



Parenting Contracts for Attendance and Behaviour



Milton Keynes Local Authority

Parenting Contracts

Making the decision to offer a parenting contract –

In considering whether it would be appropriate to offer a parenting contract, the LA and school governing bodies should have regard to all their statutory duties and in particular to: -

- Reasons for entering into a parenting contract
- Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998
- Race Equality
- Disability
- Special Educational Needs
- Information for parents
- Involvement of children and young people
- Multi-agency working
- Child Protection Issues
- Definition of Parent/Carer (see appendix 1)

Parenting Contract in respect of inappropriate absence from school

If a pupil fails to attend school regularly, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) with authority of Milton Keynes LA and the school may consider whether it would be appropriate to offer a parenting contract to the parent/carer as a means to formalise support in putting together an action plan to address school attendance problems.

The purpose of a parenting contract is to improve the pupil's attendance at school and to address any underlying issues such as the pupil's behaviour. It is not to be seen or used as a punitive measure against the parent. Nor will it be appropriate in all cases. A parenting contract will be an appropriate course of action where the parent is willing to address their child's attending behaviour, but needs support to do so effectively.

A parenting contract is a formal written agreement between a parent, the Education Welfare Service (in cases of poor school attendance) other relevant agencies and the school and should contain:

- a) A statement by the parent that they agree to comply for a specified period with whatever requirements are specified in the contract; and
- b) A statement by the EWS and school agreeing to provide support to the parent for the purpose of complying with the contract.

Entry into a parenting contract is voluntary. The parent cannot be compelled to enter into a parenting contract if they do not wish to do so. Equally, there is

no obligation on the EWS or school to offer a parenting contract in cases of non-school attendance.

Parenting contracts will, however, often be a useful tool in identifying and focusing on the issues behind the non-attendance and in developing a productive relationship with parents to address these issues.

The EWS and school should be responsive to the needs of the parent in deciding what type of support they will provide. The issues behind absence from school can be complex and the type of support required will depend on each individual case.

The EWS and school may agree to provide support in the form of a parenting programme. The agreement may specify that the parent is required to attend the sessions of any such programme. In assessing the nature of the parenting programme the EWS, the school and other relevant agencies should consider who will administer the support sessions, the training and experience of the facilitators including their ability to engage with parents, the curriculum used, whether classes will be group or individually based and whether there are particular cultural and social factors to be considered.

A parenting contract may include any or all of the following: -

For the parent:

- To provide rewards when their child's attendance improves
- To bring the child to school in the mornings/afternoons
- To agree with and support sanctions
- To contact the school on a daily basis to ensure child's attendance
- Contact school on the same day if their child is ill
- To seek help from an agency or support group if appropriate
- To contact school if there are problems in the family that may affect their child's attendance

For the school:

- To keep regular contact with home to report on the pupil's progress
- To provide rewards when the pupil's attendance improves
- To provide support for the pupil in school (e.g. in the form of a mentor)
- To adjust the timetable or curriculum to meet the needs of the pupil
- To address any issues raised by the pupil (e.g. Bullying)
- To keep EWS informed of the pupil's progress.

There is no direct sanction for a parent's failure to comply with or refusal to sign a parenting contract. However, if the pupil's irregular attendance continues or escalates to such a level where a prosecution is deemed appropriate, this should be presented as evidence in the case.

A parenting contract can be used in conjunction with a Pastoral Support Plan, but primarily provides an additional mechanism that is more focused on the potential of the parent to improve their child's attendance.

Circumstances in which a parenting contract might be pursued

- Parenting contracts in Milton Keynes can apply to parents of children who attend:
 - a) A community, foundation or special school
 - b) A pupil referral unit
 - c) An alternative provision provider
- A parenting contract may be used in cases of absence from school where a pupil has failed to attend regularly at the school at which he/she is registered and where all methods of support to improve the pupil's school attendance have been exhausted.
- The purpose of a parenting contract is to improve the pupil's attendance at school and to address any underlying issues. It is not to be seen as a punitive measure against the parent. Nor will it be appropriate in all cases. A parenting contract will be an appropriate course of action where the parent is willing to address their child's attending behaviour, but needs support to do so effectively.

Assessing the appropriateness of a parenting contract

In deciding whether a parenting contract might be appropriate, the EWS, school and other relevant agencies should consider all the issues behind the non-attendance, in particular whether attendance may be improved through working with the parent and providing support to them through the formal arrangement of a parenting contract.

At what point should the contract be arranged

Attendance issues should primarily be addressed by intervention from relevant school based staff and the EWS before a contract is given consideration. Attendance should be assessed over a period of not less than 4 weeks during term-time before a parenting contract is considered.

