



newsletter for nurturing support groups

Volume 6, Number 2
April 1985

CONTRACTS

"Hey — you broke your contract!"
"I did?"

"Yes. You were supposed to take the garbage out before nine and you didn't do it."

"I never agreed to do that!"

Sound familiar? The word **contract** is often loosely used. **To make a contract** is to make an agreement between two or more persons. **A contract** is the agreement between the parties. If I tell someone to take out the garbage we have not made a contract; I have given a command. There are times when commands are appropriate, but let's say that I want to make a contract. How do I do that?

There are three steps in making a contract. It is best to do it when people are calm rather than in the heat of battle. First, I negotiate with someone about a service or product, usually about the place and time it will be done, about the duration of our agreement, and about the benefit for each. The benefit could be money, a product, a service, prestige, satisfaction, entertainment, or whatever.

Next, we negotiate the mutual effort. That is what each of us is going to do and how we will do it. Each of us must be willing to give our effort and receive the effort of the other. If your effort is to perform some task and the effort I offer is to nag you about it, you may not be willing to receive my effort. I will have to think of something else.

In the third part of the negotiation we establish rewards and penalties. There are always rewards and penalties. Sometimes they are not talked about, but they are there. Sometimes when we first introduce contracting to school-aged children, they say, "There are no penalties for parents and teachers. When they break the contract they get by with it." After we talk for awhile the kids realize that there are penalties; "Next time I'm more slow," or, "After that I don't trust them so much."

Often the children insist that there are no rewards for them in keeping their contracts, only penalties if they don't. Finally they come to recognize that their reward is, "It keeps them off my back," but the kids might prefer other rewards!

So, this contracting can work with children, you say, but what about adults? Substitute employers for parents and employees for children and read the beginning of this article over again. Or substitute landlords for parents, and tenants for children.

If you are dissatisfied with the contract you are making, check first to be sure you really negotiated instead of commanding. Then look to see if you agreed upon the other two steps: mutual effort and consequences. If you don't spell out mutual effort for both sides, each will assume what the other will do. That assumption may or may not be correct.

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 32nd issue of **WE**, a newsletter for and about groups of people who get together for the purpose of giving each other personal support or to improve their group leadership skills.

As you know, I do not write **WE** at regular intervals but usually after I have collected enough information and experience with a topic to be excited about sharing it with you.

This time, as you know because I wrote you a letter of explanation, I was delayed because of temporary heavy involvement with a sanctuary project. During that experience I learned that the legislative branch of the government is responsive to citizens.

Thank you for your patience. Be assured that you will get six issues of **WE** for your subscription.

This issue includes:

- ideas about **CONTRACTS**
- a suggested format for group meetings, and
- a report on the relationship of self-esteem and morality.

Sincerely,

Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor

If you neglect to agree upon consequences, rewards may be slighted and people will heap penalties on each other, often in secret. They may mistrust, gossip or misplace anger onto something or someone else.

You can use the contract form in this issue to help you make agreements. Several examples are included. Use two columns if the agreement is between two people, three for three people. For more people, add more columns. Each example is a real contract made using this form and carried out successfully by the people who shared them with me. In addition, pediatrician Christine Ternand told me how parents are using the contract forms with diabetic children. One father reported that after eight weeks of contracting, his child still showed very uneven blood sugar control. The father charted the blood sugar test results and found that although the graph was still uneven, since the child had started contracting for self-responsibility, the whole graph line had moved in a healthier direction.

Linda Buranen uses it with renters to her and their satisfaction.

Try it!

PRACTICE CONTRACT

Tesa said she wanted to play the cello, but she frequently forgot to practice. Becky thought carefully about how much she wanted Tesa to play the cello and decided that if Tesa really didn't want to play, it would be OK. This is an important part of contracting because a contract is an agreement based on mutual consent. When parents have decided that children must play an instrument, a contract can't be negotiated because children don't have a free part of the mutual consent. In that case parents are making a demand. In many instances that is appropriate, but it is not a contract, it is a demand.

