

Writing A Behavior Contract

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How can your family go about composing, administering, 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.

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 behavior 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.

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. 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, schoolwork 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 everyday 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:
 - Structured school nights (meetings, after-school activities, etc)
 - Unstructured school nights
 - 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

Home Rules Contract For The John Sample Family

All family members, whose signatures are present on this document below, are in agreement with and will follow the rules and consequences of this Home Rules Contract, as listed:

This contract is designed to make your life easier and to help you learn basic responsibility and organizational skills. There are some items in this contract that will be done with out reward. These items are essential to your success in the real world. There will be times that your decisions will not be based on a reward but based on what you were taught. In these instances, you must make the right decision!

Attitude and Respect

Jan will display a good attitude when asked to perform a task at home and at school. Jan will not be disrespectful towards me, Papa Chan or any adult (talking back, making smart comments, being sarcastic).

There is no privilege for being respectful to others. This is not optional!

Daily Responsibilities

Jan will clean up after herself daily

- Pick up plates, cups, and utensils from dinner table
- Rinse dirty dishes and put them in the dishwasher
- Wipe off the kitchen table and the kitchen counter whenever something spills or if a mess has been made
- Pick up any food, etc. that is dropped on the floor
- Slow down when eating her food and chew her food properly
- Water the flowers daily
- Get in the bed between 8:30 and 9:00pm (M-Th); 10:30pm (F-Sat.)

Jan will clean her bedroom daily – This should be complete before 8:00pm

- Make up bed
- No clothes on the floor. They need to be put away or in the dirty clothes hamper.
- No mess on the floor
- Dresser and night stand organized neatly
- Place shoes in shoe rack or in closet (do not leave in the foyer or other parts of the house)
- Place book bag in room after homework

Jan will clean the bathroom daily – This should be completed before going to school

- No mess left on the counter or in the sink
- No water on the floor
- No towels or clothes on the floor
- Towels and washcloths put away (not on bed or floor)
- No trash on the floor
-

Jan will prepare for the next school day at night

- Get book bag ready for the next day
- Prepare snacks and lunch (if you are taking lunch) at night for the following day
- Get your clothes and shoes ready for the next day

Privilege: *15 min. of computer time earned*

Consequence: *Loose TV for a day and 15 min. of computer time*

Weekly Responsibilities

Jan will clean her room every Saturday by 1:00pm.

- Change the bed
- Make sure bedroom is free from items on the floor, organized and all trash thrown away. This includes the closet and under the bed
- Room vacuumed

Jan will clean her bathroom every Saturday by 1:00pm

- Scrub bathtub
- Clean toilet
- Clean mirror
- Sweep floor and mop
- Put all towels in the hamper
- Empty the trash

Jan will clean the kitchen every Saturday by 1:00pm

- Wipe down the stainless steel (refrigerator, dishwasher, microwave, stove & bread box)
- Clean the kitchen table

Jan will iron her clothes for the week on Sunday evening

Privilege: *\$5.00 allowance plus 1 hour of computer time*

Consequence: *No allowance and no computer and TV for a week*

School Responsibilities

Jan will do her personal best at school

- All homework shall be completed by 7:30pm (This means signatures on folders, agenda, etc.)
- Practice self control at all times (This means getting prepared for morning work, getting homework out and in the appropriate place, using your time wisely in the morning to complete all tasks)
- Read for 30 minutes on Monday, Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday
- Respect your friends and treat them the way you want to be treated
- Talk only during the appropriate times
- Follow directions and listen to your teachers
- Take your time and go over your work to ensure you have the correct answers
- All homework and school work should be done neatly

Privilege: *\$5.00 added to weekly allowance plus 1 hour of computer time*

Consequence: *Loose \$5.00 out of that weeks allowance*

Report Card Responsibilities

Jan will maintain all A's and B's

Privilege: \$2.00 for each A
\$1.00 for each B
-\$1.00 for each C
-\$2.00 for each D

Consequence: No computer and TV for two weeks if grades drop below a B

Personal Hygiene

Jan will brush and floss her teeth twice a day, wash her face each morning and put lotion on her face and use her lotion and cream after each shower without me or Papa Chan telling her.

Privilege: Get to pick out something at Bath & Body works or Claire's once a month for \$5.00 or less.

