

## ***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/>

**Sample Family Contract** – *This is provided as a starting point. Please copy and edit as needed.*

We agree on the importance of trust and honesty between us. We understand the need to abstain from unsafe and illegal behaviors such as underage drinking. We also agree to the consequences associated with any failure to fulfill our responsibilities.

1. **We Agree** on the following no alcohol rules:

- Young people will not drink alcohol. At age 21, you may decide whether or not you choose to drink alcohol.
- Young people will not attend parties or other situations where underage youth will be drinking alcohol. Even if young people don't drink themselves, being in that environment would place them at higher risk for harm, including assault and unintentional injuries.
- Young people will not stay at parties/other situations where alcohol is being served to underage youth.
- Young people will not ride in a motor vehicle with a driver who has been drinking. Young people will also not ride in or drive a motor vehicle with underage passengers who have been drinking (unless the driver is a parent or other responsible adult). Driving with drunken passengers places people at higher risk for crashing.
- Young people will call parents for a ride if they are ever in a situation like those listed above, or any other situation that threatens their safety. If for some reason parents are unreachable, young people will call: *[insert name(s) of responsible adults]*\_\_\_\_\_.
- Parents agree to pick up their child at any time and will not discuss the event until the following morning.
- If parents pick up their child at a location where other youth are drinking, parents agree to take action based on their best judgment.
- Young people will not allow their guests to bring alcohol onto our property. No one in our home is to make alcohol available to anyone under age 21.
- Older brothers and sisters will not encourage younger brothers and sisters to drink and will not give them alcohol. Younger brothers and sisters will not accept alcohol from anyone.

2. **We Agree** that all discussions will promote mutual respect. Even if we don't agree, we will use our normal voice level, and our voice tone and language will show respect. We will keep communication channels open.

3. **We Agree** that failure to abide by these rules will result in firm consequences that will be decided jointly by all of us. Possible consequences include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. **We Agree** to jointly establish priorities for healthy behaviors and choices over the next \_\_\_\_ months. Parents and youth will agree on the type of support parents will give youth participating in fun, interesting, and healthy activities. Possible activities include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent(s)/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
The Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Other Responsible Adult

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

