

The CMC- The Coming Home Contract

During Resident breaks and before coming home the teen prepares to transition out of FMSLH and back into their community. With the help of FMSLH staff and weekly meetings the family is coached through a CHC process that teaches life skills, makes clear agreements, and helps everyone understand the boundaries and consequences when coming home.

The contract is important on many levels. It begins clear communication between parents and teens about expectations, consequences, agreements, and unity.

We will be spending the next couple of weeks helping the kids prepare **their** offer for the coming home contract. This means that expectations will be clarified and agreed upon with consequences put into place if they are not followed. It is also an opportunity for teens to learn the art of negotiation, asking for what you want, giving something in return, and how contracts work. Parents are expected to create their contract ideas as well and then we all meet at the kitchen table at FMSLH and hammer out agreements.

We teach the process of contractual negotiation very seriously and you can expect your teen to use some “negotiation strategies” on you. We recommend that you sit in front of the computer and brush up on some tactics yourself. Asking for what you want and negotiating are very important life skills that can really empower these teens.

Behavior contracts have several advantages for teens and their parents. For teens, behavior contracts make both the rules and the consequences of breaking the rules clear and can help develop habits of good behavior. Parents find that behavior contracts help them to be consistent with rules and discipline, and provide an opportunity to talk straightforwardly with their teens about important subjects such as suicide, drugs and alcohol, dating, and driving.

Behavior contracts are effective with many teenagers, including those with antisocial, disruptive, or delinquent behavior. Behavior contracts are especially good for teens with past or current behavior problems, as well as for troubled teens with physical or mental disabilities. Bullies, including those who are running into trouble with law enforcement, often benefit from behavior contracts. Behavior contracts have been used successfully with teens who have problems with drug or alcohol abuse.

The most important thing you must be aware of this: Whether emotionally or physically, your teen will relapse into old destructive patterns and habits. Everyday since they have been here they have been working on new ways of behaving and choosing...but there is a lifetime of habits to work through. The work is not done.

It never is is it?

The next step in this process is for you to set up 1-2 30 minutes sessions per week with me and your teen over the phone or in person (most effective) until the contract is ready to go. Call 303-443-3343 or email aaron@firemountainprograms.com

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Here are rules that YOU must take into consideration while working with your teen on a coming home contract.

1. Take care of yourself first, your relationships second and your teen third.
2. Plan for the worst and hope for the best.
3. They know that you are willing to take drastic measure now...utilize that leverage.
4. They will ask for things that they may want and may not need...don't say yes so they like you, see rule number one and give the answer of a responsible parent. The goal is to prepare them for adulthood...not make them happy.
5. Be prepared to walk away from the table and put YOUR contract into full force without negotiation if they become manipulative, argumentative, or immature about this experience. You taking their thoughts and offers into consideration is a privilege they have earned because of their hard work here. If the hard work vanishes, so does the privilege. Responsibility earns freedoms.
6. If YOU don't follow your agreements, you CANNOT expect them to. You can null and void this contract and must be at the top of your game.
7. Only accept offers and make agreements that you are sure can be kept. This is not a set up for failure but an experiment in WIN, WIN, WIN.

REMEMBER!

The contract must be in writing.

Changes can be made but must be made in a process similar to how the contract was created.

The contract negotiation process must be free of old family bickering, arguing, and conflict. You have to listen, be respectful, consider offers, and say "No" in a constructive manner providing alternatives.

If you are lost for an answer, don't answer. Say you will consider it and move on and then get support on your decision away from the table.

This is more of like a contract between and employer and an employee or an landlord and tenant..not equals in a business partnership.

YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF THE PROCESS. NOT THE TEEN. THEY ARE INVOLVED ONLY BECAUSE OF THEIR GOOD WORK.

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The P.L.A.N.

This extremely clever acronym is to give you more support in writing a contract with your teen. I created this amazingly clever acronym explicitly for FMSLH teen/parent processes.

Prepared

- Answer the questions now, not after the teen arrives- **you** have to think of the problems first.
- Line by line understanding- total clarity with everything written and agreed upon by all parties involved creates a bigger chance for success
- Agreed upon and signed- Every agrees or the negotiations continue.
 - multiple drafts- plan on a few meetings and a few drafts till we get it right...it's worth it.

