

The Three-Prong Approach: A Practical way to Implement Effective Incentives and Sanctions

Introduction

Juvenile drug court (JDC) teams should work towards building a comprehensive policy that aides in the delivery of incentives and sanctions. This means moving beyond simply using graduated grids to define sanctions (e.g., 1st positive drug test = written essay; 2nd positive drug test = community service; 3rd positive drug test = detention time). This also means moving beyond lists of possible incentives detailed in policy and procedure manuals or simply having stacks of gift cards that are used as those possible incentives.

JDC teams should implement incentives and sanctions that are individualized and adolescent focused, as well as strength-based. Teams should strive to meet a 4-to-1 ratio (4 incentives to every 1 sanction) and these procedures should be consistent, immediate, and fair; this process is steeped in research and is important in achieving behavior change. However, this is easier to say, know, and believe than it is to actually implement.

The Three-Prong Approach allows teams to strategically target specific behaviors, as well as create a strength-based atmosphere that focuses on engagement. In addition, this approach may give teams more power and leverage since a graduated process can be used, for example: if teams use the most punitive response in their “tool box” first, their leverage in using that tool is lost. A graduated response to unwanted behavior shifts the power back to the team. Below is information on each of the three prongs, as well as examples for teams to implement in their own program.

The Three-Prong Approach

1. Using an individualized privilege-reduction to gain compliance over a single behavior, positive drug tests AND individualized incentives for negative drug tests – Every Single Time!
2. Using individualized youth contracts to reward and motivate positive behavior change in other areas (school attendance; family connectedness; community involvement).
3. Using program-wide incentives to motivate families to engage in the program, positive phase movement, and to promote a strength-based atmosphere.

It is highly recommended that the team purchase and use *Contingency Management for Adolescent Substance Abuse: A Practitioner's Guide*.¹ All the prongs focus on using strategies introduced in this guidebook, which are based on contingency management.²

¹ *Contingency Management for Adolescent Substance Abuse: A Practitioner's Guide* by Scott W. Henggeler, Phillippe B. Cunningham, Melisa D. Rowland, Sonja K. Schoenwald, and Associates

² “Contingency management incorporates a relatively comprehensive framework in attenuating the negative effects of substance use risk factors while building protective factors such as social skills, family involvement, and contacts with prosocial peers” (Henggeler et al, p. 3)

The 1st Prong – Implementing the Most Valued Privilege (MVP)

NCJFCJ has observed two ways that JDC teams respond to drug test results:

1. Teams use a very punitive approach by attaching graduated days in detention to positive results; and
2. Teams attach sanctions that have very little impact on the youth and therefore are not likely to change the behavior (e.g., community service, essays).

This Prong focuses on the court's response to positive or negative drug tests. Treatment providers will have a response, as well, but this response allows the team to use a therapeutic framework when responding to drug test results that likely connects with what treatment providers are trying to accomplish in treatment sessions. Teams should use the Guidebook recommended above to help develop and implement this process.

Some specific characteristics include:

- A privilege that the youth values and will work hard to earn
- A privilege that is developed with the youth and family and is preferably a family-based reward (i.e., video games, cell phone use, time w/ friends)
- A privilege that is given or taken away with each positive or negative drug screen³

Why Implement the Most Valued Privilege?

These theories are based on cognitive behavioral therapy, which has been proven to work with adolescents, and is vastly used in outpatient settings. JDC teams can easily adapt this theory by working with youth and families to develop a court response to positive or negative drug tests. Indeed, in their study of six juvenile drug courts, Henggeler et al (2006) found stronger outcomes for those youth who received multi-systemic therapy and contingency management than the standard process

The 2nd Prong – Implementing Youth Contracts - “Rewards for Responsible Behavior in Other Domains”⁴

- Youth contracts help teams:
 - Target specific behaviors (e.g., school attendance)
 - Add a step-by-step process for the youth to follow
 - Get youth working towards “things” they are interested in
 - Engage families/guardians in the process
 - Increase communication between the youth and judge

Youth contracts can be seen as way to set proximal goals that help accomplish distal goals set in case plans. See the example and explanation below:

³ Henggeler et al, p. 107-108

⁴ Henggeler et al, p. 131

| Example of Youth Contract | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| Goal | Objectives/Tasks | Incentives | Non-compliance | Sanction | Support Services |
| Finish three lessons in your English Credit Recovery class before the next court hearing – 1 week to accomplish | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determine how long each lesson takes - Determine how much time will be allotted each day to complete the lessons and set schedule - Complete lessons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Praise - Recognition - Points/tokens (if court uses a reward system) - closer to completing course | Failure to complete three lesson plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to earn tokens or rewards Curfew reduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tutoring assistance Use of computer |
| Youth's Signature of Agreement: | | | | | |
| Caregiver(s) Signature of Agreement: | | | | | |
| Case Manager's Signature of Agreement: | | | | | |

The distal goal here is completion of an online English credit recovery class, which may take a semester to finish. The youth contract may help the youth focus on this goal in smaller bite-size chunks. For example – if it takes three hours to complete each lesson plan, the youth should plan for nine hours this week to accomplish the goal.

