

Creating a Family Contract

Objective:

To help a person in your family by working together with a family contract.

You Should Know

The hardest part for those who care for someone suffering from problems is to watch them struggle. When they ask you for help, you know it is not really helpful to pretend that their issues are based in reality in order to avoid upsetting them. When, against your better judgment, you reassure them that everything will be all right, you have to ask yourself, are you really being helpful?

Many families face this dilemma when trying to support someone. Creating a family contract that addresses your role in your loved one's struggles, the person's specific problems and behaviors, and the best strategies for providing useful assistance can help a family be proactive while still not impeding the person's sense of self-reliance and self-worth.

What to Do

Create your family contract with the following steps:

Clearly state the issue.

It is very important that the language of the plan is clear so that everyone knows exactly what the issue is and how it impacts the family.

Clearly state the approach.

Identify what specific behaviors the person is trying to change.

It will be helpful for the entire family to understand what problems the identified family member experiences, so that the family can agree on what behaviors to focus on and how to provide the proper support.

Identify what behaviors the family has agreed they will *not* engage in.

Make a written list of behaviors that the family has committed to *not* engaging in. The family should work together as a team to decide and list exactly what behaviors they will not support and how they will achieve this goal.

Create a commitment statement that the entire family writes together.

All family members from the youngest to the oldest need to commit to following the plan they have agreed upon. It is also important that the entire family work together to develop a plan

that works for everyone and that addresses every detail so that no part of the problem is neglected. This plan should be in writing and posted where the entire family can view it.

Make sure you

- are consistent;
- start out with small goals;
- don't give up; (If you concede and reassure, immediately agree to try to not engage the next time you are asked.)
- celebrate the successes!

Family Contract

The issue

The approach we'll take

Specific behaviors to be addressed

Behaviors we will not engage in

Our family commitment statement

Before making the family contract, how difficult was it to not provide help to the person you care for?

How did the contract make it easier to provide care that was helpful rather than enabling?

How do you think having the contract strengthened the person?

Based on your experience working on this activity, what advice would you give to other families who are trying to support a family member with similar issues?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
