

Behavior Contracts

Guidelines: Definition/Purpose

A behavior contract is an agreement between two or more persons that lists specific behaviors that the parties will perform and the consequences that will result. The consequences include what sanction will be imposed if the individual does not perform the target behavior, as well as what reinforcer the individual will receive for performing the target behavior within the designated timeframe.

Behavior contracts should be used when an individual engages in a repeated problem behavior. Typically, the resident will have been given a sanction, according to the sanctioning grid, but s/he continues to engage in the problem behavior. The contract is designed to target a specific behavior for change.

Negotiating a Behavioral Contract

A behavioral contract should be negotiated between the staff and individual receiving the contract. Once a meeting is scheduled with the resident, concerns regarding his/her behavior should be discussed. The concept of the behavioral contract should be explained, i.e.:

“This contract serves as an agreement between you and me that you will perform the [list behavior] within the [list time frame]. If you do, you’ll receive a reward [list reinforcer] that you and I agreed on; if you don’t perform the behavior, you’ll receive the following sanction [list sanction]”.

Staff and the resident can together decide what would be an appropriate reinforcer for performing the targeted behavior. Staff, however, should designate the appropriate sanction for not performing the behavior.

Be sure that the focus of the contract is on helping the offender to make better decisions, versus staff’s attempt to control the resident. Discuss how continuing the identified behavior can be problematic in the short and long term.

Constructing the Behavior Contract

The *target behavior* listed on the contract is the behavior you *want* the resident to perform, rather than the behavior you *don’t* want them to engage in. This helps the resident to learn what to replace the problem behavior with. For example, if a resident continues to get written up for not following staff instructions, the target behavior would be to *follow staff instructions* for a designated timeframe; or if a resident has repeated write-ups for cursing, the target behavior would be to use appropriate/non-offensive language or to avoid using said cussword for a designated timeframe.

Be sure to *avoid* very general behaviors (i.e. respect staff) as this is too broad and difficult to measure. Instead, decide *how* the resident is being disrespectful (tone of voice, words used,

failure to follow instructions) and target that behavior. Be very clear with the resident as to what needs to be done to receive the reinforcer listed in the contract.

When choosing the timeframe, one should begin with small increments of time. Contract times can range from a few hours to a few days, depending on the frequency of the problem behavior. Avoid timeframes that exceed a week, especially if the behavior occurs on a regular basis. This makes success at meeting the contract more plausible. If a target behavior is achieved by a resident, and s/he is given a reinforcer, the contract can always be continued for a longer period of time to promote continued behavior change.

After the contract has been written, review it with the resident and sign your names, if both are in agreement. Have a witness read and sign the contract as well. This helps to ensure that everyone agrees to what is on the contract. Using a witness who is perceived positively by the client can be a good motivational tool. All of the signatures lend legitimacy to the contract.

Be sure to decide ahead of time who will be monitoring the behavior, who will be giving the resident the reinforcer or sanction, and when s/he will be receiving it. It is very important to follow-through with the consequences stipulated on the contract (whether a reward or punishment), or an escalation in the problem behavior is possible.

Evaluating the Results

When a resident performs the target behavior, in addition to issuing the reinforcer, be sure to also discuss *why* continuing the appropriate/pro-social behavior is beneficial for him/her—have the resident tell you how it can help him/her in the short and long term. This helps to internalize the benefits of making good decisions.

If a resident does not meet the contract behavior, issue the sanction listed on the contract. Staff may decide to renegotiate the contract, perhaps changing the length of the contract, if it proved to be unrealistic. Staff could also monitor the behavior, and wait to issue another contract if the behavior pattern continues. Remember, behavioral change is difficult. Staff should not expect that one contract will result in long-term behavioral change. Even if the resident is successful, s/he may revert back to the behavior, which suggests skills may need to be taught or reinforced to help him/her make better decisions.

Responsibilities:

The program should decide who will be responsible for constructing a behavior contract with residents. Typically, clinical staff are responsible for constructing and overseeing the contracts, and resident supervisors serve as witnesses to the contract, and help monitor the target behaviors.

SOBER Court Behavior Contract

By agreeing to the terms and conditions of this contract, I understand and accept that everyone who signs this contract is bound by the contract and neither I nor the CSCD or court staff is free to vary from the terms of the contract.

I, _____ (probationer), enter into the following contract in order to successfully meet the conditions of this program and develop more pro-social behaviors. This contract will be reviewed _____ days from the date of signing, at which time it is subject to either being continued or renegotiated.

I, _____ (probationer) agree I will perform the following behavior:
[Target Behavior]

I, _____ (probationer), also agree that I will receive the following consequences if I choose to violate the contract by failing to perform the behaviors as described above:
[Negative Consequences/Loss of Privileges]

I, _____ (staff) agree that if _____ (probationer) performs the behaviors as described above, he will earn the following rewards in addition to avoiding any of the consequences as outlined above:
[Reinforcers to be earned]

Both parties acknowledge that this contract is entered into voluntarily and that the terms and conditions will be respected. If the conditions are met, the staff agrees that the probationer will not be denied privileges or receive other consequences.

Client

Date

Staff

Date

Judge

Date