The team should discuss a graduated sanction process before implementing behavior contracts and/or the Most Valued Privilege (i.e., how many times will the youth be allowed to not complete the contract before an increased response takes place). However, by implementing the youth contracts, the team will have a measurable framework in place to track the graduated sanction process.

The 3rd Prong – Program-Wide Incentives

The 3rd prong creates a strength-based atmosphere for the youth and families. Program-wide incentives are very broad, for example: token economy, rocket docket, and/or positive peer-to-peer reinforcement. Program-wide incentives are incentives that all youth are eligible for. They are different from Program Activities (trips to baseball games, family game nights, etc.). JDC teams should think of program-wide incentives as a micro-economy by: codifying what certain standard tasks are worth (TX attendance, school attendance), and using it as an incentive to catch the youth and family doing something right. This allows the team to change from a deficit approach to a strength-based approach.

Examples of Program-Wide Incentives

- **Rocket Docket** – Motivate youth and families on a weekly basis with an early out. A rocket docket does a couple of things: it gives an easy incentive to promote good behavior (and have the families back it up) during the interim between court hearings; and it adds a visual component for the other youth/families to see (if I do well, I can get on the rocket docket). See the attached example of a written policy.

- **Ticket/Token Economy or Point-Level Reward system** – This allows the team to create a clear and consistent process for incentivizing youth in several categories: phases advancement, reaching goals set in case plans, treatment attendance, daily contact with case managers, school attendance, pro-social activities, etc. In addition, this allows the team to track measurable progress by the youth. If points are attached to tasks and youth have to earn a certain amount of points to progress, the process becomes very objective. See the attached example of a written policy.
- **Positive Peer-to-Peer Reinforcement** – This incentive creates positive peer pressure and was adapted from the education system. Essentially, a teacher or educator incentivizes youth to turn in their homework every day with the lure of a pizza party by adding a marble to a mason jar every time all of the kids in the class turned in their homework. Once the jar was full, the class would be treated to a pizza party. In the realm of the JDC, teams should use this strategy to engage the youth in providing negative drug tests. Every time all the youth are clean on a set day every week (within a randomized drug testing schedule) a marble is added to the jar, once the jar is full the team gives the youth a pizza party.

Connecting the Dots

Find ways to connect each component under an overarching incentive policy (i.e., how youth earn rewards, points, tokens, or cards):

- Can the team attach points or tokens to the phase process?
- Can clean UA's be attached to an MVP and an extra card / points / tokens?
- How many points can be attached to completed youth contracts?
- Who on the team can hand out cards / points / tokens? Can the family?
- Can points be taken away as a form of a sanction (e.g., if the youth misses an appointment, will he/she have to pay in points or tokens)?

Rocket Docket⁵

- 1- A total of 4 people max may be on the docket to keep it as an incentive, the 4 most engaged participants will be placed on the Rocket Docket as agreed upon by the drug court team.
 - a. Person may not be on the docket if they have missed appointment, positive UA, probation Violation, new law violation, or are not engaged in treatment.
- 2- Rocket Docket names will be listed on the monitor in the court room prior to start of Drug Court
 - a. Jason will create a graphic with the list of names that can be edited each week.
- 3- Rocket Docket participants will have reserved seating and will be seen by the judge first.
 - a. Judge will read names they will come forward, and the audience will applause.
 - b. Docket may leave early once they have met with the judge. Judge will fully engage the rocket docket.
- 4- The Rocket Docket will receive additional incentives
 - a. Recognition from the judge.
 - b. Applause from team, and participates.
 - c. RD fishbowl, wheel spin, or choice from large rewards? (to be determined)
 - d. Leave early.

Sample Rocket Docket



ROCKET DOCKET

Name 1

Name 2

Name 3

Name 4

⁵ Special thanks to the Bannock County, Idaho JDC team for the development of the Rocket Docket Policy, as well as for allowing NCJFCJ to share with other JDC teams.

