BEHAVIOR CONTRACT: HOW TO USE IT

1. **This is a contract between you and your child or teen.**
   
   If you have more than one child, you should make a contract with each child.

2. **Choose a behavior you want to encourage.**
   
   We use the word “job” because kids can understand it better than “task” or “behavior.” It helps to break a job into smaller steps, as many as you need. For example, instead of saying “Clean you room,” break it down into smaller steps such as “Make your bed, put your toys in the toy box, and put your dirty clothes in the hamper.”

3. **Write down when the job needs to be finished.**
   
   Let kids know when the job needs to be done before they earn a reward. For example, tell the child that when she makes her bed, puts her toys in the toy box, and puts her clothes in the hamper, then she can go ride her bike.

4. **Write down the number of times the job needs to be done.**
   
   Decide on a reasonable number of times kids need to do the job to earn their reward. Don’t expect 100 percent cooperation. Praise him or her after completion of each part of the task. If he or she makes the bed and puts the dirty clothes in the hamper, but forgets to put the toys in the toy box, don’t focus on what the child didn’t do; focus on what the child did do. Praise the child for making the bed and putting the clothes in the hamper.

5. **Negotiate with your child or teen what the reward will be in advance.**
   
   A good reward will motivate your child to complete the job. Children and adolescents can be motivated if they are involved in the process of negotiating the contract and providing input about what the rewards will be. A good time to discuss the behavioral contract and decide on the details is during a family meeting that you may have already set up. You may also have developed a Menu of Fun with your child, so the two of you can decide which rewards from this menu he or she can choose for completing the job. Examples of rewards include a favorite snack, watching a favorite TV show, playing a video game, riding his or her bike, a trip with friends to the mall food court, an outing with the parent, a movie rental, and an overnight stay at a friend’s house.

6. **Mark success on a chart.**
   
   Make a chart big enough to post somewhere in the house so kids can see it. For younger children, make the chart colorful and use pictures to mark success. Stickers also work well with younger kids. For teens and adolescents, they can be involved in making a poster that has magazine pictures of rewards they are working toward and the jobs expected. This is an activity that parents can engage in with their adolescents.