

4 PRINCIPLES FOR CREATING FAMILY CONTRACTS WITH TEENS

“Mom, I’m in 7th grade. I think I am responsible enough for a phone. All my friends have one. When can I get one?”

“Mom and Dad, I am almost in high school. Most of my friends have social media. It’s time for me to get one!”

“Dad, you and mom have always said that when I turn 16, I can date. That’s coming up real soon.”

Do any of these questions sound familiar? Navigating these endless questions and desires from our kids as they begin to mature and grow can be exhausting. Family contracts are a great way to bring understanding and clarity to expectations from both parents and kids. By giving kids a chance to participate in the conversation; families can set realistic boundaries and reach a healthy agreement that works for everyone. **Below are 4 principles that help define guidelines and build a framework for trust when creating contracts with teens.**

1. Know WHY a family contract important.

Using family contracts as a tool with teenagers because gives them the security that comes from love AND the ability to navigate the world that comes from guidance. When kids are young, the rules and boundaries in their lives were pretty easy. *Don’t touch the stove. Look both ways before crossing the road. Say please and thank you.* But as kids get older, life gets more complicated. The boundaries transition from behavior-based rules to principle-based decision making.

As the black and white world of rules and boundaries becomes grey, parents can’t predict every single situation and make a specific rule for it. This is where a family contract helps parents and children. The contract demonstrates the continued need for boundaries while also respecting your kid’s need for growth and independence.

2. Understand WHAT a family contract is.

Simply put, a behavior contract for kids is a parent-kid contract that defines expectations, responsibilities, and consequences for a certain subject. Done properly, it is a positive experience allowing everyone to discuss expectations before problems arise.

3. Utilize steps in creating a family contract.

A. Pray for Guidance. Cover your planning in prayer. Make sure each family member understands we are doing more than entering a written agreement. These contracts are also a family pledge to honor God in all our areas of life.

B. Clearly Define the Topic. Broad contracts lack the clarity needed to have important conversations with your kid. We recommend having individual contracts for specific topics. Here are a just a few topics for which contracts with kids: can be helpful: cellphones, social media, dating, and driving.

C. Participate Together. This should not be a process where one side dictates the conversation or the terms. Though mom and dad have the final word, it is important to welcome input. Have your child spend a few days praying about the topic and writing out their thoughts before discussing it as a family. Remember, you are teaching your kids responsibility and fostering their independence.

D. State the Non-Negotiables. Clearly state your “absolutes.” Absolutes, or Non-Negotiables, are the rules that will never change. They are the limits that are in place for your family’s safety. As the contract changes, the non-negotiable rules remain.

E. Write it out, Review, and Sign it. Like every good contract, to ensure that there isn’t any confusion over the terms of the contract, put everything in writing. Then spend some time as a family discussing it. Talk through scenarios that describe how certain parts of the contract can be used. Discuss what happens if portions of the contract are violated. Conversation is one of the key ingredients of this process. Then everyone signs it!

4. Remember what a contract is NOT!

Contracts are not a replacement for covenant-based parenting. You see, a contract is an agreement between parties, while a covenant is a pledge based upon a relationship. A contract is an agreement you can break, while a covenant is a perpetual promise that you will be there. As parents we must ensure that as we walk through this process with our children, we never imply that our relationship with them is based upon any performance.

We must remember that the greatest need of our kids today is not all the things we use these contracts to manage. Their greatest need is a home that reflects the image of God and gives them the freedom and safety to grow in this image!

The following pages contain sample contracts to help get you started.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND TEXTING CONTRACT

1. I agree to keep my settings at “private” at all times. I will not delete DMs. The same rules apply to text messages.
2. I agree not to post any pictures of body parts. I will only post pictures of myself or friends if they include our faces.
3. I agree not to post sexualized images. This includes kissing of any kind, grabbing body parts or making sexual gestures of any kind. There is nothing wrong with being silly, but the Internet is not a safe place to be immature in a sexual way.
4. Don’t send a text if you would not want that text, post or photo shown to a future coach, college teacher, boss or to everyone at the reception on your wedding day.
5. If you get caught in a mean text sequence, resist the urge to argue back via text, simply text: “Thank you for sharing” and put the phone down and walk away. This phrase tends to end conversations easily. Remember you are in control of this tool. Don’t let it control you.
6. If you wouldn’t post a photo, meme, gif on a highway billboard or show it to your parents/grandparents, do not post it on a social media site or send it to your friends.
7. Resist the urge to send or post photos of yourself sticking out your tongue.
8. Do not post photos of our family unless you ask us. (Unless it’s a family pet.)
9. I agree to be respectful of myself and others in the words and images I use. This includes agreeing not to use social media to mock, tease, embarrass, gossip or reveal secrets.
10. I agree to immediately tell mom or dad if I ever receive any threatening or sexual messages or images on any social channel.
11. I agree not to view pornography or other sexual related or improper sites.
12. I will only allow people I personally know to follow me. I will only follow people I personally know. Any other sites or individuals (celebrities, athletes, etc..) must be approved by mom or dad.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND TEXTING CONTRACT

