

FIVE TRUST CONTRACTS FOR COUPLES

by Stephen B. Karpman, M.D.

Couples can deepen their relationships by making trust contracts. There are five trust contracts, one for each ego state shared by each other.

1. **Controlling Parent: The No-Collapse Contract.** The couple agrees to maintain structure and personal standards without collapses such as quitting a job and leaning on the other, numerous threats to walk out, breaking contracts, or sudden switch-offs of integrity, discipline, or hygiene. When there is no contract, a person says, "I'm free to make whatever decisions I want."

2. **Nurturing Parent: The Protection Contract.** The couple agrees to spare the other person needless anxiety and pain, often by anticipating stress situations and giving preventative support and information. The partner saves the other the pain of jealousy, embarrassing exposure, needless anger, careless hurts, and uncertainty, by being considerate or knowing the other's weak points and using restraint. When there is no contract, a person says, "You'll have to take care of your own feelings."

3. **Adult: The Openness Contract.** The couple agrees to talk through issues between them, preferably on the same day. The talk will be free of Condescending, Abrupt, Secretive, and Evasive intimacy blocks, and follow the three rules of openness: 1) Bring it up; 2) Talk it up; 3) Wrap it up. When there is no contract a person says, "I don't have to tell you anything."

4. **Free Child: The Pleasuring Contract.** The couple agrees to pleasure each other: 1) In sex, by asking for and doing what the other likes, without playing the game of "Don't push me, I'm getting to it." 2) In events, by going to new places on the whim of the other. 3) In personality, by bringing up refreshing surprise sides of your personality that challenge the routine predictability of the relationship. When there is no contract, a person says, "We can both have fun in our own way."

5. **Adapted Child: The Flexibility Contract.** The couple agrees to a spontaneous giving-in in an argument, "even when you know you're right," or going along with the other one just to save the peace. The opposite of flexibility is the rigid position, "I will not change my whole way of life for anyone." When there is no contract a person says, "It looks like we see things differently."

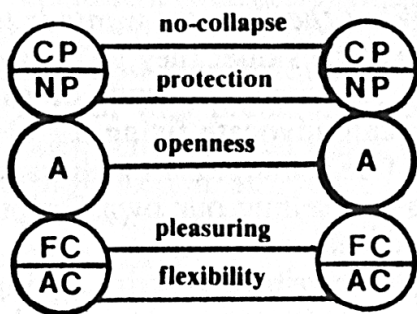


Figure 1—The Five Trust Contracts

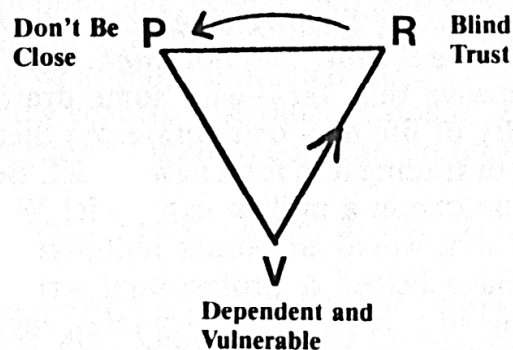


Figure 2—“Blind Trust” Switch

Trust should be distinguished from "blind trust" which occurs when: 1) a contract is made in the absence of trust; 2) a contract is assumed without the expectations being stated; 3) a contract is assumed to be still valid after a breakup has begun; 4) a contract is assumed to be perfect without slip-ups. Victims will prove a "Don't Be Close" injunction by assuming blind trust from a Rescuer who will then hurt and disappoint them as a Persecutor (Figure 2).

Karpman, S. (1979). Five trust contracts for couples. Bulletin of the Eric Berne Seminar. 1(3), 26-27.

(Reformatted). Copyright © 1979 by Stephen B. Karpman, M.D. All rights reserved. Downloads free.