

Encouraging Your Wellness

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Positive Parenting— Using Contracts as a Parenting Tool

If you have attended one of my parenting workshops, we likely have discussed that a major job we have as parents is to prepare our kids for the real world. Our parenting tools should reflect that very fact. A question I often recommend to parents when they are wondering how to handle a situation with their child is to ask themselves, "How would the world handle this if they were older?" This can work with negative behaviors like lying, cheating, stealing, physical fighting, etc. or simply managing expectations, like homework, chores and cell phones. One of the ways that the real world handles expectations is through the use of contracts. When you open a bank account, you get a contract of the bank's responsibilities and your responsibilities. Even when you rent a video—you sign a contract agreement where expectations are laid out and consequences are specified. Contracts not only help kids get ready for the real world, they also take the parent out of the "bad guy" role when they are breached. Yelling and anger get replaced with a simple review of the signed contract. Several of my clients have graciously permitted me to offer their contracts as examples. Feel free to use these contracts as starting points to create contracts for use with your kids, and remember to have both you and your child sign the contract with some sort of a statement like, "I agree to abide by this contract, or accept the consequences above." Contracts can be as simple as, "I agree to pay you a specified allowance for completing all weekly chores by Saturday. For all chores not done satisfactorily, \$1 will be subtracted from the amount owed" or more complex like the sample contracts on the following pages.



Mental Health's Daily 7

I recently received a handout titled, The Healthy Mind Platter by Dr. Dan Siegel. Dr. Siegel is a neuro-psychologist whose works I have been studying. The Healthy Mind Platter is to mental health as the food pyramid is to physical health. Dr. Siegel outlines seven DAILY essential mental activities to optimize brain matter and create well-being.

1. Focus Time: Closely focusing on tasks in a goal oriented way—these challenges make deep connections in the brain.
2. Play Time: By being spontaneous and creative, we make new connections in the brain.
3. Connecting Time: When we connect with other people and the world around us, we activate and reinforce the brain's relational circuitry. (Cont'd on page 2)

Dear Readers,



Happy Fall! I hope this issue of Encouraging Your Wellness finds you happy and staying healthy. And, as always, I hope you find this newsletter informative as well as inspirational in helping you be the person, parent, and partner you want to be. Happy Reading!

This newsletter comes to you the week that our country will face the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Because of some discussion at school, my eleven year old daughter asked me to share with her the story as I recalled it. As I told her the story of the fourth plane that was taken back by Americans and not permitted to hit it's designed target, I began to cry. That part of history really touches something deep in my soul. The courage and determination they showed in the face of inevitable death; the depth of caring for America and for fellow Americans they showed is remarkably inspiring and will forever change me. How I wish we could show this kind of compassion for one another; this kind of pride in our country when not faced with such devastation. This month, my family and I will remember this tragedy in our country, we will pray for the lost Americans and their families, and we will perform random acts of kindness to honor their spirit; the spirit that can remain alive if we simply carry it forward. Won't you join me in tribute?

*“As long as
you can meet
our needs,
you can have
your room any
way you want
it.”*

Contracts as Parenting Tools—cont'd from pg. 1

(Sample #1) Dad and I recognize that you don't want to make your room the way WE want it to be since tidy and organized does not feel comfortable to you, so we have decided to let you know what's important to us and as long as you can meet our needs, you can have your room any way you want it.

Our needs for your room:

- * You can find the things you need when you need them, including (but not limited to) cell phone, house phones, appropriate clothes for an occasion, books, school work
- * Drawers need to be safely installed as designed (on the tracks) and not so full they fall off the tracks (which is a safety issue when they land on feet)
- * Closet not stuffed so full that the doors are at risk for coming off the tracks (it takes Dad's time to put them back on, and eventually could break them permanently).
- * Floor clean enough that it can be vacuumed weekly and dog messes can be found and cleaned immediately
- * Must be able to walk safely around the room at any time without stepping on or tripping over things on the floor. (cont'd page 3)

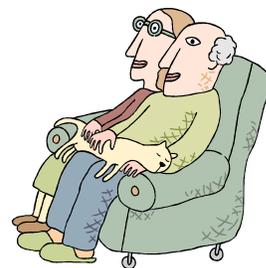
Mental Health's Daily 7

4. Physical Time: When we move our bodies, especially aerobically, we strengthen the brain in many ways.
5. Time In: When we quietly reflect internally, focusing on sensations, images, feelings and thoughts, we help to better integrate the brain.
6. Down Time: When we are non-focused, without any specific goal, and let our mind wander or simply relax, we help the brain recharge.
7. Sleep Time: When we give the brain the rest it needs, we consolidate learning and recover from the experiences of the day.

Thank you, Dr. Siegel, for outlining it in such a way to encourage us, and give ourselves permission, to do all of the above. Just this week in my practice I have heard, “Sleep is for the weak”, “Taking time to myself feels selfish” and “I have no time for exercise!” If we are seeking mental wellness, how about adding one of the above seven each week?

Couple's Corner—What Are “Bids” in Relationships?