Becky and Tesa negotiated back and forth. First, they agreed on a reasonable amount of practice. Then they hassled over Mom's part. Mom was used to doing lots of reminding. They had to find an "effort" Becky thought she could live with.

This contract is reinstated or renegotiated weekly during the school year.



CONTRACT

Name: *Mom*

Name: *Tesa*

<p>MUTUAL CONSENT Description of Product or service</p> <p><i>Mom and Tesa both want Tesa to play the cello, but Tesa forgets to practice.</i></p>	<p><i>Provides lessons and cello</i></p> <p><i>Mom gets the satisfaction of having a daughter play cello</i></p>		<p>SERVICE or PRODUCT PLACE HOURS DURATION BENEFIT</p> <p><i>Practice cello</i> <i>Living room after school</i> <i>one week</i> <i>Tesa has satisfaction of playing cello</i></p>
<p>MUTUAL EFFORT How going to do What going to do</p>	<p><i>listen and help only if Tesa asks. Mom may ask once each day and Tesa has right to say yes or no. NO FUSSING or SCOLDING by Mom.</i></p>		<p><i>Practice, without being reminded, one hour each night M,T,W & Th.</i> <i>No fussing by Tesa.</i></p>
<p>CONSEQUENCES</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p> <p><i>Buy myself two more little round doilies.</i></p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p> <p><i>no doilies!</i></p>	<p>For Keeping Contract For Breaking Contract</p> <p><i>lets to have a friend overnight.</i> <i>no friend to sleep overnight.</i></p>

Thanks to Becky and Tesa Monson for this one week practice contract.

THUMB SUCKING

Charlie had tried to stop his bedtime thumb sucking many times. He had painted it with awful-tasting stuff and tried to sleep with his hand under his pillow. He seemed to need to work the problem out on his own but with lots of support. The contract he designed with his mom gave him that support. He stopped sucking in one week. He and his mom decided to keep the contract in force two months longer because it takes time to replace a tenacious old habit with a sturdy new one, and Charlie didn't want to lose his new skill.

Charlie's mom reported that she got a big surprise from the contracting process. She learned that it was easy for her to suggest what her son was supposed to do, but difficult for her to figure out her part. When she asked him what he wanted they were able to work it through.



CONTRACT

THUMB SUCKING

Name: MOM

Name: CHARLIE (AGE 10)

