



TIPS FOR DIRECT SERVICE PRACTITIONERS

Practice Principles That Build Partnerships for Juvenile Court Work

1. Respect offenders as people worth doing business with.

Maintaining the position that the youth and family are capable of change can create a sense of hope and possibility. Be as open-minded toward your probationer and their family members as possible, approaching them as potential partners in building solutions. Some staff who see their probationers as "damaged goods" simply can not build the type of relationship that is the most productive for solution-building.

2. Cooperate with the person, not the drug abuse or the delinquency.

Probation staff can begin to build helping relationships with the youth and family members without condoning the troublesome behavior(s) in any way. Listen and respond to the youth's story—because accepting an offenders story is not the same as agreeing or acquiescing. Give the youth & family choices and opportunities to give you input. Learn what they want. The worker must be up front and honest, particularly in the investigation. Treat offenders as individuals.

3. Recognize that cooperation is possible even where coercion is required.

Workers will almost always have to use some amount of coercion and often have to exercise statutory power to prevent situations of continuing delinquency or danger, but this should not prevent them from aspiring to build a cooperative partnership with youth and their parents. Recognize that coercion and cooperation can exist simultaneously, and utilize skills that foster this.

4. Recognize that all families have signs of sobriety and/or prosocial behaviors.

We must avoid the unbalanced focus that notices and reports only the failure and flaws. Strength-based practice is concerned with adopting a balanced view. All families have competencies and strengths. They behave appropriately, at least some, and usually most, of the time. Ensure that careful attention and balanced reporting is given to these signs of positive behavior or conduct.

5. Learn what the youth and family wants.

Acknowledge the offender and family's concerns and desires. Use the family's goals in creating a plan for

action and motivating the youth and family members to change. Whenever compatible, bring the offenders goals together with agency goals.

6. Always search for detail.

Avoid generalizations. Detailed information—the "who, what, where, and when" of both negative and positive family functioning provides for realistic assessments and case plans. Always elicit specific, detailed information, whether exploring negative or positive aspects of the situation. Solutions arise out of details, not generalizations.

7. Don't confuse case details with judgments.

Reserve judgement until as much information as possible has been gathered. Time pressures, high caseloads, and poor client/staff relationships can lead to overly harsh judgments that may not fit the information and events. Try to separate "events and information" and "meaning and judgments." Don't confuse these conclusions with the details of the case. Remember that others, particularly the family, will judge the details differently.

8. Focus on creating small change.

Big goals, set way into the future, can frustrate. Try to focus on specific and small "first steps." If we make any mistake in this field, we try and do too much! We take on large behavior problems that have been in existence for months (maybe years). We set large goals that can only be reached far away into the future. We begin our work only to find it "all falls apart." Although visioning and large (macro) goals that detail how one can reach dismissal from probation will always have their place, *we must scale back to be successful in our daily work.*

Think about, discuss, and work toward small changes. Don't become frustrated when big goals are not immediately achieved. Focus on small, attainable goals and acknowledge when they have been achieved. Offer choices.

9. Offer choices...avoid unnecessary coercion.

Avoid alienating youth and their families with unnecessary coercion. Instead, offer choices about as many aspects of the casework and probation plan as possible. This involves family members in the process and builds cooperation.

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10. Treat the interview as a forum for change.

View the interview as the intervention, and therefore recognize the interaction between the court staff and the youth/family is the key vehicle for change. Building cooperation and motivation begins during the initial interview. Remember that cooperation is not a characteristic of the offender. It is not found "inside their skin" but rather is developed and enhanced by the interaction that occurs between the court staff and the offender. We have more influence and responsibility to engender cooperation.

Adapted from A. Turnell & S. Edwards (1999)
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