Liaison between the head teacher, governing body, EWS and other agencies involved

The EWS and the school should liaise prior to entering into any parenting contract in order to share information with any other agencies that might be involved with the pupil and family. If other agencies are identified, the school and the EWS should consult them to discuss any underlying issues and to

consider the type of requirements and support that might usefully be included in the contract itself.

Parenting contracts require the parties entering into the agreement to resource the supportive element of the agreement. This could be for example, non-teaching staff participating in the delivery of parenting support sessions in partnership with Education Welfare Officers, Connexions Personal Advisers, Educational Psychologists, Youth or Social Workers. This will have resource implications for all agencies involved and in respect of schools needs to be agreed with the governing body. The decision of whether parenting contracts should form part of the school's attendance policy must remain with the governing body.

The governing body may delegate responsibility for parenting contracts to the head teacher and the head teacher may commit resources (by way of staff participation or use of venue for example) on behalf of the governing body where the governing body has chosen to delegate this power.

Consideration before entering into a parenting contract re attendance issues

- Make contact with other agencies involved with the pupil and family – a multi-agency approach is necessary to ensure that all work being carried out with the pupil and their parent fits well together and avoids duplication.
- Governing bodies and the LA should consider in each case whether the contract should cover poor school attendance, and if applicable, exclusions and/or criminal conduct and anti-social behaviour. If the youth offending team agrees that the contract should cover these areas, they would usually, depending on the circumstances of the case, be the lead agency in supervising the contract.
- Decide the duration of a parenting contract.
- Decide who is going to be the lead officer and maintain regular contact with the parent to discuss any problems in meeting the contract's requirements.
- Decide how breaches of the contract are going to be managed. In cases of school attendance, failure to comply with a contract may lead the LA to consider issuing a penalty notice to the parent or may lead the LA to consider prosecuting the parent for failing to ensure their child attends school regularly in which case evidence that the parent to comply with the contract could be presented in court.

Use of Parenting Contracts in Exclusions

If a pupil is excluded from school whether for a fixed term or permanently, the LA or governing body of the school may consider whether it would be appropriate to offer a parenting contract to the parent.

A parenting contract is a formal written agreement between a parent and either the LA or the governing body of a school and should contain:

- a) A statement by the parent that they agree to comply for a specified period with whatever requirements are specified in the contract; and
- b) A statement by the LA or governing body agreeing to provide support to the parent for the purpose of complying with the contract.

Entry into a parenting contract is voluntary. The parent cannot be compelled to enter into a parenting contract if they do not wish to do so. Equally, there is no obligation on the LA or governing body to offer a parenting contract following exclusion.

Parenting contracts will, however, often be a useful tool in identifying and focusing on the issues behind the behaviour that gave rise to the exclusion and in developing a productive relationship with parents to address these issues.

The LA or governing body should be responsive to the needs of the parent in deciding what type of support they will provide. The issues behind the behaviour may be complex and the type of support required will depend on each individual case.

The LA or governing body may agree to provide support in the form of a parenting programme. The contract may specify that the parent(s) are required to attend the sessions of any such programme. There is a wide range of parenting programme providers including voluntary organisations, youth offending teams and the LA. In assessing the nature of the parenting support programme in which the parent should take part, the LA or governing body should consider who will administer the sessions, the training and experience of the facilitators including their ability to engage with the parents, the curriculum used, whether classes will be group or individually-based and whether there are particular cultural and social factors to be considered.

Failure to keep to the terms of the parenting contract cannot lead to action for breach of contract or for civil damages.

There is no direct sanction for a parent's failure to comply with or refusal to sign a parenting contract. However, if the pupil's misbehaviour continues or escalates to such a level that the school or LA considers an application for a parenting order is appropriate, the court will be required to take this failure or refusal into account in deciding whether to make the order.

All those defined as a parent under section 576 of the Education Act (see appendix 2) are parents for the purposes of these provisions with the exception of local authorities who have parental responsibility as a result of being named in a care order ("corporate parents") who are not included here. Parenting contracts can apply to each and any parent coming within the definition.

A parenting contract can be used in conjunction with a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) and is not intended to replace the

excellent practice that already exists in this area, but instead provides an additional mechanism that is more focused on the potential of the parent to improve their child's behaviour. There is nothing to prevent an LA or school entering into a contract (either formal or informal) with parents in relation to their child's behaviour at any time. Parenting contracts are not intended to replace existing practice but simply to provide an additional option that has the backing of statute.

Circumstances in which a parenting contract might be pursued where there has been an exclusion

The purpose of a parenting contract is to improve the pupil's behaviour at school and to address any underlying causes. It is not to be seen as a punitive measure against the parent. Nor will it be appropriate in all cases. A parenting contract will be an appropriate course of action where the parent wishes to address their child's poor behaviour in school but needs support to do so effectively.