Consequence: Loose 1 hour of computer time

Family Responsibilities

When at home, all family members will have dinner together

The Sample family will establish a family night once a week

Each family member will take turns choosing the activity

Parents Request

Parents reserve the right to be parents and will at time request extra duties to be performed. These will sometimes be rewarded with extra privileges. Outlined above are only the "basics" and is not all inclusive of being a family. A family should share in responsibilities and help each other when needed.

Child Request

Child reserves the right to discuss any responsibilities that cannot be met for the week. Child must have a plan as to how the work will get done and be prepared to share that plan during the request. At any time the child may call a family meeting to discuss important issues or concerns they may have. Child also reserves the right to tell parents, in a respectful way, when they are breaking the rules or not doing what they say.

Signatures of family members (contract must be signed by all family members involved in the contract)

Caregivers

Mike Sample

Joan Sample

Children

Jan Sample

Example Family Contract

Daily Responsibilities

Pick-up Bedroom Before School

This means:

- Make up bed.
- No clothes on the floor. They need to be put away or in dirty clothes hamper.
- No mess on floors.

Consequence: If not done before school it has to be done immediately after school. All privileges are suspended including snack until complete.

Pick-Up Bathroom after each use

This means:

- No mess left on counter or in sink.
- Toothpaste cap is put on tube.
- No water on the floor after your shower.
- No towels or clothes on the floor.
- Towels and washcloths are hung up to dry.
- No trash on floor.
- No Yuk left in toilet.

*If you go into a messy bathroom please inform a parent so that you will not be blamed for the mess.

Consequence: All privileges are suspended until complete. If it becomes a recurring offense then privileges may be suspended for a day or more and/or extra chores.

Homework

Homework is one of your most important responsibilities. After school you are allowed a break-time (play, tv, computer, snack, phone). The amount of time you “break” needs to be dependent upon how much homework that you have and what other obligations you have for the rest of the night. It is important that you learn to manage your time well. Obvious mismanagement of time will have consequences both in school and at home.

This means:

- “Break time” ends at 6:00 p.m. unless you have **prior** permission.
- After 6:00 p.m. all privileges are suspended until homework is finished.
- Late homework nights are only allowed with **prior** permission. Procrastination is not an excuse for a late homework night.
- If in doubt ask for advice and get “prior permission”.

Consequences: Late homework nights that happen due to procrastination will result in a loss of privileges for 1 day to 2 weeks depending on the seriousness of the offense. This can be avoided by planning your time better and communication with your parents.

Missed homework or zero's for homework will be completed even if the teacher will not accept late homework. If the zeros affected your grade point average all privileges are suspended until your grade is brought back to what it was prior to the zero.

After Dinner Kitchen Clean-Up

Responsibility for after dinner clean-up is primarily Steve and Julie, however if Jill does not have a job she is also required to help.

This means:

- Kitchen clean up begins immediately after dinner is over.
- Food put away in containers.
- Dishes / pots rinsed and put in dishwasher or washed.
- Dishes dried and put away.
- Counter tops cleaned.
- Stove top wiped down.
- Trash emptied.
- Floor swept.

*Everyone is required to help in the kitchen until the entire kitchen is complete.

Consequence: If the job is not done properly all who worked in the kitchen will return until it is done completely.

Before Bed Pick Up

Each person is responsible for picking up anything left on the main or basement level before they go to bed. This includes the computer area (homework), drink cups, shoes, clean laundry etc...

Consequence: If items are found after you have gone to bed you will be asked to get up/wake up and complete the task before going to bed for the night. If this becomes a recurring problem you will have added responsibilities/chores for a period of time.

Weekly Responsibilities

Clean Bedroom

This means:

- Bedroom is picked up and organized and all trash is emptied. This includes closet and under bed.
- Bedroom is dusted and vacuumed.
- Sheets are changed on the bed and dirty sheets are put **downstairs** in the laundry hamper.
- Occasionally other duties will be expected like sorting through clothes you have out-grown, cleaning your window, etc.. However you will be given advanced notice and if needed extra time.

*If you have a guest that messes up your room – remember it is still **your** responsibility and if you want help, make sure you leave time for your guest to help you before they go home – otherwise you will be cleaning up the entire mess by yourself.