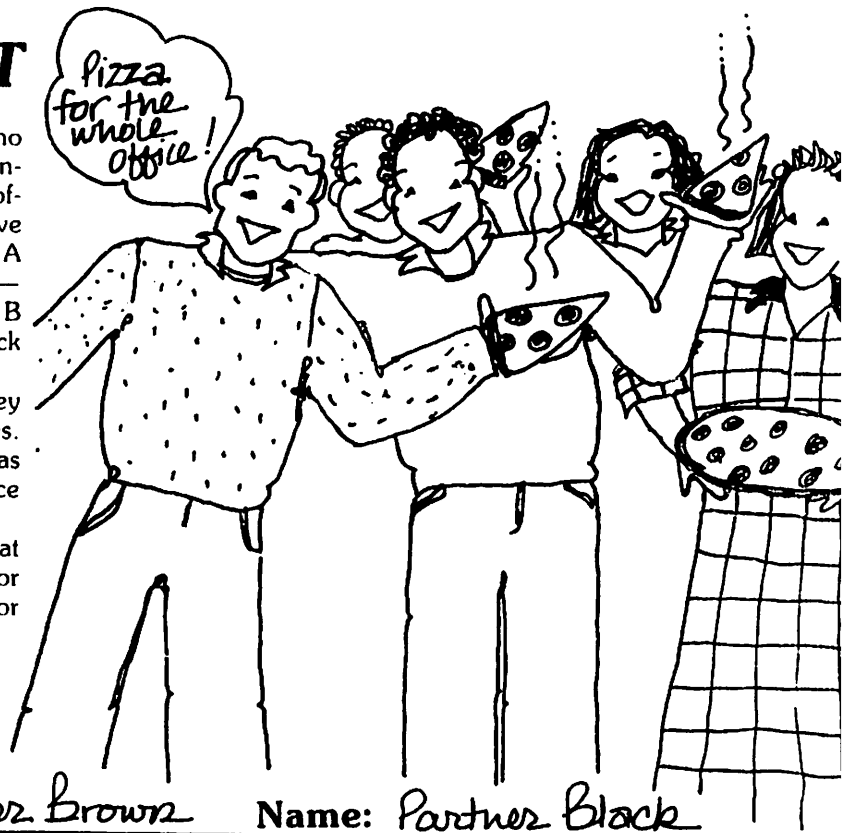
<p>MUTUAL CONSENT Description of Product or service</p> <p>Charlie wants to stop sucking his thumb. Mom is willing to help.</p>	<p>SERVICE OR PRODUCT</p> <p>STOP SUCKING THUMB</p> <p>PLACE</p> <p>IN BED</p> <p>HOURS</p> <p>AT BEDTIME</p> <p>DURATION</p> <p>ONE DAY AT A TIME</p> <p>BENEFIT</p> <p>MOM GETS THE SATISFACTION OF HER SON NO LONGER SUCKING HIS THUMB.</p>		<p>BENEFIT</p> <p>CHARLIE GETS THE SATISFACTION OF STOPPING A HABIT HE WISHES TO STOP.</p>	
<p>MUTUAL EFFORT How going to do What going to do</p>	<p>MOM WILL REMIND OR ASK ONCE (AND ONLY ONCE) EACH NIGHT, LOOK AT HIS THUMB BEFORE SHE GOES TO BED AT NIGHT, AND REPORT TO HIM IN THE MORNING IF HE WAS SUCKING HIS THUMB.</p>	<p>CHARLIE WILL TAPE HIS THUMB OR WEAR A MITTEN EACH NIGHT TO REMIND HIM. HE WILL TAPE HIS THUMB PLEASANTLY.</p>		
<p>CONSEQUENCES</p> <p>BOTH MOM AND CHARLIE LIKE BADMINTON.</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p> <p>SHE GETS TO PLAY ONE GAME OF BADMINTON ON SATURDAY FOR EACH DAY SHE KEEPS HER "EFFORT."</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p> <p>SHE WILL MAKE HIS BED (A JOB HE HATES) FOR A WEEK FOR EACH TIME SHE FAULTS ON HER "EFFORT."</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p> <p>HE GETS TO PLAY ONE GAME OF BADMINTON ON SATURDAY FOR EACH DAY HE KEEPS HIS "EFFORT."</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p> <p>HE HAS TO CHANGE HIS BED ON SATURDAY.</p>

PARTNER'S CONTRACT

Partner's Brown and Black are skilled professionals who work in a partnership to share office space and help. Both enjoy the professional work and neither wants to manage the office. Every so often they meet. Brown says, "Things have gotten out of hand. We have to shape things up. I'll do A through E, and you do F, G and H." Black says, "Okay — that will take care of it." But it doesn't. Brown forgets to do B and they lose money because of it. Brown notices that Black has not done F, so Brown does it.

When Brown and Black looked at their contracts, they realized that they had built in neither rewards nor penalties. Both were letting the management tasks slide, and each was feeling irritated with the other. This is often the consequence when that part of the contract is unspoken.

Each thought carefully, choosing rewards and penalties that would be highly motivating. They agreed to review or renegotiate the contract at the request of either of them or quarterly, whichever came first.



