



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*.

Goal-Oriented Incentives and Sanctions

CASE STUDY: The Evergreen County Juvenile Drug Court (JDC) launched in 1996 and proudly operates as one of the longest running juvenile drug courts in the country. The team has seven core members who have worked together for five years. All team members have received local, state and national training on the model, as well as topic-specific trainings. The program is built to serve 25 youth at any time, and the team has two active treatment providers who are both able to offer an array of evidence-based treatment modalities. The team, however, is increasingly frustrated with low graduation rates, high termination rates, and an inability to fill the program.

Two years ago, team members began conducting exit interviews with youth and families so that they could collect information on what worked and what was not helpful to the JDC client. The team quickly noticed a trend in responses from former clients regarding the use of incentives and sanctions. Youth and families repeatedly reported that they did not understand the purpose or use of incentives. Youth reported that they were generally uninterested in the gifts or incentives that they received, or didn't understand why they received a certain type of incentive. As one youth stated: "I think they just felt bad because they hadn't given me anything in a long time." In terms of sanctions, youth believed that the court was overly harsh and too quick to punish. One youth reported that that after his first dirty UA he was placed into detention for seven days, and by his third dirty UA he served 21 days. Youth and parents also reported that no one bothered to ask them what sort of incentives were important to them, or what they considered to be an effective consequence.

Solution-focused Tips to create an effective incentives and sanctions process:

1 Tip No. 1: Team members need to embrace the philosophy that the use of incentives and sanctions is to *motivate for behavior change*.

- Read and understand the *Juvenile Drug Courts: Strategies in Practice* and how incentives and sanctions fit within the larger model and intended outcomes.
- Read and have focused discussion of the "Making Sense of Incentives and Sanctions in Working with the Substance Abusing Offender" written by Yeres, Gurnell and Holmberg. This resource will help team members shift from rewarding and punishing to engaging youth through calculated and thoughtful steps to move youth toward behavior change.
- Utilize on-line training opportunities available through the NCJFCJ, Center for Court Innovation, and the National Drug Court Institute to continually stay abreast of the latest research findings on incentives and sanctions.

2 Tip No. 2: The JDC team should develop written incentive and sanction procedures based on the concepts of proximal and distal goals.

- Research has shown that courts that have written guidelines for incentives and sanctions procedures experience stronger outcomes (NPC Research, 2013).
- Distinguish between proximal and distal goals when addressing behaviors.
 - Proximal goals are immediate. They are goals or directives that the youth can regularly address (e.g., school or counseling attendance) and should be rewarded immediately.
 - Distal goals are much more difficult for youth to address. These goals (e.g., obtain GED) take greater time to address and accomplish, given that youth are limited in their ability to see long-term solutions. Teams should carefully craft responses to distal goals that are tied to the behavior (or program condition) that they are trying to address.



3 Tip No. 3: After a period of sobriety and stability, the JDC team (case manager, treatment provider, and coordinator) should sit down with the youth and family representative and generate a list of rewards and consequences.

- What is rewarding and/or consequential to one youth is not necessarily so for another youth in your program. Creating a level of individualization, while also building family-based incentives leads, to greater motivation for change.
- Teams can still utilize grid systems, but ensure enough flexibility in each section to meet the varied needs and interests of program youth.
- This list of incentives and sanctions should be updated every 60-90 days.

4 Tip No. 4: The JDC team should match the use of incentives and sanctions to the current phase.

- Goals vary according to phase, and therefore so should incentives and sanctions. Phase one should be considered a brief, orientation phase with minimal requirements. This will allow for a period of stability and exposure to new structure and treatment. JDC operations that focus on a long, requirement-heavy phase one often lead to excessive punishment based on too many stringent requirements.
- JDC teams should expect more from youth as they move through phases.
 - Phase one is considered a period of stabilization, and youth should have minimal expectations and be rewarded for simple steps (e.g., showing up for treatment).
 - Phase two and three are focused on program engagement and completion, and team members should expect stronger behaviors; therefore, rewards and sanctions should match to greater expectations.

- Phase four is a step down phase, and teams are cautioned to carefully address sanctions in this phase, as over-punitive responses (e.g., “They should have known better” and “we left off at seven days detention”) can cause greater setbacks.

- JDC teams should monitor their data on a continual basis to ensure that treatment-related behaviors are being addressed through a therapeutic process. In addition, teams can ensure that a wide range of incentives and sanctions is used, that the incentives and sanctions are directly tied to the underlying behavior, and the incentives and sanctions are meaningful to the individual youth to whom they are applied.
- Extensive research shows that the least effective way in which to bring about behavior change is through the use of detention. It is also the most costly. Teams are encouraged to use detention sparingly.

5 Tip No. 5: Teams should employ a variety of methods in both treatment and in the court room to visualize the incentives and sanctions process, which allows for greater engagement and understanding of the process.

- Youth learn through various mediums, and are often visual and tactical learners.
- Teams are encouraged to use white boards, “checking accounts” and other methods to track weekly progress. With the white board approach, youth step up to the board to check off or place stickers on the program goals that they have achieved for the week. For the checking account, youth are awarded points for positive behaviors and goal attainment each week and can “cash a check” for relevant incentive items when they so desire.
- JDC teams are encouraged, if possible, to incentivize parents or caretakers as well, and to make them an active participant in the incentive/sanction process in the front of the courtroom.
- Team members are encouraged to read *Contingency Management for Adolescent*



Substance Abuse: A Practitioners Guide (2012) by Henggeler, Cunningham, Rowland & Schoenwald for further practical tips and ideas on how to integrate contracts and point-reward systems into their drug court program.

6 Tip No. 6: Team members should use their data to review the effectiveness of the incentives and sanctions, and engage in open communication (among the team, youth and family) about the changes in incentives and sanctions.

- Courts that use their data in an ongoing manner to monitor for effectiveness and make necessary adjustments have stronger program outcomes and greater cost savings (NPC Research, 2013).
- Teams should survey and/or interview youth and family upon program completion to collect detailed information about the appropriateness and effectiveness of their current incentives and sanction procedures.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING: *How would you ensure that the Evergreen County JDC utilizes proper methods and techniques to motivate youth for behavior change?*

ANSWER: The Evergreen County JDC team should be encouraged to capitalize on all training opportunities, as well as assign several team members to carefully reviewing the literature sources outlined in this tip sheet. This information should then be presented at a policy meeting to discuss the array of information and to develop the new procedures. Once the method of engagement (e.g., point system, white board, etc.) is selected, then all necessary forms should be developed. The team should allow sufficient time for these changes to take place within the courtroom and at the treatment provider. Teams also need to develop the forms necessary to collect information from youth and families about what they perceive to be meaningful rewards and consequences. The judge should engage the youth and family member each court session via an integrated process of review (e.g., “Tell

me what goals you have met for the week?” and “So, Mom, tell me what you both worked on this week and how it went.” “How many points did you earn this week and why?”), while ensuring that the time spent talking with the youth is short and targeted. Gone are the days of ordering a youth to complete community service work due to missing school. Instead, the team is focused on addressing the school truancy through school-based interventions such as a teacher signing an attendance card, tutoring and/or after school sessions with teachers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE(S):

- NCJFCJ’s Juvenile Drug Court Information Center - <http://www.ncjfcj.org/collaborative-planning>
- *Juvenile Drug Courts: Strategies in Practice* – Page 53
- NPC Research - http://www.npcresearch.com/publications_drug_treatment_courts.php
- Henggeler, S. W., Cunningham, P. B., Rowland, M. D., & Schoenwald, S. K. (2012). *Contingency management for adolescent substance abuse: A practitioner’s guide*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

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