Bedroom has to be completed by 9:00 p.m. Sunday night. ***Exception** is when we have company for the weekend and time will be changed to before company's arrival. If finished sooner (like on Saturday) then you need to let a parent know so it can be checked. Procrastination or mismanagement of time is not an excuse for the bedroom to not be completed on time. If you have a prior commitment for Sunday you need to have your bedroom completed early. Early is always better just in case you have a surprise invitation/ activity that you want to do.

Consequences: All privileges are suspended until the room is completed. Recurring offenses will have longer suspension of privileges and /or extra chores.

Clean Bathroom

Julie is responsible for up-stairs bathroom. Jill is responsible for basement bathroom.
This means:

- Bath tub scrubbed.
- Toilet scrubbed outside, inside and around base.
- Vanity and mirror cleaned.
- Floor swept or vacuumed and then cleaned.
- All towels put in laundry hamper downstairs and clean towels and washcloths hung up.

Juliee time frame and stipulations as placed on bedroom clean up.

Consequences: All privileges are suspended until the room is completed. Recurring offenses will have longer suspension of privileges and /or extra chores.

Basic Yard work

Steve is primarily responsible for yard work, however at times everyone may be asked to complete yard assignments when necessary.

Steve:

- Mow yard and blow off driveway and sidewalk after mowing. During the spring and summer season this needs to be done at least once a week. Yard needs to be mowed on Thursday (weather permitting). Only with approval can this date be changed.
- May be asked to mow during the fall/winter. (example: In the fall a few times to get up leaves).
- Edge driveway, sidewalk and edge at street once a week. This can be completed be Sunday night at 5:00 p.m.

Jill, Julie, Steve – other occasional duties.

- Weeding
- Blowing driveway
- Sweeping / blowing front and back deck and porch.
- Trimming
- General yard help

We will try to give you notice and plan the other occasional yard duties so that you can keep from making other plans. However, this may not always be possible.

Consequences: No weekend activities until yard work is completed unless there is no-fault due to weather or mechanical problems or prior arrangements have been approved.

Trash

Julie will be responsible for taking the garbage out to the street on Sunday night. This needs to be completed by **9:00 p.m. Sunday**. Steve will be asked to help if there are items that are too heavy for Julie to carry.

This means:

- Before taking trash to street check/ empty kitchen garbage, other garbage cans in the house and ask parents if there is any other trash that you need to take to the street.
- Bring garbage cans back to the house on Monday after school.

Consequences: This needs to be something that you remember to do. If forgotten and trash is not picked up then you will lose privileges on Monday. If there is a reason you cannot put out the trash on Sunday it is your responsibility to ask someone else to do it for you.

Vacuum and Dusting

Since Steve has the bulk of yard duties vacuuming and dusting will be Jill's and Julie's responsibilities.

Vacuuming and dusting needs to be done between Thursday after school and no later than 6:00 p.m. Friday night.

This means:

Jill:

- Dust and vacuum basement, basement stairs, and clean railings going up the basement stairs.
- Basement tile needs to be mopped. Once a month the furniture needs to be moved and the floor mopped and vacuumed.

Julie

- Dust and vacuum main floor, stairs, and upstairs hallway.

Consequence: No weekend activities until complete beginning Friday night.

General Rules and Expectations

Manners

- Asked to be excused from the dinner table.
- Try not to interrupt when someone is talking. Always pause when entering a room and make sure that there is not a discussion going on before you start talking.
- If it is not yours don't touch it. Always get permission when you want to borrow something and put it back when you are finished.
- If you use an area in the house leave it neater than how you found it.

Bedtimes

My goal is to help you establish better sleeping habits so that you can do your best in school. I realize that there are times that getting to sleep may be hard or there will be times that you need to stay up later. Any changes or exceptions to these bedtimes will need to be approved by a parent.

- During school the bedtimes are as follows:

Jill –	11:00 PM
Steve –	10:00 PM
Julie –	9:00 PM
- Bedtimes mean the time that you physically go and lay down in your bedroom. You may then take another **hour to read or watch TV**. You need to set your TV sleep timer for an hour. This is intended to relax you so that you can get to sleep easier. If watching TV simply wakes you up even more than you need to read.
- One hour after your bedtime your lights need to be out and TV off.

