Structuring Supervision to Promote Long-Term Behavior Change
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Traditional probation models focused on surveillance and control have a limited impact on youth recidivism. Instead, programs focused on skill-development and long-term change outperform punitive programs. Client-centered approaches to youth probation, where probation officers and youth form supportive working alliances, have also been associated with improved outcomes.

STRUCTURE MEETINGS TO PROMOTE LONG-TERM CHANGE

WHY: Developmental research indicates that most youth crave independence and respond poorly to authoritarian interventions. Research supports cognitive behavioral approaches that allow youth to self-identify their problems and come up with steps to solve them. Youth benefit from techniques that promote self-efficacy and motivation rather than punitive techniques.

HOW: Help youth identify and achieve attainable goals. Ask youth about their interests, strengths, and goals. Help them identify specific, measurable, and attainable goals. Ask about goals often and provide positive reinforcement.

HOW: Engage in collective problem solving. Support youth in self-identifying problems instead of telling them what they did wrong. Engage youth in problem-solving activities, such as writing down five solutions for a self-identified problem.

HOW: Use empathy and motivational interviewing. Support youth’s efforts to direct their own change. Be nonjudgmental, avoid arguments, promote self-reflection, and reinforce positive behavior often.

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational interviewing is a collaborative method of strengthening youth’s motivation for change. It involves (1) using empathy and making youth feel understood, (2) allowing youth to self-identify how they should change problematic behaviors, (3) respecting and understanding youth’s reluctance to change, and (4) supporting youth’s efforts to change themselves. The method has been proven effective for youth with substance abuse treatment needs and holds promise for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. For more information on how treatment practitioners can adopt motivation interviewing, see "Understanding and Using Brief Interventions in the Juvenile Justice System," published by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, "Motivational Interviewing for Probation Officers: Tipping the Balance Toward Change," and "Motivating Offenders to Change: A Guide for Probation and Parole."
TREAT YOUTH FAIRLY AND CONSISTENTLY

**WHY:** How youth perceive the justice system impacts their likelihood of misbehaving. Youth of color have the lowest perceptions of fairness of the juvenile justice system, perceptions that may be related to their experiences of disparate treatment at multiple points of the justice system, including arrest, detention, referrals to treatment, court processing, adjudication, and waiver to adult court.

**HOW:** Clarify roles. Be transparent about the role of a probation officer, expectations for the relationship, confidentiality, and the nature of authority.

**HOW:** Use accessible language. Avoid using legal jargon to explain probation requirements; use language that youth and caregivers understand. Make sure in-person translation is provided for youth and caregivers who do not speak English.

**HOW:** Address disparities and unconscious bias. Learn about racial disparities within the juvenile justice system and how these disparities impact the development of youth of color. Ensure that the quality of contacts is the same across all youth. Give youth and caregivers the opportunity to talk about race, racism, and discrimination. Consider how unconscious bias (attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect how people view and react to others) may impact interactions with youth and their caregivers/supportive adults.

FOSTER A GENUINE, SUPPORTIVE, PROSOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

**WHY:** Justice-involved youth need positive relationships with supportive adults, especially when they have experienced trauma and/or may not have supportive families at home. A limited research base suggests that a positive relationship with a probation officer is associated with lower likelihood of recidivating.

**HOW:** Model prosocial behavior. Embody the behavior you want youth to adopt (such as being prompt and respectful). Praise prosocial comments and actions. Be respectful, and listen attentively.

**HOW:** Build trust with youth and their caregivers. Meet them in locations where they feel safe. Make time for light conversation and humor. Ask youth about their interests in every meeting. Cultivate relationships with community groups in youths’ neighborhoods.

CASE STUDY: RETHINKING PROBATION USING THE EPICS MODEL

The Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) Model is a training developed and administered by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute that reimagines community supervision to promote positive behavior. It coaches probation officers to develop rapport with youth; use principles of risk, need, and responsivity; and apply a consistent structure to youth interactions. Training on the EPICS has been shown to increase the use of core correctional practices which is associated with reduced recidivism.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ON DEVELOPING ATTAINABLE GOALS: Pennsylvania’s SMART goals training

EXAMPLES OF ACCESSIBLE COURT LANGUAGE: the Washington Judicial Colloquies project

ON ADDRESSING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS: RFK Resource Center’s training for probation officers

FOR CURRICULUM ON BUILDING TRUST WITH YOUTH ON PROBATION: Building Authentic Relationships

This fact sheet summarizes chapter 5 of *Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation: Rethinking Strategies to Promote Long-Term Change*. The full report includes citations for the research summarized here.