

Behavior Contracts

For many kids, good behavior is something that just comes naturally. They get along well with their parents and follow instructions like they're supposed to. For others, however, things are not so simple. Perhaps they don't have adequate discipline in the home, perhaps they have emotional problems caused by early lifetime traumas, or maybe they're just kids who have more difficulties than most. For these kids, behavior contracts can be a lifesaver.

As a parent and a teacher, I know firsthand the usefulness of behavior contracts. I have been using printable behavioral contracts with my students and my own kids for years. It started off when my youngest son turned eight. I don't know what it was, but somehow he started acting out very soon after he had his birthday. He would not follow rules, go to bed on time, do his school work, or anything else. He had anger management problems, organization and discipline problems - you get the idea.

I tried a behavior contract on a whim. I didn't really expect it to work, but I thought I would give it a shot. I explained to him the rules he was expected to obey. I also explained to him what I would do if he didn't obey the rules. We wrote it out and posted it on the wall, along with rewards and punishments, and both signed it.

At first, the behavior contract didn't work. He was trying to test the boundaries of course, and started acting up even more than before. Once he realized that I meant business, however, his behavior started to change. He started behaving better, doing better in school, mouthing off less, and generally behaving like a young gentleman. It took a lot of work and it didn't happen overnight, but it did happen.

One of the biggest and worst mistakes you can make as a parent is to expect behavior contracts to solve all your problems. They don't work that way. Instead, they are a tool that you can use to solve your own problems. A behavior contract is basically a way for a parent or teacher to set down the law in a concrete manner. Some students and children need firm discipline and stable boundaries. Behavior contracts define these boundaries and tell the student or child what will happen when the boundaries are crossed. It is up to the authority figure to stay firm on the punishments that have been decided on. If you don't, you can make the problem worse than it was.