



## **CONTRACTING**

When there is disagreement and conflict between two or more members of the family, it is often useful to sit down together and solve the problem by making a contract. There are several steps you can use to solve problems together. This method works well because everyone is involved and has a say. Because everyone is involved, they will be much more likely to follow the agreement than if the parents just "lay down the law." CONTRACTING is especially good for adolescents because it teaches them responsibility and how to make and keep agreements.

### **Advantages**

- leads to a better understanding of the problem
- everyone is involved and hears the same discussion
- there is a clear method for reaching agreement
- cooperation is better than when parents give orders to the kids, especially when the kids are older
- less disagreement about what the expectations and rewards and punishments are.

How to use:

1. IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM. Each family member takes a turn and should say how the problem affects them and their role in the problem. (Active Listening and I Statements are useful here).
2. EXPLORE THE PROBLEM. Discuss what factors led up to and followed the problem. Add more detail to step 1.

3. **BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS.** Everyone in the family should come up with one or two possible solutions to the problem. No one should comment on how good someone's idea is until the next step. Funny and unrealistic ideas are fine, just as long as everyone contributes. Ask someone to volunteer to write all the ideas down.

4. **EVALUATE EACH SOLUTION AND DECIDE ON THE BEST ONE.** Go through the ideas one by one and discuss the pros and cons of each. Again, everyone should have a say. Ask each family member which solution they think will work best. Try to get everyone to agree to try one solution, or combine good solutions.

5. **WRITE UP A CONTRACT.** Discuss what each person can do to help carry out the solution and solve the problem. Write down the agreements, stating who is going to do what. Discuss what the rewards are for keeping the contract agreements, and the penalties for breaking them. Write these down also. If the contract is a little complicated, ask each person to explain what they think the contract says. Correct any misunderstandings.

### **How to make CONTRACTING work most effectively**

- \* Make sure all family members have had a say in the terms of the contract and feel that they've contributed.
- \* Post the contract where everyone can see it
- \* Make a regular meeting time to review the contract, (weekly) to see how it's working. If any changes are needed, such as adding a penalty for not following the contract, make them then. If someone wants to discuss changing the contract, tell him/her to do it at the weekly meeting.
- \* Stick to the contract. If someone earns a reward, make sure the person receives it. If someone deserves a penalty (such as less screen time), make sure you follow through. That way the contracts will be believable.
- \* Validate people for following the contract, especially those who make the greatest efforts. (However, avoid comparison between siblings!)

