

The Sober Contract Guide

A Practical And
Invaluable Parenting
Tool When Your Child
Is In Early Recovery

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What is a Sober Contract?

A sober contract is a clear, written agreement between parents and their newly sober adult child. It outlines expectations, boundaries, privileges, and consequences in the early recovery period.

Think of it as a road map for rebuilding trust and providing your adult child with the accountability that they absolutely need in order to make healthy decisions.

It is important to remember that their brains are still hard-wired for self sabotage until they have been sober for at least one year. Meaning, the parts of their brains that have been damaged by chronic substance abuse are the parts that are responsible for judgment, impulse control, memory, emotional regulation, and planning - therefore external accountability is critical to provide the guardrails that will incentivize them to follow through on the actions that promote recovery.

A formalized contract is a way to replace vague verbal promises with concrete commitments that everyone can refer back to. The contract should be considered as something you are implementing to help them stay on track, not something that you're implementing to be punitive or controlling. It should also be considered as something you are doing for your own well being, and taking care of your needs is paramount if you're going to have the stamina to support them through the ups and downs of early recovery.

A carefully constructed sober contract will:

- Set clear, mutual expectations that keep you from renegotiating in moments of stress
- Reduce reactive decision-making
- Provide a reference point you can both revisit if tensions escalate or there is confusion
- Model healthy, adult-to-adult communication
- Prevent misunderstandings
- Help your child take ownership of their recovery, including the natural consequences of their actions, both positive and negative
- Protect your relationship with your child and others in the household

Real Life Applications

Example 1:

Your son has been sober for 90 days and he is living in your home. You've agreed he can use the car as long as he passes random drug tests. One day, you find paraphernalia in his room. Instead of arguing or making a snap decision, you test him. He fails the drug test and you both revisit the contract, which clearly states that driving privileges are suspended for one month if this happens, and are only reinstated if he meets certain criteria. The conversation is shorter, calmer, and less emotionally loaded. There is no opening for negotiation, as the language in the contract was specific and measurable.

Example 2:

Your daughter is living in a sober house, and you've agreed to help with money for groceries and gas if she attends all outpatient sessions. After she skips two, you don't have to guess how to respond. The contract outlines a pause in financial support. It also specifies the length of the pause, as well as the criteria and process for resuming support.

Example 3:

Your son, who is two months sober, has agreed to a 10 p.m. curfew to support a consistent self care routine and reduce temptation. One night, he texts that he'll be "a little late" because he's hanging out with friends. Instead of panicking or arguing over the phone, you remind him of the agreement. You calmly explain that if he misses curfew without prior approval, the consequence is an immediate drug test and an 8pm curfew for one week, assuming he passes the test. Because it's in writing, the interaction stays brief and matter-of-fact rather than emotional and drawn-out.

Do's & Don'ts



Do:

- Keep expectations clear, specific, and measurable
- Include both rights/privileges and responsibilities
- Be consistent in following through
- Keep the tone respectful, not authoritarian
- List positive and negative consequences and make sure the negative consequences are deterrents to future behavior
- Specifically insist on complete abstinence, even if it may seem obvious



Don't:

- Use it as a punishment or a “gotcha” trap
- Fill it with vague language like “be respectful”
- Add more rules unilaterally after signing
- Sign if you're not willing to follow through
- Make the contract too complicated or long
- Change anything between review periods unless a trusted professional recommends doing so

SAMPLE SOBER CONTRACT TEMPLATE

Parent(s): Tom and Jane

Recovering Adult Child: Jake

Date: 08/25/25

Purpose:

This agreement is designed to provide structure, support, and accountability for Jake between now and the time he reaches six months of continuous sobriety. It is intended to help rebuild trust within our family and maintain a safe, respectful, and substance-free living environment.

Expectations of Jake:

1. Maintain complete abstinence from alcohol and drugs. This includes THC in any form. This also includes any prescribed medications, such as Xanax or Adderall, which are defined as relapses regardless of whether they are ordered by a doctor.

