

A Guide for Writing Behavioral Contracts



A contract is an agreement and signed by all the parties involved in the mediation. These agreements may be between the students and parents or school staff, or both and possibly other agency personnel. A good, or well written, agreement will specify the behavioral expectations of the student including any related terms or conditions to acquire benefits (rewards) that will be provided, contingent on the demonstration of appropriate behavior(s). During the negotiations, inappropriate behaviors should be identified. Discuss unacceptable behaviors prior to writing the contract, which need not be reiterated within the agreement.

Some guidelines for writing contracts are:

- The contract should be negotiated, not imposed on any of the parties. Discuss how the desired behaviors will of benefit to the student beyond the contract.
- The contract must be as equitable as possible – conceived to have a high probability of success.
- Contracts should be written in positive terms: what each of the parties **will do**. Describe the responsibilities of all parties involved - student, parent, teacher, administrator etc.
- Limit the number of behavior change targets – one to three.
- State specifically what observable behaviors need to be accomplished.
- State clearly what incentives (rewards) can/will be provided.
- Be specific about the timeline - one to four weeks is typically long enough. Shorter intervals are important for younger and/or more disable students.
- State specifically how the target behavior(s) will be monitored and charted.
- Contracts can contain penalties for failure to achieve the desired outcome. However, these should be less emphasized than the positive goals or avoided entirely if possible.
- Renegotiate the terms if needed, rather than continue if observable improvement is not occurring.
- If the contract is successful, renegotiate the terms - develop a new contract - to set new standards or for different target behaviors.