


Juvenile Drug Treatment Court
NEWSLETTER

Challenges with Drug Test Observations

Question: Over the last six months, we've had issues with our JDTC youth around observed drug testing. We currently have a transgender youth and a youth who has disclosed a sexual assault. Both have said they are uncomfortable with the observed drug testing. Is there guidance for JDTC teams around observing drug tests with young people who have special circumstances?

Answer: This is the type of question we've heard from many JDTC programs around the country. You are not alone. First, let's acknowledge that observed drug tests remain the gold standard for ensuring that the sample has not been diluted, substituted, or tampered with in some way. But it is important to remember why we are drug testing in a juvenile drug treatment court. Drug tests serve as a therapeutic tool and provide the team and treatment provider with information about how well interventions meet the youth's needs. With that in mind, there are several things:

- Take youth seriously and respect the information they have provided you about their identity and needs. It may be tempting to assume the young person is trying to game the system; however, if we want to truly engage youth in our programs, they must first feel comfortable, respected, and trusted.
- Talk to the individual youth and their trusted adults about what kinds of accommodations might be appropriate. Offer several trauma-responsive alternatives, for example: 1. Asking a trusted adult to be in the room for all observed drug tests; 2. Asking the young person where they would feel most comfortable when taking drug tests, or 3. Trusting parents to administer the drug tests.
- Research alternative drug testing methods to urine tests that don't require direct observation. For example: blood tests, hair tests, oral fluid tests, or sweat tests. Keep in mind that some of these methods can be expensive. However, since the team will likely use these methods with a limited number of young people, the cost may be justifiable.

As a team it is important to discuss drug testing challenges and to develop a plan of action before the challenge arises. The coordinator should schedule a team meeting and ask the treatment provider to provide information on drug testing alternatives and trauma-responsive approaches. In addition, both the defense attorney and prosecutor should provide information around any legal issues that may arise (e.g., fairness or the use of results as evidence). After the team has fully discussed and developed a plan/process for drug testing youth with special circumstances, the coordinator should add the plan to the team's policy and procedure manual.

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News & Highlights

SAMHSA Funding Available to Expand Treatment Capacity in Treatment Courts
Application Deadline: Monday, March 6

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Upcoming Events

Tune-In Tuesdays: How to Start and Sustain a Youth Advisory Board
Tuesday, April 11

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Resources

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QUESTIONS:

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What Drug Tests Can Tell Us

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