Assessing when a parenting contract is appropriate

In deciding whether a parenting contract might be appropriate, the LA or governing body should consider all the issues behind the exclusion, in particular whether the pupil's behaviour may be improved through working with the parent and providing support to them and, if so, what form this support should take. In addition, seek the views of relevant support services.

A parenting contract for behaviour may include any or all of the following: -

For the parent to agree to:

- Attend any meeting arranged by the school to review their child's progress or review their PSP or IEP.
- Their child attending any detention arranged by the school (this could include a detention on the same day as any incident). In the case of primary aged pupils, loss of golden time.
- Any curriculum or timetable changes that would help improve their child's behaviour.
- Check and sign any daily report card/home school diary used by the school to monitor their child's behaviour and give rewards where appropriate.
- Keep in regular contact with the school, especially if they have evidence that their child's behaviour at school is deteriorating.
- Attend any meeting or workshop facilitated by a family support agency.

- Attend any parenting programme arranged that is intended to help them manage their child's behaviour.

For the school to agree to:

- Follow their agreed policy/strategy for dealing with challenging behaviour.
- Arrange regular meetings (inviting the parents) to review their child's progress and keep in regular contact.
- Set up and regularly review a Pastoral Support Plan for the child.
- Monitor the child's behaviour by placing them on report.
- Give rewards/incentives agreed with the parents.
- Make (if necessary) changes to the child's teaching group, timetable or curriculum.
- Involve (if necessary) any outside agencies that can support the child and family.
- Provide a mentor to support the child.
- Where the child has a statement the SENCO will be involved in the contract arrangements.
- Seek advice from support services. (e.g. Behaviour Support Team)

At what point should the contract be arranged

The parenting contract should be arranged as soon as possible after the exclusion and completion of any exclusion review and appeal process.

In the case of permanent exclusion this would be: -

- The date by which it is known that the parent does not wish to lodge an appeal against the head teacher's decision to exclude, which has subsequently been upheld by the governing body. This would be the date set out in the letter sent to the parent by the governing body, informing the parent of their decision to uphold the permanent exclusion, as the date by which time the parent must have notified the LA that they wish to lodge an appeal, or
- The date upon which the independent Appeal Panel endorses the head teacher's decision to exclude.

In the case of fixed-term exclusions the date on which the review process is complete would be:

- The date upon which the governing body endorses the head teacher's decision to exclude; or
- If the exclusion is not considered by the governing body, the date on which the exclusion began.

For a pupil referral unit, the review process is complete when the LA endorses the decision of the teacher in charge to exclude; or if the LA does not consider it, the date on which the exclusion began.

Parenting Contracts following Permanent Exclusion

In cases of permanent exclusion from school, it will usually be the LA that will consider arranging a parenting contract in relation to the pupil. In most cases, the excluded pupil will be the responsibility of the LA until arrangements can be made for the pupil to continue their education elsewhere.

The governing body of any school, which takes in an excluded pupil, may also consider arranging a parenting contract if it wishes, but is under no obligation to do so. However, in accordance with the law on admissions, a school may not require a parent to sign a parenting contract as a condition of their child being accepted by the school.

Considerations before entering into a parenting contract to address behaviour

- Make contact with other agencies involved with the pupil and family – a multi-agency approach is necessary to ensure that all work being carried out with the pupil and their parent fits well together and avoids duplication.
- Governing bodies and the LA should consider in each case whether the contract should cover exclusion, poor school attendance and/or criminal conduct and anti-social behaviour. If the youth offending team (where the child is of secondary school age) agrees that the contract should cover these areas, they would usually, depending on the circumstances of the case, be the lead agency in supervising the contract.
- Decide the duration of a parenting contract.
- Decide who is going to be the lead officer and maintain regular contact with the parent to discuss any problems in meeting the contracts requirements.
- Decide how breaches of the contract are going to be managed. In cases of exclusion from school, failure by the parent to comply with the contract would be a relevant consideration for the LA in deciding whether to apply for a parenting order.

The use of Parenting Orders

Where the use of parenting contracts for attendance or behaviour have been assessed as failing due to a lack of co-operation from parents, and where appropriate local services are in place, the LA will consider applying to the local magistrates court for a parenting order.

To discuss this document further either contact Linda Rayfield, Principal Education Welfare Officer on 01908 657808 or e-mail – Linda.rayfield@milton-keynescouncil.gov.uk regarding parenting contracts and school attendance OR

John Akers, BIP Manager on 01908 253969 or e-mail – John.Akers@milton-keynes.gov.uk regarding parenting contracts in respect of behaviour and exclusions.

