

## Behavioral Contracting (Writing A Behavioral Contract)

Shari Landes

How can your family go about composing, administrating, and enforcing a Behavioral Contract for your child? This article will guide you through the process and present you with a blank sample Behavioral Contract for you to use.

Below is the text from the first screen of the FamilyIQ course, "Behavioral Contracting." This screen illustrates the definition of what exactly a behavioral contract is:

What exactly is a "Behavioral Contract"?

For the purpose of this course, a Behavioral Contract is:

A written agreement between you and your child regarding his or her specific behaviors, which, if not complied with, has specific enforceable consequences. This behavior contract is agreed to and signed by both parties.

Remember: A behavioral contract is only as good as your willingness and ability to follow through on it and to enforce it.

This article addresses concisely what a behavioral contract is, and at the end of this article is a link to a sample contract.

We strongly recommend that you take the FamilyIQ course, "Behavioral Contracting" before writing and executing a behavior contract with your child. As you go through the course, fill out the workbook exercises. This will help you enormously when it's time to sit down and write the contract with your family and your child.

Remember that the overriding purpose of a Behavioral Contract is for the child or teenager to understand their behavior and to take responsibility and to be accountable for that behavior, and indeed, all of their behavior. Another, more subtle outcome of Contracting is to help parents and caretakers track behavior and consequences with consistency and full communication involving all persons in the household.

Using what you've thought about and wrote in your workbook, make a list of the targeted behaviors and describe the circumstances when these behaviors occur. Write down your expectations and very specifically state the consequences. Try to think in terms of natural consequences when possible, and logical consequences when needed. Please see the FamilyIQ course for further definitions of these terms. Once prepared, you're ready to schedule a family meeting and compose the contract with your family.

The writing and execution of the behavior contract should take place during a family meeting, held with all household members, including the person whom the contract is addressing. This person should also take an active part in the creation of the behavior contract, contributing ideas and suggestions. At the very least, weekly family meetings should be held during the course of the contract. Compliance and grievances are discussed in subsequent meetings. Adjustments may be made to behavior contracts as time passes. Original contract should be signed by all family members and subsequent addendums to the contract should also be signed.

Communication is one of the major goals of a behavioral contract.

Remember to be VERY SPECIFIC in the language of the contract. Try to leave NO LOOPHOLES!

What follows are some contract guidelines and examples, and then a blank form for you to fill in to use as the actual contract.

Description of Targeted Behavior problem: Grades have fallen, school work has been incomplete. Family members agree that this is partly\* a consequence of non-preparation and reduced attention to schoolwork in general.

Behavior Targeted: Homework duties

Expected Behavior for Problem Resolution: 2 hours of homework or studying every day after school

\*

If no homework has been assigned, then 2 hours of studying and reading may be substituted. No TV while working, however reasonable music is permitted.

\*

Special circumstances for a specific day can be discussed by contract members and decided on fully before the specified homework day and/or period.

Consequences:

Positive: Reward or Privilege:

From what you know of your child and with discussions with child, decide what kind of reward would be most valuable and would help your child towards success. Some examples are:

\*

Monetary or material: Since child or teen didn't spend time playing video games as usual and worked on the homework instead, money towards a video game is deposited after a specified period of time complying with the homework contract, or

\*

Child or teen can maintain access to the TV or video games, or having friends visit, or going out with friends, once their homework period (and other set routines, such as chores) is completed.

Negative Consequence:

\*

No additions to video game fund, or

\*

No TV or video games, no friends visiting, no going out with friends.

\*Targeting one behavior may very well be the tip of the iceberg for a cluster of behaviors. If, for instance, your child's schoolwork has been suffering, look at what other factors may be involved besides homework. Look too and try to identify overriding problems and situations. A problematic behavior may be indicative of overall problems. Below are other factors to look at and consider when composing your contract.

Plan on spending at LEAST an hour at your first behavior contract meeting. Assigning one family member (a parent, but not necessarily) as moderator and mediator can help expedite the process.

Suggestions for Behavioral Factors

\*

Curfews: Consider the following:

o

Structured school nights (meetings, after-school activities, etc)

o

Unstructured school nights

o

Weekend nights, both structured and unstructured

\*

Communication (Subsequent family meetings to be scheduled)

\*

Substance Abuse

\*

Smoking

\*

Behavior with siblings

\*

Respect or lack thereof of parents and/or other adult authority figures

\*

Chores and household responsibilities

\*

Car Use or 'Chauffeured' transportation to friends, events, etc.

\*

Attendance at therapy and/or compliance with medications

\*

Expressions of anger

\*

Expressions of violence

\*

Computer and/or TV use

\*

School behavior, attendance and grades

\*

Running away

\*

Allowance

For a free Behavioral Contract and for additional information, see the FamilyIQ course, "Behavioral Contracting." Additional information can also be found in the article, "What is a Behavioral Contract?"

Shari Landes worked as a senior researcher in experimental psychology at Princeton University for 15 years, primarily studying learning, cognition, and linguistics. She has an extensive web presence, beginning with the development of one of the first websites that provided resources on ADHD and related disorders. She has published and edited numerous research articles and books.