Point Reward System⁶

REWARD PROGRAM RULES

- When a participant is doing well in the JDC program and following the rules they are able to earn rewards.
- Each week a participant does not use drugs or alcohol he/she is eligible to earn points.
- These points can be traded for rewards.
- Each participant must keep track of his/her points with reward checks and a balance sheet.
- If a participant is clean and provides negative drug tests for the week he/she will automatically earn 3 points.
- If a participant has a positive drug test he/she is not allowed to earn or spend any points for the week.
- Other ways to earn points:

| Earning full points | Amount | Earning partial points | Amount | Earning Zero points |
|---|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|---|
| Attend therapy and fully participate or present work. | 2 | Attend scheduled therapy appointment | 1 | Missing an individual or family therapy session |
| Attend MRT group and present work | 2 | Attend MRT group with book | 1 | Missing MRT group |
| Attend school with no absences | 2 | Attend school with only one absence | 1 | Two or more school absences |
| Check in everyday | 2 | Check in 6 days | 1 | Fail to check in two or more days |

BONUS POINTS

- There are several ways participants are able to earn bonus reward points.
- Participants can earn 1 bonus point for meeting all treatment requirements or for attending the Relapse Prevention Group.
- If a participant does well at the Santa Fe Mountain Center or another JDC activity they can earn up to 3 bonus points.
- Participants can complete extra life skill assignments to earn between 2-12 bonus points per activity.
- Participants can also earn extra points by accomplishing clean day goals

30 days- 5 points

60 days- 10 points

90 days- 15 points

120 days- 15 points

150 days- 15 points

200 days- 15 points

250 days- 15 points

300 days- 15 points

350 days- 15 points

⁶ Special thanks to the Bernalillo County, New Mexico JDC team for the development of the Point Reward System, as well as for allowing NCJFCJ to share with other JDC teams.

POINTS NEEDED TO PHASE

- The JDC program has four different phases. In order to move through the phases participants must complete all the phase requirements and have enough points to move to the next phase. If participants are not doing their phase work and they are in the phase too long they could be required to buy more time in the phase.

| Phase | Cost |
|---------------------|------------|
| Move to Phase Two | 100 points |
| Move to Phase Three | 70 points |

| Phase | Cost |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Move to Aftercare | 70 points |
| Graduate from program | 40 points |

PHASE RENT

- If participants are in the phase too long because they are not doing their phase work they could be required to buy more time in the phase. Phase rent can cost 5-10 points per week depending on what phase they are in and how far behind they are. Phase rent is determined by a individualized behavior contract.

BONUS POINTS

| Action | Points |
|--|--------|
| Meeting all treatment requirements for the week | 1 |
| Attend the relapse prevention group | 1 |
| Doing well at the Santa Fe Mountain Center or other JDC activity | 1-3 |
| Achieving 30 clean days | 5 |
| Reaching 60 clean days | 10 |
| 90, 120, 150, 200, 250, 300 or 350 clean days | 15 |
| Completing extra life skill assignments | 2-12 |

REWARDS YOU CAN BUY WITH YOUR POINTS

| Reward | Cost | Purchasing Guidelines |
|---|-----------|---|
| Credit for 1 hour of community service | 4 points | No community service assigned with in the past week |
| Leave court early | 5 points | Must be attending therapy |
| \$5 gift card | 10 points | Must be attending therapy |
| Extend curfew on 1 day for 1 hour | 10 points | Must be checking in, cannot be on house arrest or have a curfew violation in past 2 weeks |
| Credit for 3 hours of community service | 12 points | No community service assigned in the past week |
| \$10 gift card | 20 points | Must be attending therapy |
| Extend curfew on 1 day for 2 hours | 20 points | Must be checking in, cannot be on house arrest or have a curfew violation in past 2 weeks |
| Credit for 5 hours of community service | 20 points | No community service assigned in the past week |
| \$15 gift card | 30 points | Must be attending therapy |
| Extend curfew on 1 day for 3 hours | 30 points | Must be checking in, cannot be on house arrest or have a curfew violation in past 3 weeks |

Sample Checks and Checkbook to track points and purchase rewards

| | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Denied Date: _____ Staff: _____ | <i>Participant's Name</i> _____ | | DATE: _____ |
| | PAY TO THE ORDER OF: _____ | | |
| | _____ | | POINTS <input type="text"/> |
| | FOR _____ | | |

POINTS BALANCE SHEET

| DATE | DESCRIPTION OF TRANSACTION | DEPOSIT/ CREDIT | PAYMENT/ DEBIT | NEW BALANCE |
|------|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| | | | | |
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