July 2005

SAMPLE

Parenting Contract

Personal details

Pupil's Name: Sam Adams

Parents' Names: John Adams and Sue Thomas

Teacher's/EWO's Name and Name of School/LA: Edward Jones, Sam's form teacher at Parkmead High school

Teacher's/EWO's contact details: 01888 888888

Background to Parenting Contract

Following a meeting on 13 March 2004 between Mr Jones (Sam's form teacher/the LA Education Welfare Officer), Mr Adams and Ms Thomas (Sam's parents) and Sam, we have all agreed that we want to work together to help Sam to attend school more regularly/behave well in class.

Mr Jones, Sam, Mr Adams and Ms Thomas have also agreed a pastoral support plan/ individual education plan for Sam and a copy is attached to this agreement.

What has been agreed

The School/LA's promise

Mr Jones has agreed that to help Sam's parents help Sam attend school regularly/behave in class he will:

- Send Sam's parents a behaviour report at the end of every day so that they know if there have been any problems;
- Make sure that a member of staff contacts Sam's parents immediately if Sam is not at school when the register is taken or if the school becomes aware that Sam is not on the premises;
- Be available between 4.00 and 4.30 every school day if there is anything that Mr Adams or Ms Thomas want to discuss with him in person;

- Give Mr Adams and Ms Thomas contact details of their local benefits agency so that they can make an appointment to discuss their benefits entitlement;
- Provide Mr Adams with a parent mentor;
- Put Ms Thomas in touch with the local parent peer group;
- Give both Mr Adams and Ms Thomas details of Ravenhill High Extended school's adult education classes and discuss possible options with them if they wish to attend;
- Provide Sam with a learning mentor.

Mr Adams' and Ms Thomas' promise

Sam's parents have agreed that to help Sam attend school regularly/ behave well in class they will:

- Sign the copy of the behaviour report and tell Mr Jones if they have any comments on it;
- Discuss the behaviour reports with Sam at the end of every week;
- Let Mr Jones know if there are any problems which might make Sam truant/ behave badly in class;
- Set rules for Sam at home to make sure that he behaves properly at home, does his homework and is in bed by 10.30pm and back each other up in sticking to them. (A meeting has been arranged with Sally Pieterman, the local parent practitioner to discuss what types of rules might be appropriate and how to enforce them);
- Regularly attend meetings with the local parent support network group
- Get Sam up for school by 7.45 so that he has enough time to get ready for school and eat breakfast and so that he arrives at school on time every day;
- Provide a doctor's note if Sam is off sick.

Review

Mr Jones, Mr Adams, Ms Thomas and Sam will meet again at the end of term (April 4) to discuss how things are going and whether this agreement needs to be changed in any way.

Mr Jones, Mr Adams or Ms Thomas can ask for a meeting at any time to discuss the agreement further or to discuss any difficulties or problems.

Important dates

We will next meet on **March 21st** at **4pm** at Parkmead High

We will meet **every Friday at 4pm**. Sam, his parents or Mr Jones can also request additional meetings.

Other important dates are:

April 15th when Sam returns to school after the holidays

May 22nd to June 23rd when Sam has his school tests

We will review this agreement on **April 4th** and **June 6th**

We will end this agreement at the end of the school year (July 16th) and have a meeting to discuss any issues on **July 15th**.

Useful Contact details

Mr Jones: _____

Sally Pieterston, Parenting Support practitioner: _____

If Sally is unavailable contact: _____

Parentline Plus _____

Local Youth Project & Activity Centre _____

Agreement

We will do what we have agreed in this parenting contract and will work together to help Sam attend school regularly/ behave well in class

Signed: Mr Jones _____

Date:

Ms Thomas _____

Date:

Mr Adams _____

Date:

Parents' Consent to Information Sharing

We also understand and agree that information about me/us has been and will continue to be collected so that Mr Jones, the school and the LA can assess and provide appropriate assistance and services. The school and LA may also use this information for service planning, monitoring and research purposes and may share the information with external agencies and providers of relevant services that they need to work with to ensure that we are provided with the most appropriate services.

We understand that this information will be stored either electronically or in the manual records by the school/LA for case management purposes until the end of the agreement on July 16th and for 6 months following, to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. The school/LA will keep the information updated and notify anyone who is given the information of any changes to ensure corrections are made.

[The above statements must be explained in full to the parents so that they understand them & the implications clearly]

Signed: Mr Jones _____

Ms Thomas _____

Mr Adams _____

Date:

Complaints procedure

Mr Jones has provided Mr Adams and Ms Thomas with a copy of the school's complaints procedure and explained it to them so that both of them understand it.

Signed: Mr Jones _____

Ms Thomas _____

Mr Adams _____

Date:

Appendix 1

The definition of a parent

The education-related provisions of the Anti-social Behaviour Act apply to all parents who fall within the definition set out in section 576 of the Education Act 1996. This defines 'parent' as: all natural parents, whether they are married or not; any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility (as defined in the Children Act 1989) for a child or young person; and any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person. Having care of a child or young person means that a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law.