

Introduction

This manual is for parents, teachers, childcare workers, counselors, staff members of institutions for individuals who are mentally ill or retarded, employers, marital partners, and others who may want to negotiate behavioral contracts. It is designed to be used under the supervision of a counselor or other professional person familiar with the proper use of behavioral contracts. The format enables the instructor to review the fill-in information provided by the reader and to use that feedback to assure the reader's proper understanding and use of behavioral contracts.

All of us use some kind of behavioral contracting each day, wittingly or unwittingly, and some form of negotiation, in our interactions with other persons. Sometimes those informal arrangements work, and sometimes they do not. With this booklet, the time for trial and error and hoping for the best is past. Using properly negotiated contracts, as explained in this manual, both parties have a chance to have a say and an opportunity to suggest alternate behaviors or rewards. If the negotiation is carried out in good faith, both parties will feel positive about signing the contract, know that it is fair, and have an interest in seeing that the contract brings about the desired changes in the behaviors of everyone involved.

Anyone who wants to change someone else's behavior, and is willing to give up something in return, will be able to use this manual to draw up a contract to ensure that the behaviors he or she wishes to change will be clearly defined and that the rewards for those behaviors (including how the rewards will be delivered) are spelled out for everyone so there is no misunderstanding and so the contract benefits everyone who is a party to it.

Behavioral contracts have been used informally in many situations for a long time. Recently they have been used in a more structured systematic manner in home, work, and educational settings to change various behaviors.

Behavioral contracts are particularly useful with adolescents. Parents of teenagers have found they can use behavioral contracts in cases where other procedures such as planned ignoring and time-out have been ineffective. As is pointed out in *How To Use Time-Out*, (Hall & Hall, 1998d), time-out is of limited

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usefulness for persons over 12 years old. Behavioral contracts, however, are especially useful for older youths and adults.

Properly implemented, behavioral contracting is a procedure that avoids ethical pitfalls sometimes associated with the use of powerful behavior change procedures. If properly negotiated, a behavioral contract provides the informed consent of the other person and results in an improved situation for all concerned. Another advantage of the proper use of behavioral contracts is that they can begin in a situation in which a person's behavior is out of control, provide external control, and finally lead to self-control. Self-control should be the ultimate goal of any person who uses behavioral contracting. An ideal program starts with a behavior that is not under control, and is often a source of disharmony and fighting. The first stage to overcome is the one in which the person initiating the contract imposes a certain amount of external control (through a manager's role) in arriving at a contract. Even here, however, the other person has some input if the contract is properly negotiated. Over time, the contract should shift to one in which there is joint control—that is, control or responsibility equally shared by both parties. The final stages are where the person begins to manage his or her own behavior and the contract is faded, and natural and social reinforcers maintain the behavior. If this happens, the person has control of both the behavior that was formerly a problem and the consequences that control the new behavior.

What Is a Behavioral Contract?

It is easiest and most natural to arrange contingencies and deliver consequences in an informal manner. In most interactions in the home, at school, in the community, or at work, you do not need to stop and think, "Now it is time to reinforce" or "I had better reward that behavior." The delivery of some reinforcement becomes a habit. However, there are times when an informal approach to providing rewards and other consequences of behavior is not effective. If you become particularly concerned about a specific behavior and your informal efforts to bring about an improved situation fail, it may become necessary to set up a structured contingency system. This may be true even if you have tried other management techniques.

A structured contingency system helps arrange your thinking so the behaviors you wish to change are clearly defined and the rewards for those behaviors (including when and how rewards will be delivered) are spelled out for everyone involved.

A behavioral contract is an agreement between two or more persons (parent and child, husband and wife, employer and employee, teacher and student) that lists specific behaviors the parties will perform and the consequences that will result. Behavior contracts, if properly negotiated, include clearly specified behaviors and rewards. The purpose of the contract is to