



4 Addressing the Needs of Youth with Comprehensive Case Planning

Wendy Schiller, Site Manager, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

OBJECTIVE 4: Conduct comprehensive needs assessments that inform individualized case management.

First, this isn't new! For more than a decade, the juvenile justice system as a whole has been moving towards addressing a youth's specific needs, derived from validated assessments (risk/need and/or substance abuse), through comprehensive case planning. Juvenile drug treatment courts (JDTCs) should be especially adept at this, but as it turns out, JDTCs often fall back on pre-determined requirements (e.g., phase structures), rather than goal attainment and achievement. There are several things a JDTC can do to align itself with Objective Four under the *Juvenile Drug Treatment Court Guidelines (Guidelines)* (<https://www.ojdp.gov/pubs/250368.pdf>), but more importantly, to develop effective individualized case plans for the youth.

SHORT-TERM ACTION

As a team, meet with the department of justice supervisors or with other probation/case manager supervisors in your jurisdiction and find out what risk/need instruments are currently used in your jurisdiction. It is important for everyone on the team to participate in this conversation because the information in the risk/need instrument will drive the case plan. In fact, many of the validated instruments available on the market have case planning capabilities. If yours does, you should take advantage of them. Then, the team should begin implementing case planning strategies within the JDTCs. This may mean that case managers or probation officers will need additional training and technical assistance to incorporate case planning concepts fully. Of course, the case managers and probation officers will likely need to train the JDTC team fully on these concepts as well.

JDTC teams need to connect case planning strategies to their current (or enhanced) phase structures to fully implement comprehensive case planning strategies. For example, JDTC teams incorporate these concepts

by changing phase level requirements to be focused on case planning goals – i.e., adding case plan development to phase checklists and case plan assessments to phase advancement, rather than focusing on compliance issues which can be dealt with in other ways (e.g., school, treatment, court attendance, and drug testing).

LONG-TERM ACTION

If JDTC teams find themselves in an environment that does not support comprehensive case planning, the team will need to add this function on their own. Which can be done! Simply identify the need and then add comprehensive case planning by:

- Focusing on priorities identified in the youth's assessment;
- Drafting SMART goals (<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm>) and clear objective statements to address specific needs, with actual interventions;
- Defining levels of progress (e.g., Likert scales or a grading scale) to ascertain progress on specific goals; and
- Setting informal reassessment dates to review progress on goals, objectives, and activities.

The main recommendation for JDTC teams is to move away from focusing too heavily on compliance (i.e., school, treatment, and court attendance, or not violating court orders) and being proactive in assisting youth in achieving attainable goals. This means that SMART goals should not revolve around compliance issues, rather, goals should be specific (an actual intervention that aligns with the goal developed), measurable (can the team determine objective progress?), attainable (are the youth and family able to affect this goal?), relevant (connect with a value or priority that the youth has), and time bound (is there a reasonable and proximal end date for the goal?).