

## COOPERATIVE CONTRACT

The cooperative contract was developed to promote cooperation rather than competition among people in getting their basic needs met. The primary assumptions behind the contract are as follows: People tend to get into competition and use *competitive behaviors* (rescuing, power-plays, secrets and lies) when they perceive some scarcity. In human relationships, there is not a scarcity of the basic things we need. There is enough time, energy, and attention to go around. People can get their basic needs met far better through cooperation than through competition.

### CONTRACT AGREEMENTS

**1. ASK FOR 100% OF WHAT YOU WANT, 100% OF THE TIME**, with the understanding that the other person has the right to say "Yes" or "No". "Yes" does not mean "Yes" forever. It means "Yes" for right then, so that when the other person is ready she/he can say, "I'd like to stop now."  
In the same way, "No" does not mean "no" forever. It means "No" for right then, so that if the other person says "No", you can ask him/her when she/he would be willing to do what you have asked.

**2. TO NOT RESCUE.** Rescuing can take several forms:

One way of rescuing can be to say "Yes" when you really want to say "No", and agree to do things you really don't want to do.

Another way of rescuing is to do something for someone else, that they have the ability to do for themselves, without asking them if they would like for you to do that.

The intention in rescuing is to be "helpful." The actual effect is to discount the other person's ability and to treat them as though they are inadequate. Rescuing builds up resentment in both people.

PROCEDURE: The basic rule of thumb is to ask before you do something.

**3. TO NOT USE POWER-PLAYS.** Power-plays are attempts to make someone else do something they don't want to do. Power plays do not respect the other person's right to say "No". Power-plays may be overt or covert:

*OVERT POWER-PLAYS* are carried out from an one-up position in which I use my physical strength, organizational position, money, power, influence, etc. to attempt to make someone else do something I want.

*COVERT POWER-PLAYS* are carried out from a one-down position in which I attempt to play on another person's sympathy, good will, or guilt in order to manipulate them into doing what I want. Another variation of the covert power play is attempting to keep the other person's attention by playing helpless and not doing anything to solve the problem while keeping the other person concerned about me.

PROCEDURE: The agreement is to ask directly for what I want rather than to use power plays.

**4. TO NOT KEEP SECRETS.** This does not mean you have to tell everything about yourself. It means to not keep secret things about yourself. It means to not keep secret things you are feeling or thinking about another person that could get in the way of your relationship or that they could use for their own growth. The idea is to be reactive to one another from a caring position.

**5. TO NOT LIE.** This means to be truthful and level with others when they check things out with you.

### PROCESS

The cooperative contract is carried out by processing issues (feelings, fantasies, wants, and needs) when they arise. Examples of things that are important to process and procedures for doing so are as follows:

**1. VERBALIZE ALL FEELINGS, INCLUDING RESENTMENTS:** Usually people feel OK sharing anxiety, fears, sadness and excitement. Individuals have the most difficulties when sharing anger and resentment, because of the assumptions and fantasies they make about themselves, others and the situation. Often times they prevent themselves from sharing

resentments for fear of conflict or for fear of “hurting the other person’s feelings”. In other instances, they may use anger by attacking others, and ultimately pushing others away.

In this regard, all of us are “emotional” human beings and we often feel resentment in response to things other people do or say. If we hold back our resentment and do not share it, we tie up our energy internally and often build a wall between ourselves and the other person. The purpose of sharing the resentment is to give the other person information they can use and to let go of the negative energy we are feeling.

**PROCEDURE:** The process for sharing the resentment is to ask the person toward whom we are feeling the resentment if they would be willing to hear it. This is important because sometimes people are not in a place to hear it. If the person says “No”, you can ask them when they would be willing to hear it, and set it aside until then. When they are willing to hear the resentment, it is important to specify the behavior on the other person’s part to which you reacted to with resentment rather than trying to interpret that behavior. For example, you might say, “*When you stepped on my toe, I felt resentment*”, rather than, “*I resent that you don’t like me*”, which is an interpretation of the behavior.

