

## Family Contracts: A Practical Way To Provide Healthy Boundaries

Using the contract method in the home is a very effective way to balance love and limits. By writing those limits out in contract form a family is forced to clarify and clearly set out its boundaries. But how does one do that on a daily basis? Here are three guidelines to use in implementing boundaries in your home.

**First**, *set clearly defined limits by writing a contract.* By writing down what you've agreed on with your children, you avoid the heartache of a difference of opinion about what was said and not said when the boundary was set. By having an "official" document, misunderstandings can be cleared up quickly.

**Second**, *have the parties involved sign the contract.* At the risk of becoming too business-like this does serve to solidify commitment and encourage responsibility. If a child knows his name is "on the dotted line-," he's less likely to try and fudge on the boundary. Make sure you sign it as well; it's important for your children to see your seriousness and willingness to take responsibility as well.

**Third**, *supervise the living of these limits regularly.* ? This takes discipline and a willingness to "hang in there" when it would be easier to "Just let them do what they want." Through consistent supervision, your children learn responsibility and learn to take commitments they've made seriously. The guiding principle here is, "Don't expect, inspect." As Dr. Henry Brandt is quoted as having said, "People do what you inspect, not what you expect ."

**Last**, *consistently handle resistance through lost privileges.* Have the children decide which privileges will be lost for which violations of the contract. (You might be surprised by how tough they'll be on themselves!) In allowing them to have a say, you give them ownership in the agreement and the security of knowing they've been included in the process. And, when loss of privilege does occur, they are much more likely to adhere to the punishment because they decided what it would be.

### What In The World Does A Contract Look Like?

Here's an example of two contracts we've used in different homes. Again, once an agreed upon contract becomes a part of the family, it can be the policeman ? not you. The first contract is designed for younger children. Every home would have it's own unique contract, specifically designed to help the family function in an organized and loving way. Not only that, but as communication and harmony grows

through creating a contract, it provides one of the best methods of family stress reduction we know. The following contract is one that was used in a family with young children where both parents were working. The husband was working full-time, and the wife was working part-time which allowed her more time to be available with the children.

Charting Family Responsibilities	
Responsibilities	Lost Privileges for 24 Hours
1. Conforming: Obeying Mom and Dad ? not complaining, arguing or nagging.	All toys
2. Cleaning: Clean room every morning; clean up after using toys or other items.	Television for one day
3. Chores: Lawn once a week: trash every evening; piano by 5:30 P.M.	After-school snack
4. Courteous: At meals, at church and outings.	Not joining the family the next time they eat out
5. Caring: To bed on time; brush teeth; kind to people and things, not teasing, hitting or arguing.	No friends over for a day
Signed: _____ Date: Signed: _____ Date:	
Auto Guidelines Contract	
<p>[date] Upon receiving my driver's permit, I will be allowed to drive on local errands when accompanied by either parent. I will assist in driving for extended periods of time on long family vacations under all types of driving conditions. This is a contract you can use with a teen as you just begin to drive, or the experience. Setting up a contract is not setting something in concrete. There is room for mutual negotiation and restructuring in a later family meeting.</p> <p>I will not carry more than five passengers at a time except for emergencies. I will not give rides to hitchhikers under any circumstances, and I will use extreme caution in accepting assistance if I should have difficulty with the car. I will pay half of the increase of insurance costs when my grades fall below a C average or when receiving any D. In case of an accident, I will assume half of the deductible costs. If I receive any moving violations, I will lose my license for up to one month. On the second violation, I will lose it for up to three months. Signed, (Michael) (Dad) (Mom)</p>	