Dr. John Gottman, one of the most renowned relationship experts in our country, brings us the concepts of “bids” in relationships. He defines bids as the fundamental unit of emotional communication. In more simple terms, bids can be a question, gesture, look, touch—any single expression that says, “I want to feel connected to you.” Dr. Gottman and his research colleagues have discovered how profoundly this bidding process affects relationships. They learned that couples headed for divorce disregard their spouses’ “bids” significantly more than happy couples. When we habitually fail to respond to our spouse’s bids for attention/connection, the results can become devastating. On the contrary, couples who learn to effectively respond to bids have an astounding chance for success in their relationships. Dr. Gottman has learned that people respond to bids in one of three ways: turning toward, turning against or turning away. Turning toward means to respond in a positive way to the bid. Turning against might sometimes be described as argumentative or belligerent and possibly involves sarcasm or ridicule. Finally, turning away involves outright ignoring another’s bid—or acting uninterested or preoccupied. Dr. Gottman’s research demonstrated that once bidders are ignored or rejected, they usually give up trying to connect in the same way again. It’s not hard to see how damaging this can be to a relationship. Learning about this bidding process can be invaluable. Being aware of how we are responding to our partners’ bids for connection can help us do it better. Give it a try. When your partner “bids”, try to increase your willingness and awareness of turning toward the bid. Be interested, ask a follow up question, make eye contact, respond with a story that relates. Notice if your partner responds better to your bids as well. You can learn more in Dr. Gottman’s book, [The Relationship Cure](#).



Contracts –continued from page 2

* We need assurance the dogs will be safe by not finding food or anything that could hurt them in your room

* We need assurance there won't be things in your room that will attract bugs

* Ability to do laundry weekly without excavation from the closet, behind the shelf or under the beds

* No food or beverage other than water in your room at all times - there have been too many spills which causes damage to our home, and dogs have eaten things they shouldn't which is bad for their health.

Consequences: Whenever these needs aren't met, we will remove the distractions (friends and screens) until the needs are met to our satisfaction. Please confirm that you agree to meet these needs every day. If you do not agree, let us know and we will revert to our old way of telling you how your room should be.

Here's a great Cell Phone Contract: (Sample #2)

Here are my requirements for you to keep your monthly cell phone service:

- 1) Charge it every night
 - 2) Take it with you whenever you leave the house, except for school or when you're with a parent.
 - 3) If I call or text you on it, I want you to respond within 15 minutes. When you are in school or some other activity where you need to turn your phone off, turn it on as soon as you're done and respond to any messages.
 - 4) We reserve the right to spot check your phone at any time, including texts and pictures to ensure safety.
- You have 3 weeks from today to prove you will adhere to these requirements, otherwise I will cancel your phone service and you will have to regress to traditional methods of calling me from house phones to keep tabs the old-fashioned way. If you do not wish to sign this contract, you can instead choose not to have phone service.

How about this great homework/chore contract? (Sample #3)

I am happy to allow you to have as much fun time with friends and activities as you can handle. I will know how much you can handle by you showing me in the following ways:

1. All assignments are turned in the week they are due, and receive passing grades.
2. You maintain a minimum of a C in each class at all times.
3. Your chores are completed well and on time.
4. You demonstrate respect for each member of our home, proving that you are not over-tired.

If any of these expectations are not met, we will understand that you are over involved and we will help you by cutting back on free time/activities during the week and weekends to help you get back on track.

And always make sure that you will abide by any consequence in the contract, or kids will not take it seriously

If any of these expectations are not met, we will understand that you are over involved and we will help you by cutting back on free time/activities...



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If you are in need of individual, couple or family help, call me. Together with you, I will design a treatment plan that helps you achieve your goals and gets you on the road to feeling life more fulfilled. I specialize in working with teens, adults and children who are struggling with depression, anxiety, low self-worth, past experiences of abuse, and who are believing there must be more to life than what they are currently experiencing. I look forward to speaking with you.

Dear Pam,

Our 16 year old son recently earned his driver's license and got a car. We are trying to stick to the law that he not have other teens in the car with him for the legal time. Recently, there have been two episodes in which he has ignored the law and our rules. The first time, we had a heart to heart chat and the second time I took his keys from him on the spot. I know it will happen again. What should we do about a third offense? K and D

I commend you for giving it your best to abide by this law. I know many parents are ignoring this law which makes it all the harder for the parents who are enforcing it. When we give our kids the inadvertent message that we get to pick and choose the rules we want to follow, we send a dangerous message; "If we don't like or agree with the rule, we can ignore it." Thanks for NOT sending that message to your son. Next, I would encourage you to create a contract like the ones outlined in the Positive Parenting column of this newsletter. Driving a car is a big responsibility with significant risks. The contract should outline exactly what your expectations are for the privilege of driving. Some parents would include expectations around following all applicable laws, demonstrating responsibility in other areas of life (like school), rules about cell phone and texting use while driving, expectations for how the car is maintained, etc. Consequences could include longer times of restriction from the car and driving privileges, and also could include increased financial investment from your son each time he violates the contract. For example, "We will pay your car insurance as long as your liability remains low. If you choose to break the law, your liability goes up and therefore, you will be expected to pay 25% of your insurance on a first offense, 50% on a second offense and 100% by the third offense." The keys to the car become yours until he makes the payment (either to you or the insurance company) Another thing that parents could include is mandating that the teen call the parents of the kids in the car to apologize for driving them when he wasn't legally authorized to do so. A third offense certainly needs to get their attention in a dramatic way!

