

Recommendations for Creating a Family Contract to Prevent Illegal Alcohol and Other Substance Use

As a parent, you are the most influential person in your child's life. Building a close relationship with your children will encourage them to come to you for help in making decisions that impact their health and well-being. One way to help your child make healthy choices is to involve him or her in writing a family contract.

Possible actions

Every family and every child is different, and what works for one family or child might not work for another. Below are some ideas and suggestions to get you started.

- 1) Clearly state your position on why you don't want your child to use alcohol or other illegal substances; share your honest concerns with your child.
- 2) Tell your child you will always give them a safe, calm ride home with no discussion or questions until the following day.
- 3) Ask your child to name other caring adults in their life that they believe would help them if asked.
- 4) List all possible consequences if your child violates the contract. Consider rewards and incentives for your child to continue good behavior, which may be taken away if the contract is violated. These could be things like a weekly allowance, going out with friends, a later curfew, driving privileges, or use of phone, television, video games, and computers (other than for homework). You could also list activities that would replace the restricted activities, for example homework projects and chores—or even family-building activities like hikes or board games.
- 5) List the reasons why you would follow through with the consequences and enforce the contract. Make the contract mutual by asking your child to let you know if you aren't following through with what you promised.
- 6) Write out the contract with your child.
- 7) Make a copy for both you and your child—you both sign each and keep a copy.

Some Tips

- **Discuss limits and expectations.** Rules work best when teens help develop and understand them.
- **Don't lecture.** Constant reference to the contract may build anger and resentment in your child.
- **Be consistent.** On-again, off-again rules quickly lose their impact.
- **Have good reasons.** Rules mean more when they're based on facts and principles including fairness, kindness, and your desire to keep them safe.
- **Don't retreat.** Let kids learn by experiencing the consequences of their actions. Make sure their actions do not cause harm to themselves or cause damage.
- **Stay positive.** Let kids know that you value them and are proud of them. Reward them when they make good choices!

For more tips, visit: <http://family.samhsa.gov/> and <http://www.21reasons.org>

Special thanks: <http://www.stoughtonyouthcommission.org/>