Consequences: If you are caught not following the rule then your bedtime will be earlier the next evening by 30 minutes. It will increase by increments of 30 minutes until you abide to the rule. If TV becomes a problem then the TV will be temporarily removed.

REWARD: If you follow the rule during the week of school then on the weekend you will not have a bedtime. If you did not follow the rule during the school week then you must follow the school day bedtime on the weekend (which also means that you will not be allowed to spend the night at anyone's house that weekend and if someone spends the night with you they will have to follow your bedtime.)

Phone

- You may use the house phone **until** your established bedtime. Once you are in bed you are not allowed to talk on the phone.
- On the **weekends** you may use the house phone until **midnight**.
- If you are using the phone you must answer all calls that come in.

- Priority goes to the person with the earliest bedtime. If someone needs to make a quick phone call you may be asked to hang up and call them after the phone is used. We need to share the phone.
- Please ask your friends to **not** call the house after 10:00. Even though you may be allowed to talk on the phone I do not want the phone ringing after 10:00 on **any night**.

Consequences: If you are talking on the phone after your “time” you will lose all phone privileges for the next day. If you are talking on the phone on a day that you have lost privileges then you lose privileges for a week.

Laundry

These are basic rules and courtesies that I want to establish for laundry. Most of the children have expressed a desire to do their own laundry. However:

- On Sunday night when you have cleaned your room you need to empty your laundry hamper and sort it in the hampers in the garage. This way if I am doing laundry I will incorporate what I can and if you want to do your laundry you can get it from the hampers in the garage.
- Always check pockets (we have had entire loads of clothing ruined due to items left in the pockets)
- Turn socks to correct side. Socks turned inside out only keep the dirt in the sock.
- **No super oversized or super small loads.** Oversized loads can damage the washing machine and small loads waste electricity and water.
- If you don't have enough of your own clothes to make a load then get some more from the hamper.
- **DO NOT MIX WHITES AND COLORED CLOTHES** in the wash. I pay for your clothes and do not want them ruined.
- **Don't start it if you can't finish it!** If so you may get a “You Owe Me”.
- If you want to use the dryer and it already has clothes in it, go and get that person to finish their laundry. If they are not home then fluff the clothes for 5 minutes and **you have to fold and hang up the clothes** that are in the dryer. You also may get a “You Owe Me” for finishing their laundry. Make sure that you get a parent to sign the slip. You **may not just dump** the load into a hamper.

We all need to cooperate in dealing with laundry. We are a big family. At this time consequences will be handled with the “You Owe Me”.

Car Washing

Brittney and Jill must wash their car twice a month and clean out and vacuum the inside. You can either wash it by hand in the driveway or pay to have it washed. Steve and Julie may want to be hired for the work or “You Owe Me” can be used or you can buy a car wash when you fill up at a gas station.

Car has to be washed by Sunday at 7 p.m. on the first and third week of the month.

Consequence: Car cannot be used until it is washed. That means riding the bus to school Monday morning. Exceptions for work may be approved by an adult however it will cost you an extra chore for the week.

Parent Request

Parents receive the right to be parents and will at times request extra duties to be performed. These will sometimes be rewarded with extra privileges. Outlined above are only the “basics” and is not all inclusive of being a family. A family should share in responsibilities and help each other when needed.

This is a contract for the purpose of explaining both our responsibilities and some of our family expectations. It is a document that will be occasionally reviewed and updated. This contract only covers the most basic responsibilities and is in no way all inclusive of our expectations or your responsibilities.

There are places in the contract that the term “privileges” has been used. Privileges is defined as anything that is not necessary. When you lose “all privileges” it means No TV, phone, computer (except for homework), friends, music, and going out, etc... There are times in the contract that you only lose a specific privilege.

Most of the categories on the contract only spell out consequences and not rewards. This is because the “Reward” is the ability to keep the privileges. Rewards and Privileges include many things like our trust, spending the night out, having friends spend the night with you, paying for an occasional movie, taking you places, buying you things, etc...

The contract is designed to make your life easier, and help you learn basic responsibility and organizational skills. And is a direct response for your requests for me to be more intentional on my expectations. By signing this contract you are agreeing and understand your responsibilities as well as understanding the consequences for not fulfilling your responsibility.

