.
4. Use of car _____ days per week.

Signature (teenager): _____ Date: _____

Signature (parent): _____ Date: _____

Signature (parent): _____ Date: _____

Re-negotiate contract in _____ weeks

A Sample Ironclad Contract

Rules and Consequences

Rule #1 (Son will not go to school) Beginning Monday, John will ride the bus at 8am and attend school every day. This includes every class period with no tardies unless there is a medical emergency requiring that he be taken to the doctor's office. The parents will determine this and will contact the attendance officer each morning to monitor John's attendance.

Consequence A: If it is discovered that John did not attend school, was tardy or missed even one class, the following consequences will occur. **First Offense:** Being grounded the next day plus one weekend day and evening. This means no phone calls, no TV and no friends over. **Second Offense:** Mother or Father will attend school and sit next to John in as many classes as they are able the first available day they can get time off from work. John will be fined \$5 for every hour his parents have to take off work to sit with him in class.

Consequence B: Each day that it is determined from the attendance officer that John has abided by Rule #1, he can have one extra hour of phone time.

Rule #2 (Stealing) John will not take or borrow any items in the house or at school that do not belong to him. Any items that John wants to borrow, such as a hairdryer, must first be approved by at least one parent.

Consequence A: If John is caught stealing, he will apologize and do 5 hours of labor for the person from whom he stole property. This will increase to 5 hours for each additional offense. The labor tasks will be jointly determined by the victim and the parents.

Rule #3 (Son will not come home on time for curfew) John's curfew time will be 5pm on school nights (Sunday through Thursday) and 9pm on weekends (Friday & Saturday). If John returns even one minute past curfew, he will be considered late. These times will not be changed or altered until the parents decide otherwise.

Consequence A: For every night John is late, he will be grounded the next day plus one weekend night. If he is late again that same week, the same thing happens. If he runs out of weekend nights, then it will be postponed to the next weekend. If John happens to be grounded for breaking curfew on the same day he is grounded for missing school, one of the days will be postponed until the next available date.

Consequence B: If John comes home on time, he will receive one hour added to his curfew the following night. For example, on school nights it would be extended to 6 pm and on weekends to 10 pm.

Rule #4 (Son is disrespectful) John's behavior will be considered disrespectful if he does one or more of the following:

- (1) Swears or uses obscene gestures like giving the finger
- (2) Tells a lie (and it is proven that he told a lie as determined by a parent)
- (3) Refuses to complete a task (homework, chores etc.) even after one warning is given.

Consequence A: If John is disrespectful, he will be given a verbal count of three to stop swearing, tell the truth or complete the task. If he refuses, he will be escorted to the bathroom for a time-out. For the first offense, he must stay in time-out for 15 minutes. Each additional offense on the same day will result in a 15-minute addition to the penalty. John will begin each day back at 15 minutes. The timer does not start until he is quiet. His total time is cut in half if he goes to the time-out area on his own and quietly completes his time.

CONTRACT BETWEEN _____ AND PARENTS

1.Substance Abuse

Rule:

Consequence A

Consequence B

2.School/Homework

Rule:

Consequence A

Consequence B

3.Use of Car

Rule:

Consequence A

Consequence B

CONTRACT

The purpose of this contract is for all of us to work cooperatively, responsibly, and proudly toward family's increasing autonomy.

A. We agree to the following terms through October 11, _____.

1. No drug or alcohol use in or out of the house.
2. Compliance with Kaiser program.
3. Driving only directly to and from school except with parent's permission.
4. Parental permission for any friend(s) in the house while neither parent is home.
5. Be home at night by time agreed on with parent.

B. Consequences:

1. Loss of night-time privileges
2. Loss of driving privileges
3. Loss of TV
4. Loss of refrigerator
5. Loss of computer use
6. Loss of telephone use
7. Loss of pager
8. Loss of stereo
9. Loss of allowance

Progress review on October 11.

Signature (Student) _____ Date _____

Signature (Parent) _____ Date _____

Signature (Parent) _____ Date _____

SIMPLE CONTRACT-I agree to the following terms:

HOUSE RULES:

- 1) No drug or alcohol use, in or outside of the home.
- 2) Drug & alcohol meetings twice a week, counseling w/ _____ once a week, NA meetings twice a week.
- 3) Compliance with Medications
- 4) Full attendance at school, which includes no tardies, skipping or unexcused absences.
- 5) Homework done every day.
- 6) Chores to consist of the following:
 - a. Take out trash by 8pm every evening.
 - b. Clean up dog poop on alternate Saturdays – starting 7/08/2000
 - c. Room to be picked up on Saturday 3:00
 - d. Bathroom—clean your side daily after shower/take out trash every other week on Wednesday starting 7/05/2000
 - e. Laundry done by Sunday before 8:00pm
 - f. Feed dongs every evening, change water buckets every other day.
 - g. Clean up own dishes and messes made in other areas of house other than own room as they happen.
- 7) Mutual Respect within the home—loss of temper (anger), cursing, slamming doors.

CONSEQUENCES:

- 1) Use of drugs – 30/60 day in house drug facility
- 2) Missed drug & alcohol meetings, meeting with _____, NA meetings – one week no privileges or until full attendance for a week.
- 3) 1 day missed Meds—Loss of T.V. for 2 days.
- 4) Unexcused absences—grounded one week.
- 5) Homework not done—grounded until homework is done.
- 6) Chores not done on time--\$1 per minute it takes for parent to do chore (example: \$3 to take out trash), to be deducted from allowance or pay.
- 7) Loss of mutual respect at home—loss of all activities and privileges for a day.

PRIVILEGES: ALL HAVE BEEN REINSTATED AS OF 6/29/2000:

- 1) Hapkido classes reinstated
- 2) Bike activities
- 3) Paintball
- 4) Pizza—Friday nights
- 5) Privacy—door back on room
- 6) Limited phone use--\$40 per month, after that deducted from allowance/pay
- 7) Seeing friends
- 8) T.V.
- 9) Radio back
- 10) Reinstate ATM (allowance)

_____ also agrees to go to Summer School and work with his dad after summer school 3-4 days a week. After summer school is over, he will work with his dad full days, 3-4 days a week. These work days will be agreed upon in once a week Sunday dinner meetings.

The consideration of returning the knife collection will be negotiated in one year—July 1, 2001 to see if it is reasonable to return to _____.

Fireworks are okay for the 4th of July only. If there are any leftover they are to be given to parents to hold until next 4th of July.

Signed by:

Parent: _____

Student: _____