



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*.

Family Engagement

CASE STUDY: Ms. Thomas has four children one of whom has been in and out of the juvenile justice system for shoplifting, possession of alcohol and marijuana (he has a daily smoking habit), fighting, and gang activity (not substantiated). Victor is well known within treatment and juvenile justice circles, and according to his records remains non-compliant. Victor is very close to his grandmother, Nona, who is 65 and lives with the family. At age 16, Victor has been accepted into the juvenile drug court program, which is seen as a last ditch effort to get him through the juvenile justice system before he is sent to an out-of-home placement. Ms. Thomas recently received a letter to meet with the drug court team coordinator. But, Ms. Thomas is resistant and informs the JDC coordinator, “I’m not wasting my time coming to meet with the court; I’m tired of Victor’s behavior, at this point, I don’t care what happens to my son!” You know that successfully engaging Ms. Thomas or another family member in the JDC process will likely lead to a more positive outcome for Victor.

Solution-focused Tips to engage families:

- 1 Tip No. 1:** The JDC team should demonstrate respectful behavior to the family, even if the family members behave badly and/or are resistant to the process.
 - Family members may appear to be resistant because of prior negative experiences with the court system - take the time to identify what those experiences have been, which may help to open the door to improved communication.
 - Utilize active-listening skills and provide family members an opportunity to express concerns.
 - Ask open-ended questions to seek clarification and to increase knowledge about the youth and family.
 - Remember that family members took time out of their very, very busy day to meet with the team, to come to court, to come to treatment. Take the time to recognize this effort.
 - Always thank family members for their time and cooperation!
- 2 Tip No. 2:** The JDC team should develop a professional relationship built upon honesty and trust.
 - Build rapport by doing what you say you’re going to do (e.g., begin and end court or other appointments on time; their time is just as important as yours).
- 3 Tip No. 3:** The JDC team should determine who the decision-maker is within each family unit.
 - Be honest about what you *can* and *cannot* do (e.g., do not promise to provide transportation when the program doesn’t have adequate funds to support this).
 - If you don’t have an answer to a specific question or concern, indicate that you will get back to them with the answer – the key is to follow-through with a response via phone or email.
 - To alleviate miscommunication, have a parent/responsible adult repeat the instructions you have provided to clarify.
 - Ask family members and/or the youth who the decision-maker is in the family/household (this might not be mom or dad).
 - If the immediate parent is not available, inquire who may be able to serve as an active family participant in the program.
 - Ask about extended non-traditional family members (in some cultures, an individual can be considered family even if there is no blood relation).
 - In some cases, the team will be working with an elderly grandparent/family member.
 - It may be difficult for him/her to interact with younger team members, as there



may be a perception that the younger person will not understand the elder's life experiences strictly because of age. In some cases, the team may want to identify a team member who will be able to relate to an older generation.

- If a youth is a part of a group home or in foster care, connect with a case worker to discuss the value and support a drug court can provide.

4 **Tip No. 4:** The JDC team should define expectations and roles for the team *and* the youth & family.

- Be clear about the JDC's expectations – what is it that you want the youth and family members to do, how often, and at what times?
- Explain the roles of the JDC team members and indicate points of contact for specific questions or concerns.
- Explain what the family member's role is on the team. Help each family member understand that he or she is a JDC team member, too. The court is looking to family members for guidance in the decision-making process.
- Work with the youth and families to identify any potential conflicts (i.e., childcare, work, transportation) and help them find solutions to those barriers.

5 **Tip No. 5:** The JDC should engage family members between court appearances and appointments, by keeping them informed and updated on the youth's progress.

- Share positive and negative feedback on grades, timeliness, and attitude (i.e., Victor was going to be late today, but he called to let me know...I really appreciate that).
- Make contact with the family to ask how things are going at home. Ask what kind of support the JDC can give (i.e., "Victor is having trouble waking up in the morning for school, and he won't listen to me" ...The judge may be able to address this in court;

the family then feels as though the court is backing them).

- Encourage family members to participate in the JDC program by asking for their advice on sanctions or incentives. Keep in mind that these are their children, the court is there to offer guidance and support.
- Consider maintaining a contact/communication log to refer back to.

6 **Tip No. 6:** The JDC team should implement a written guide or JDC binder for youth and families.

- Consider the population the JDC team is serving – does the information need to be provided in another language (e.g., Spanish; Chinese)?
- Keep readability at a fifth grade level, which is the recommended level of understanding for court users.
- Some information to include would be:
 - Expectation/roles of JDC team members and youth/families
 - Detailed schedules for court and treatment
 - Contact information for JDC team members (e.g., calling tree)
 - Maps/addresses for important locations (e.g., drug testing centers)
 - Sections for case plan/goals (e.g., treatment goals, court goals, school goals)
 - Include blank sheets for questions or notes

7 **Tip No. 7:** Most importantly, when working with families, JDC teams should have patience.

- Be prepared for resistance from the youth and families.
- Be prepared for manipulation from the youth and families.
- Always keep in mind that these families and significant others may have several things going on at one time!



- If families and youth are struggling with time management issues, the JDC team should work to remove any barriers (e.g., set up reminder texts, calls, or emails or implement easy-to-read, simplified schedules).

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING: *How would you engage the Thomas family using some of the Tips discussed above?*

ANSWER: Listen respectfully and attentively to Ms. Thomas's concerns and periodically ask if there are any questions. Respond to those concerns which you are able to and seek clarification regarding any issues that are not clear. Ask Ms. Thomas if another family/extended member, such as Nona, who would be available to attend and actively participate with Victor – permit Ms. Thomas to suggest someone else. Determine, if any, additional conflicts to either of them attending. Give the family hope. The drug court team is there to help and support Victor and the Thomas family. Indicate that you will keep her informed regarding Victor's progress and follow through with this promise. Provide her with contact information, where you or another team member can be reached if there are additional questions. Provide the family with a participant guide or JDC binder loaded with all of the information the youth and family need to know. Thank Ms. Thomas for taking the time to meet with you to share her concerns.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE(S):

- NCJFCJ Juvenile Drug Court Information Center <http://www.ncjfcj.org/our-work/family-engagement>
- *Juvenile Drug Courts: Strategies in Practice* – Page 43
- Family Resource, Support, & Education Services - <https://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/services/resource.cfm>
- Engaging Families, Act for Youth Center of Excellence - http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/communities/partners/families.cfm

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