In the event of a positive result on a drug or alcohol screen, Jake will check himself in to a treatment program within 12 hours. The particular program will be chosen in collaboration with Jake's support team.

2. Submit to random drug/alcohol testing a minimum of once weekly and also upon request, under the supervision of a recovery coach or Tom if required by circumstances.

A refusal will be considered a positive result, and Jake will check himself in to a treatment program within 12 hours. The particular program will be chosen in collaboration with Jake's support team.

3. Follow all treatment and meeting requirements, specifically:

- **Minimum of 5 in-person A.A. meetings per week**
- **Minimum of 1 in-person psychotherapy session per week**
- **Compliance with all prescribed psychiatric medications**
- **Minimum of 2 meetings with recovery coach per week**
- **Maintain signed releases of information for Tom and Jane with all providers**

If anything within this section is not adhered to, Tom and Jane will pause all financial support (e.g. gas money, streaming subscriptions, takeout meals, and all miscellaneous expenditures) until two consecutive weeks of proof of consistent attendance is provided. If these requirements are unmet multiple times (3 or more times), or if releases of information are revoked, Jake will move to a sober house.

4. Follow household rules, specifically:

- **12am curfew on weeknights, 1am curfew on weekends**
 - Missing curfew without prior approval results in immediate drug test and 10pm curfew for one week.
- **Keep living space clean and neat, as defined in separate document delegating sibling household chores**
 - Not completing chores will result in having to send pictures of completed chores each morning before leaving the house.
- **All guests must be approved by Tom or Jane**
 - Unapproved guests will result in 10pm curfew for one week. If this happens again, it will result in move to sober house.
- **Maintain steady, paid employment at an appropriate business at a minimum of 25 hours per week**
 - Missed payment will result in all financial support halted until Jake is caught up on all payments and makes payments on time for two consecutive weeks

Support and privileges provided by **Tom and Jane**, contingent upon **Jake** meeting the expectations above:

- Safe, substance-free housing
- Use of family vehicle
- Funding for mental health care
- Funding for any needed medical treatments
- Funding for private health insurance
- Funding for streaming subscriptions
- Funding for cell phone bill
- Funding for college tuition beginning Spring semester 2026
- Invitation to February's family reunion in San Diego

Review Period:

This agreement will be reviewed every 30 days.

Signatures:

Tom: _____ **Date:** _____

Jane: _____ **Date:** _____

Jake: _____ **Date:** _____

FAMILY CONTRACT

Parent(s): _____

Recovering Adult Child: _____

Date: _____

Purpose:

Expectations of _____ :

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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4. _____

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5. _____

6. _____

Support and privileges provided by _____, contingent upon _____ meeting the expectations above:

- _____
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- _____
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- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Review Period:

Signatures:

(name)

Date: _____

(name)

Date: _____

(name)

Date: _____

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are my non-negotiables in this agreement?

- How will I hold myself accountable for following through?

- What's one fear I have about putting this in writing?

- How will I feel once I have a sober contract established?

- Who can I consult with before each review period meeting?

Jessica Ponn

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Addiction Specialist
Recovery Coach



If this guide was helpful, just imagine the invaluable knowledge, confidence, and practical guidance you could receive from customized professional support!

Jessica Ponn is an LCSW and family recovery coach, specializing in empowering parents to effectively encourage their adult children to get and stay sober. She wholeheartedly believes that healthy support from parents can play a vital role in whether those with addiction issues are able to win their fight against this horrific disease. She has seen this be the case hundreds of times throughout over 15 years of professional experience.

Knowing how to successfully harness the unique influence you have over your child's recovery is not intuitive. Professional help can be an absolute game changer and a literal life saver.

Schedule your no-cost, no-pressure consultation session now to learn more about her signature program!

BOOK NOW

