

MAKING A PARENTING CONTRACT BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CHILD

As your child gets older it may be necessary to make a contract so that they understand the boundaries and limits and the consequences to their ever expanding privileges. Making yourself clear and being up front with your child reduces power struggles, misunderstandings, and provides an opportunity for your child to learn life skills that will follow them into their adulthood.

Here is an example of a contract you may make with your child would be to address the privilege of driving.

Driving Privilege

Parent: Driving is a privilege. You have earned the right to drive because you have turned of age and you have taken the required courses and passed and are eligible to get your drivers license. You have also demonstrated the ability to be responsible and I would like for you to have the privilege to drive. As your parent I love you and want you to be safe, therefore it is necessary for you to understand there are guidelines you must to follow in order for me to provide you with the privilege of driving.

Child: I respect that you love me and want to keep me safe and as a young adult I also want to have the privilege of driving. I know that driving a car is a big responsibility and through my efforts and earning responsibility I have the option of getting a driver's license. I also know that without you providing me with a car, insurance and paying for necessities related to my driving I could not have a driver's license. Therefore, I agree, I will be responsible while driving, obeying all traffic laws including but not limited to the following:

1. I will drive responsibly and safely at all times. I will also make myself available to respond to your phone calls/text messages as soon as I am in a safe position.
2. I will not use my phone while driving for any reason.
3. I will pull over into a parked position or wait until I have arrived at my destination if I have to make a call, text or respond to a text or call. I will not allow a passenger to use my phone while I am driving as that will register that I am using my phone while driving and the violation will be mine.
4. I will not allow anyone in my care as a passenger or will not allow anyone to drive the car unless they have been approved by you prior to me taking the car.

5. If any maintenance problems are noticed or occur, I will immediately report them to you.
6. If for any reason I do not feel comfortable driving, (health, functioning, weather, etc.) I will call you to come and get me.
7. I will be responsible for putting gas in the car when I use the car and to fill it up before returning the car home.
8. Out of respect for myself and to you, I will always follow the rules of curfew and if I encounter an issue I will let you know prior to my curfew time and will inform you when to expect me to be home.
9. I will also be respectful and will tell you when I am taking the car, where I am going, and approximately when I will be home and who I will be with while I have the car.
10. Other options to address are insurance costs, maintenance fees, scheduling when they have the car and distance or places off limits for driving the car.

When making consequences refer to the following parenting guidelines:

1. Be consistent- Children need to trust what you say is what you will do. This builds a sense of security and predictability so they are able to parent themselves in your absence. Realistic and consistent consequences provide them with the opportunity to build life skills that mimic the real world. Children will try most anything to get their way whether it is guilt, manipulation or defiance. They are testing you to keep your authority. They may appear to want their way but what they want more is for you to stay consistent.
2. The crime fits the punishment- In other words, the violation of the rule should be consistent with the rule. If the child does not return the car by curfew then they lose the privilege of driving to social and elective activities and can only drive to obligations such as a job for a period of time specified up front. It would be inappropriate to take their phone away or have them do extra chores for this violation.
3. Be respectful- If you want your children to respect you then respect them. Listen to their concerns, needs and their points of view. However, there is a limit when they are disrespecting you by arguing with you or manipulating, you need to step in. Model healthy discussion and listening skills. Your rules and consequences can be discussed with your child but

your child needs to understand it is you who have the right to change, adjust or decline suggestions.

4. Remain Calm- Avoid anger. Anger is a cover for frustration and a feeling of being out of control. It also only leads to negative responses from your child. Anger also diverts you from the priority of the issues. It is not healthy role modeling. If you have to take a break then say to them you will have to think about what just happened you will get with them later. Take the opportunity to avoid anger and to be productive at a later time. Anger should not be tolerated from your child either and is a trigger to stop the discussion until emotions are under control, otherwise, it will lead to saying something you don't mean or you can't follow through on.

5. Avoid the use of guilt- Using reason and logic may not give you the immediate response that you need at the time but it will provide and model tools your child can use in real life. Guilt may immediately produce a change in behavior especially if it is mixed with threats but in the long run it is only temporary and the child soon will realize they can use this against you to get what they want, resulting in manipulative behaviors and loss of parental control.

6. Parents are not friends – Children do not need you as a friend they need you as a parent. As much as it is tempting as your child enters adolescence to be their “friend”, children do not respect a parent that acts like a teenager. They need you to provide them with the security, safety, discipline and guidance of a parent. That does mean you can't have fun times with your child, it just means you need to always know your place as a parent.

7. Use humor – Most often discipline and parenting is not a laughing matter. However, there is humor in most all things if you look for it. As a parent you have more of an ability to look at the bigger picture and know that this is not the “end of the world”. Using humor can lighten up the situation and bring it back into focus. It also lightens the feelings of anger that can inhibit communication.

8. Allow your child to fail- It is from failure that we learn our greatest lessons. As long as your child is under your care you have authority to protect them. Give them opportunities that are safe to explore. If they succeed they build self confidence. If they fail they build character and

learn to try again. If you micro-manage them, you prevent these opportunities and they miss out on real life consequences to teach them the life skills of success.

9. Discipline with love- It is important that your child understand the source of your disapproval is their choice in violating the rules rather than your disappointment in them. They need to know you love them and that your primary goal is to prepare them for life. Having clear, consistent, logical and real-life relating rules and consequences is a way for you to show you care and love your child enough to provide them with the skills to succeed as an adult.

10. Age and Logic – The age of your child is important to take under consideration so you can understand their development stage and ability achieve tasks. However, there are certain life skills, beliefs and expectations you want your child to learn, no matter the age. Allowing them to act out because they are 2 yrs old or 15yrs olds does not consistently teach them the life skills of managing their emotions and impulses or understanding your expectations of them. No matter the age, children should be expected to behave within the guidelines you provide them and inappropriate behavior is attached to a consequence at any age. Logical guidelines and consequences should be applied to fit their age and development. However, the life skills, beliefs and expectations remain consistent.