For the person hearing the resentment, it is important to say “*I hear you*” or “*I hear that.*” It is important to not try to give additional information at that point. You don’t need to justify, defend or explain what you did. The resentment is not an indictment, criticism, put down, or judgment but rather information about how another person reacted emotionally to some behavior on your part. The important thing is for them to experience being heard and to let go of the resentment. You can take in the information and decide what you want to do, if anything, about the behavior.

- 2. CHECKING OUT ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT OTHERS (FANTASIES):** All of us are highly intuitive and we are constantly forming assumptions and fantasies about what other people feel or think about us. If we are tying up energy internally or relating to another person or persons on the basis of a fantasy, then it is very useful to check out our fantasy with the other person.

**PROCEDURE:** The procedure is to ask the other person whether you can check out a fantasy with them. If they say “yes”, then you share your fantasy and ask if it is true.

The purpose of doing so is to validate your intuition and get the facts so you can operate on the basis of fact rather than fantasy. For example, you might say, “*When you stepped on my toe my fantasy was that you didn’t like me. Is that true?*” If the other person says “yes”, your intuition is confirmed. If they say “no”, you can ask, “*Is there any grain of truth?*”

For the person responding it is very important first to say “yes” or “no” to the fantasy depending on whether it is true or not. If there is an element or grain of truth, then you can say what is true and what is not true. It is important to be very clear about both.

For the person who is checking out the fantasy, if the person says, “*There’s not even a grain of truth*”, it doesn’t mean you’re not intuiting something. It simply means you have not yet gotten the correct interpretation on what you are intuiting.

- 3. ACCOUNTING FOR ONE’S FEELINGS, THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIORS:** Accounting simply means sharing with other people what you are experiencing when it might have an effect on how you are relating to them. Accounting gives them the information so they are less likely to react to your behavior with resentments or fantasies. For example, “*I want you to know that I am very tired tonight and if you see me yawn it does not have to do with how I feel about you.*”
- 4. STROKING SELF AND OTHERS POSITIVELY, I.E. ASKING FOR, RECEIVING, AND GIVING STROKES.** A stroke is any act of recognition or attention. All of us need positive strokes for *being* and for *doing* and a few negative strokes for doing to let us know when we get out of line. To the extent that we do not freely exchange strokes, we will be tempted to use power-plays and are likely to end up feeling badly about others and ourselves.
- 5. SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH OTHERS, AND REFUSING NEGATIVE STROKES WE DO NOT WANT.** It is important to set limits with others and not allow them to do or say things that we do not want in order to take care of ourselves. Saying “No” or “*It is not okay for you to do that*” or “*I won’t allow you to talk to me that way*” or simply not take in negative things people say to you that are “off base” are important ways of protecting yourself and keeping yourself healthy.

**6. APOLOGIZING AND FORGIVING.** Apologizing entails checking-in internally with our feelings and “being aware of the discomfort or pain that had been caused to another person”, and requires a “heartfelt, empathic, emotional response to the harm or pain that one’s behavior has caused” (C. Steiner).

PROCEDURE: The procedure is to ask the other person whether you can express your feelings with them. If they say “yes”, then you share your apology. Apologies involve 6 steps:

- 1) Apologize by saying “*I’m sorry*” or “*I apologize*”.
- 2) Taking responsibility and naming the fact, “*I apologize for calling you names*”.
- 3) Acknowledge the impact of your actions on the other person, “*When I did that, I saw you feeling hurt*”.
- 4) Commit to change, “*I will do my best not to do it again*”.
- 5) Ask for forgiveness, “*What can I do to make it right? Will you forgive me?*”
- 6) Keep your word.

Finally, the cooperative contract is not a “perfect” system and can be abused if people try to use it as a power play. It should be used in the spirit in which it was designed: as a tool to promote cooperation and caring among people in getting their needs met and to keep their process clear.