



The In-Practice Tip Sheets are resources for juvenile drug court teams and are meant to provide operational steps to implementing the *16 Strategies in Practice*. This is not an exhaustive list of practice tips. Juvenile drug court teams are encouraged to use these Tip Sheets as a starting point as they strive to make program enhancements or operationalize the *16 Strategies*.

## Cultural Competence

**CASE STUDY:** Jorge Rodríguez is a 15-year-old male of Mexican descent. His family has been in America for three generations, and Jorge does not speak or read Spanish. Jorge has been a participant in the juvenile drug court for three months; however engagement strategies have not worked so far. Indeed, when Jorge began the assessment and treatment process, the receptionist at the treatment center was busy, saw that he had a Hispanic surname and a brown complexion, and she immediately gave him material to read in Spanish. Understandably, Jorge felt stereotyped, misunderstood, and offended from the very beginning of the treatment process. Jorge has not engaged in the treatment process and has focused on the fact that other JDC participants, JDC team members, and treatment providers do not look like him – that they are all white or Caucasian.

### Solution-focused Tips to cultural competence:

**1 Tip No. 1:** The JDC team should work with juvenile justice staff, treatment providers, support staff to increase cultural awareness, with the first step being not to make assumptions regarding race.

- Allow participants to self-identify their ethnicity. If assumptions are made, and offense is taken, the engagement process may be slowed or never begin.
- Consider having youth and family complete self-administered forms to garner information on ethnicity and other personal information before dispersing any program-related material.
- Work with an expert trainer to increase cultural competency; this should be a system-wide effort and include support staff, as many youth are in contact with line staff first and often.

**2 Tip No. 2:** The JDC team should use culturally relevant treatment interventions to engage youth of color effectively.

- Consider the appropriateness of specific therapeutic models or interventions for youth of color. Treatment interventions and case plans should be individualized, which would include taking into consideration a youth's ethnicity.
- Consider the differences in values and culture among ethnic groups and how *your own* personal values influence interaction with the client, as well as the way

challenges and goals for treatment are viewed.

- Ask – what is the value-system for this particular client/family? The team should be sensitive to:

- spiritual values
- community values
- extended family values

**3 Tip No. 3:** The JDC team should strive to be reflective of the population they serve.

- Ideally the drug court team and treatment staff's race and ethnicity should be reflective of the population they serve.
- Consider reaching out to the community to engage volunteers (who reflect the population the court is serving) to help with JDC pro-social activities, family nights, or support groups.
- Consider incorporating a mentoring component with a focus on engaging a reflective mix of the population the court is serving.
- The court can work with already established mentoring groups (Big Brothers Big Sisters) or develop and recruit, using community engagement strategies.

**4 Tip No. 4:** The JDC team should strive to achieve equitable access – do the research, if disparities exist fix it!

- Juvenile drug courts have an affirmative legal and ethical obligation to provide equal access to their services and equivalent treatment to all citizens (Marlowe, 2013).



- Take the time to review the program structure (i.e., phases, length of program, carrots used) and determine if the program is attractive to youth and families of color.
- Keep in mind that your target population might become so narrow that it is exclusive rather than inclusive.
- The court is encouraged to review its data on youth and family demographics and make necessary adjustments to eligibility criteria, if needed.
  - If disparities are discovered, develop a plan and (if needed) new service delivery approaches based on the cultural needs of the youth in your jurisdiction.

**CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:** *What should the JDC team do to engage Jorge Rodríguez and his family, and ultimately, help Jorge succeed in juvenile drug court?*

**ANSWER:** The JDC team should work with the juvenile justice system in the jurisdiction, as a whole and not just the JDC team, but receptionists, court clerks, and volunteers to provide educational opportunities to address cultural competency. The team should incorporate ways to allow the youth and family to self-identify before making snap judgments regarding race or ethnicity. Allowing the family and youth to self-identify will assist the team in finding culturally appropriate treatment interventions, which include individualized treatment case planning. Team members should address and consider if they look like the population they are serving and seek to build a team through staff, mentors, or volunteers which is more reflective and diverse – look for disparities in the program:

- Are youth of color opting not to participate in the JDC?
- Do youth of color terminate out of the program more than other youth?
- Is the treatment intervention engaging youth of color?

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCE(S):**

- NCJFCJ’s Juvenile Drug Court Information Center - <http://www.ncjfcj.org/cultural-competence>
- *Juvenile Drug Courts: Strategies in Practice* – Page 37
- The Center for Organizational Cultural Competence - <http://www.culturalcompetence.ca/>
- National Center for Cultural Competence - <http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/>

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