Leverage

- YOU must be in charge of:
 - the contract
 - the home
 - the items of consequence (phones, computers, etc)
 - anything YOU pay for or spend time on
- You must be the battery of the contract and the one who makes sure it is followed- if you don't follow it, it is null and void
- The consequences must matter to the teen. It must be felt and understood. It must worry them and be large enough for them to consider when they are faced with a destructive choice. (FRIENDLY HINT: What you used to do doesn't work.?)
- Write into the contract so that you may take time to get counseling/ seek advise on consequences (Delay the consequence!)
- Therapy and counseling is not a consequence- Never use getting help as a punishment for anyone.

Actionable

- Can you put these steps into action?
- Do they ALL look like taking care of yourself?
- Is EVERYONE behind the contract 100%? (Not including kid)
- Set up for failure or truly actionable?
- What needs to be in place NOW so the contract is effortless?

Non-negotiables

- What is the behavior that will never be tolerated ever again for any reason
- What is the Relapse Response? Since we expect the kid to relapse, the questions become WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN THE KID RELAPSES?
- What is the Arrest Response? WHAT WILL YOU DO IF THE KID GETS ARRESTED?
- Worst case scenario, cut bait, done deal items that DO NOT BUDGE (see actionable)

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SAMPLE CONTRACT

1. Teen will not use any alcohol or drugs.

Consequence: Teen will be grounded for one week. Grounding consists of: staying home, no friends as guests, no phone calls, etc. etc.)

Punishment will increase one week for each subsequent offense (i.e., if teen is caught using substances a second time, punishment will be for two weeks, etc.)

Note: It is VERY important to clearly state what being grounded consists of so that there are no avenues for manipulation by the teen to get out of the punishment.

- Privilege: Teen will be allowed to continue going out with friends and may have continued use of the car.

2. Teen is expected to return home immediately after school except if prior arrangements are made with parents. Teen will inform parents where he/she is going and will be home by 8:00 p.m. on school nights and 11:00 p.m. on non-school nights.

Consequence: Teen will be expected to come home twice as early as he was late for one week. (e.g., if 30 minutes late, then curfew will be one hour earlier for the next week).

Privilege: Teen will maintain current curfew and gain trust

Note: some parents may want to allow their teen to work his/her way up to a later curfew by proving himself or herself, but parents should never set a curfew later than the legal curfew in their area.

3. Teen will perform all assigned chores in a satisfactory manner, according to the standards set by parents.

It is helpful to provide a written list of daily chores so there is no misunderstanding - a dry-erase marker board hung in the kitchen or other family area works great for this purpose.

Consequence: Teen will not be allowed any privileges until required chores are completed, including TV, radio, computer, having friends visit or going out with friends.

Privilege: Teen will maintain access to all privileges of the house, including watching TV, using the computer, having friends visit, and going out with friends.

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Sample Items to be addressed in contract-

- Curfew
- Chores
- School behavior and grades
- Smoking
- Telephone use
- Computer use
- Use of the car
- Alcohol/drug use
- Expression of anger or violence, including profanity
- Conflict resolution (helpful when two siblings are at each other's throats)
- Running away
- Medication issues and compliance (for those who take regular medicines, such as Ritalin)
- Attendance at therapy sessions

Behavior contracts need several components:

- A clear description of the good behavior expected from the teen
- What the positive consequences of the behavior will be
- What the negative consequences of not performing the specific behavior will be
- What the adults involved are expected to do
- A clear plan to help the teen achieve the good behavior
- A place for the signatures of the teen and adults involved

Some areas that may be covered by teen behavior contracts include:

- Performance or behavior at school
- Behavior at home, including treatment of other family members, language, or doing chores
- Curfews
- Driving privileges
- Dating
- Clothing, tattoos, piercings, and other appearance issues
- Cell phone use or bill payment
- Avoiding drugs and alcohol
- UA's. Set them for random times. ("How long? Till I feel like I can trust you not to use again.")
- Extracurricular activities or how free time is spent

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Consequences

Consequences of breaking the conditions of the behavior contract should be clearly stated in the contract, and should be appropriate to the situation. Parents must be consistent in enforcing consequences or behavior contracts are ineffective.

Consequences could include one or more of the following:

- UA's. Set them for random times. ("How long? Till I feel like I can trust you not to use again.")
- No driving
- No dating or free time with friends
- No cell phone or phone privileges
- No television or computer
- Loss of allowance
- Writing an apology
- Writing a report about the rule that was broken and why it is important

Parents can make their own teen behavior contracts, get one from a teacher or counselor, or buy them from companies that provide contracts. There are a few sites that have very simple outlines (you do most of the writing) that you can download for free, or some that are complete with minimal fill in the blanks.

GOOD

LUCK!