Harry Example _____

Lynette Example _____

Brittney Example _____

Jill Example _____

Steve Example _____

Julie Example _____

Witnessed by: _____

SAMPLE #1 CONTRACT

Teen will not use any alcohol or drugs.

Consequence: Teen will be grounded for one week. Grounding consists of: staying home, no friends as guests, no phone calls, etc. etc.) Punishment will increase one week for each subsequent offense (i.e., if teen is caught using substances a second time, punishment will be for two weeks, etc.) **Note:** It is VERY important to clearly state what being grounded consists of so that there are no avenues for manipulation by the teen to get out of the punishment).

Privilege: Teen will be allowed to continue going out with friends and may have continued use of the car.

Teen is expected to return home immediately after school except if prior arrangements are made with parents. Teen will inform parents where he/she is going and will be home by 8:00 p.m. on school nights and 11:00 p.m. on nonschool nights.

Consequence: Teen will be expected to come home twice as early as he was late for one week. (e.g., if 30 minutes late, then curfew will be one hour earlier for the next week).

Privilege: Teen will maintain current curfew and gain trust (some parents may want to allow their teen to work his/her way up to a later curfew by proving himself or herself, but **parents should never set a curfew later than the legal curfew in their area**).

Teen will perform all assigned chores in a satisfactory manner, according to the standards set by parents. (It is helpful to provide a written list of daily chores so there is no misunderstanding - a dry-erase marker board hung in the kitchen or other family area works great for this purpose).

Consequence: Teen will not be allowed any privileges until required chores are completed, including TV, radio, computer, having friends visit or going out with friends.

Privilege: Teen will maintain access to all privileges of the house, including watching TV, using the computer, having friends visit, and going out with friends.

Teenager Questionnaire

(Circle the number that applies to your teen)

1. Does your teen struggle with basic family rules and expectations?
2. Has your teen ever been suspended, expelled, truant or had a drop in school grades?
3. Has your teen ever been verbally abusive?
4. In your opinion, does your teen associate with a bad peer group?
5. Has your teen lost interest in former productive activities, such as hobbies and sports?
6. Do you have difficulty getting your teen to do simple household chores or homework without a major fight?
7. Has your teen had problems with the law?
8. Do you find yourself picking your words carefully when speaking to your teen so as not to elicit a verbal attack or rage from them?
9. Are you worried that your teen may not finish high school?
10. Does your teen, at times, seem depressed and/or withdrawn?
11. Is your teen's appearance or personal hygiene outside your family standards?
12. Has your teen ever displayed violent behavior?
13. Is your teen manipulative or deceitful?
14. Does your teen seem to lack motivation?
15. Do you suspect that your teen is telling lies or has been dishonest with you?
16. Are you concerned that your teen may be sexually promiscuous?
17. Have you seen any evidence of suicidal thoughts, such as statements that your teen wanted to be dead, etc?
18. Do you suspect that you have had money or other valuables missing from your home?
19. Are you concerned that your teen's behavior is a threat to his safety and well-being?
20. Does your teen seem to lack self-esteem and self-worth?
21. Do you have a lack of trust with your teen?
22. Is your teen angry or displaying temper outbursts?
23. Does your teen have problems with authority?
24. Does your teen engage in activities you don't approve of?
25. Do you think your teen is using or experimenting with drugs and/or alcohol?
26. Are you concerned about your teen's well-being and future?
27. Does your teen seem to be in constant opposition to your family values?
28. No matter what rules and consequences are established, does your teen defy them?
29. Are you exhausted and worn out from your teen's defiant or destructive behaviors and choices?
30. When dealing with your teen, do you often feel that you are powerless?

Add Circled Questions to Total Score: _____ of 30.

18+ Checks HIGH RISK! GET HELP!	A Residential Center, Treatment Program, or Specialty School may be STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.
9-17 Checks BORDERLINE RISK	The problems may be resolved by tightening up the Family Rules and Structure.
Up to 8 Checks MODERATE RISK	Tighten up family rules and be consistent with your monitoring. Most important - FOLLOW THROUGH. When you say something will happen, your teen must see it happen!