CONTRACT

Partner's Contract

Name: Partner Brown

Name: Partner Black

<p>MUTUAL CONSENT Description of Product or service</p> <p>Business partners want to manage their office more efficiently.</p>	<p>Management Tasks A through F:</p> <p>Stated date for task. Satisfaction of improved image in the business community. increased revenue.</p>		<p>SERVICE or PRODUCT PLACE HOURS DURATION BENEFIT</p> <p>management tasks F, G and H. Office 9-5 To be completed quarterly. Satisfaction of business running well, inc. revenue</p>	
<p>MUTUAL EFFORT How going to do What going to do</p> <p>Each has been promising to do certain tasks and not carrying through. Change that.</p>	<p>Brown will do tasks A, B and C, and will hire & supervise an outside firm to do D and E.</p>		<p>Black will do F and G and supervise the employees who are doing H.</p>	
<p>CONSEQUENCES</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p> <p>For A, B, C Partner Brown will report when done, will get attention, handshakes and congratulations. For D, E & H he will hold a dinner party celebration.</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p> <p>Brown will work overtime or pay for extra help himself until done.</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p> <p>Black will get a day off.</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p> <p>Black will work overtime until done and pay for pizza for the whole office.</p>

Ground Rules

It is important to agree upon, state and post ground rules for group meetings because stating the rules helps group members know what is safe to do or say and what the limits are. We suggest starting with these:

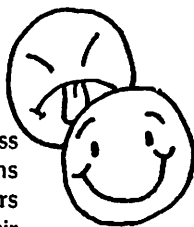
Ground Rules

1. All beliefs are honored
2. Everyone participates in their heads
3. Everyone has the right to pass on any exercise or activity
4. No gossip; confidentiality
5. Leader stays in position of respect for others and self

The first, "All beliefs are honored," does not mean that all values are correct or that all beliefs are honorable. We may disagree strongly with another group member's beliefs. "All beliefs are honored" means that we honor people's right to establish their own beliefs, that we realize each person has different life experiences and that we respect people's need to make sense out of their lives by choosing beliefs that help them do that.

Each time we are with someone whose beliefs are different from ours, we have the opportunity to learn.

Resentments & Appreciations



A kindergarten teacher who closes class each day with resentments and appreciations makes Mr. Yuk and Smiling Face stickers available to the children. As they tell their resentments they get to stick a Mr. Yuk sticker on paper on the bulletin board. The teacher reports that as the children give appreciations, they invariably place the Smiling Faces directly over the Mr. Yuk faces. Do you suppose there is a lesson there for us?

Self Esteem and Morality

by Deane Gradous

Under the topic: "You are what you think you are," Daniel Cohen offers an argument for our teaching about self-esteem and our doing everything we can to raise self-esteem in ourselves and others.

The theory holds that people who think of themselves as being "good" will resist the temptation to commit an immoral act — that they will suffer from cognitive dissonance when they do something they consider to be wrong. Conversely, people with low self-esteem will more easily commit an immoral act because doing so does not clash with their negative self-image.

This was borne out in a study in which students who had just been told they were rather worthless individuals cheated on a test involving gambling for money more than did those students who had been told that they were mature, interesting, and so forth.

According to Cohen: "If low self-esteem contributes to dishonest or cruel behavior then we might want to do everything possible to help individuals learn to respect and love themselves."

Source: **Re:Thinking** by Daniel Cohen

Suggested Format for Group Meetings

Place _____

Date _____

Time _____

Person in Charge _____

Program:

- Opening activity that offers everyone a positive personal message
- Ground rules
- Celebrating wins and sharing problems
- Asking for support
- Practice skills, new learnings, play
- Suggestion circle
- Plan the next meeting
- Resentments and Appreciations
- Closing activity that offers everyone a positive personal message

TIPS for LEADERS

Introducing Something New

You can help people build bridges from what they already know to something new by introducing one new thing at a time. If you are going to present unfamiliar content, use a familiar process. If you are going to try out a new process, use familiar content.