13. I agree to acknowledge that everything I put online is permanently available, even if it can be immediately deleted or hidden. I understand that people who know the technology well can access images and words that have been deleted even if the app tells you otherwise. I understand that even private messages can be copied and pasted somewhere else. I understand that when I am grown and an adult, someone can look my name up and find every single thing I've ever put online. This includes bosses, girlfriends, future family and friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

14. I agree that when I am having family time, I will put away my devices, including my phone.

15. Anytime you need an excuse to get out of an uncomfortable situation, just say your mom or dad won't let you do it and hit "send."

16. If I do not follow these agreements, I understand that I will lose my social media privileges for as long as my parents feel it is necessary.

17. When you make a mistake (I promise, you will), come tell us and we will help you figure out the best way to handle it. We have plenty of experience making mistakes and know what it feels like. We love you more than any of your friends do and we will always have your back. We are on your team....and you are on ours!

18. Like all areas of my life, I will strive to honor God through my use of technology as well.

I have read the above agreement and sign this in accordance with the rules.

Parent's Signature

Child Signature



DATING CONTRACT

I, _____, agree to the terms of this contract allowing me the privilege of dating. I acknowledge that I recommended many of these rules, boundaries, and principles and if at any time, I violate this agreement, my privilege of dating may be restricted.

I will first and foremost continue to be responsible in my family, church, and school. My dating relationship will not be prioritized over my family or my relationship with Jesus.

I have reviewed my purity contract and commit to the boundaries and principles I made then.

I commit to be wise when asking someone on a date or entering a dating relationship. I will ask myself questions such as: Is he/she a Christian? How does he/she live out his/her faith? What is her/his reputation? How does she/he treat others? How quickly does she/he change boy/girlfriends? Is this a young lady/man that my parents would approve of?

After talking with my parents, if I choose to enter a dating relationship, I will ask for her parents' permission.

I will continually honor and respect my girl/boyfriend. One of the best ways for me to do this is how I treat her/him and how we respond to the boundaries in place.

I understand that the below list of boundaries is not meant to be all-encompassing but helps set the condition for our relationship.

- We will not be alone together at either house.
- Doors will be open in any room we are in together.
- I will not ask for or send inappropriate texts or pictures.
- We will honor curfews as set by the parents.

I will communicate my plans with my parents. During any date, I will leave my cell phone on and will answer it immediately if my parents call.

Friends are important. While involved in a dating relationship, I will be sure to continue associating with my friends and encourage him/her to spend time with his/her friends as well.

I understand that this written agreement is necessary. I understand that the terms of this agreement may be changed based on how I handle the freedom and responsibility of dating.

I understand that if my parents judge that I am not doing well they can revise the rules and make them stricter AND if I'm doing well, they can relax the rules.

I have read the above agreement and sign this in accordance with the rules.

Parent's Signature

Child Signature

I have read the above agreement and sign this in accordance with the rules.



CELL PHONE CONTRACT

1. Using a phone, like driving a car, is a privilege, not a right. Treat this privilege with respect.
2. This phone is not yours. It belongs to us, and we have the right to take it anytime we feel the need.
3. This phone, like a car, can be fun and helpful; however, it can also hurt you if you crash and scar you for life.
4. Because of #2, this phone is not private we can read your texts at any time; Deleting your texts is considering breaking this agreement. We are not stalking you; we are just doing our job of equipping you to be a better “driver” online. You will have more privacy when you go to college but even then, remember, that nothing you do online is EVER private.
5. You must always put your phone away the first time we ask.
6. This phone is not to be taken into your room unless given permission. This rule applies to your friends as well. You are required to enforce this rule with them.
7. Phones go in the charging station in our room at night. This applies to your friends as well.
8. Do not try to get around our parental control settings. This is considered a break in trust.

I have read the above agreement and sign this in accordance with the rules.

Parent's Signature

Child Signature