For example, you have been asked to teach the people in your group about XXX. They don't know much about XXX but they like questions and answers. You could start by saying, "Tonight we are going to talk about XXX. Will you each think of two or three questions you would like answered about XXX." Then you could list the questions and answer them directly or offer a hand out for some, or include them in a lecture or demonstration.

On the other hand, let us say that you have been asked to introduce the group to a new process, role playing. Choose a very familiar and safe topic. "We can role play how we greet our co-workers when we come to work in the morning. Then we can think about how we like what we do. If we want to try greeting another way, we can role play that also."

Leader's Contract With a Group



You can find additional information on the formal and informal contracts that leaders make with groups in **Who, Me, Lead a Group?** Question 6, *What is my responsibility to the group? What is my contract?* contains information and an example of a contract with an employer. It also suggests the various elements present in an unspoken contract with the group.

Who, Me, Lead a Group? by Jean Illsley Clarke, Winston Press, Minneapolis, MN 1984, \$3.95.

CONTRACT

Name:

Name:

Name:

<p>MUTUAL CONSENT Description of Product or service</p>	<p>SERVICE or PRODUCT PLACE HOURS DURATION BENEFIT</p>	
<p>MUTUAL EFFORT How going to do What going to do</p>		
<p>CONSEQUENCES</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p>
	<p>For Keeping Contract</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p>
	<p>For Keeping Contract</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p>

CONTRACT

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

<p>MUTUAL CONSENT Description of Product or service</p>		<p>SERVICE of PRODUCT PLACE HOURS DURATION BENEFIT</p>	
<p>MUTUAL EFFORT How going to do What going to do</p>			
<p>CONSEQUENCES</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p>	<p>For Breaking Contract</p>	<p>For Keeping Contract</p>
			<p>For Breaking Contract</p>

Facilitator Training Workshops

June 10-17, 1985
Plymouth, MN
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July 15-19, 1985
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A week-long workshop for people who want to . . .

- Facilitate the **Self-Esteem: A Family Affair** parenting model, or
- Improve group leadership skills for working with growth, education or support groups.

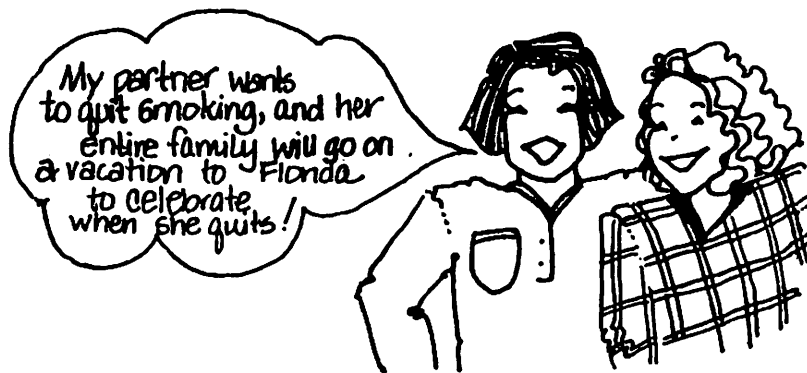
Write to **WE** for details.

OPENING ACTIVITY For Thinking About Contracts

Hand out name tags. Ask each person to:

- choose a partner
- make a name tag for her
- ask her to tell you one contract that she wishes she had.

Introduce your partner and tell the group about her contract if she is willing for you to share that information.



CLOSING ACTIVITY

At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.

- Ask several people to share one contract they plan to make in a different way in the future.
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.

Edited by Jean Illsley Clarke
Layout Design by Marnie Lilja Baehr

Published by Marnie Lilja Baehr

\$15.00 per year (6 issues)

- Suggested activities
- Thoughts on theory and purpose of support groups
- News from other support groups

WE
16535 9th Avenue N.
Plymouth, MN 55447

newsletter for nurturing support groups

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