Developing and Using SMART Goals

In Nevada, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) is used to gather risk and need information for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. This information is then used to create probation case plans and refer youth to other services.

Case plan goals should target the needs identified by the YLS/CMI and written in a way to maximize both the youth's and the probation agency's success. The SMART model is a widely supported method of developing case plan goals for youth on probation or involved with other service providers.[1]

SMART Goals[2] Are Clear, Well-Defined, and Encourage Success!

Specific Goals should be detailed in order to ensure that the youth understands what the goal is and how to reach it. The goal should clearly define what the youth wants or needs to accomplish and who is involved.

Measurable Goals should include details on how completion is measured so youth know how and when the goal is accomplished. This makes tracking progress possible and can help the youth stay motivated. Measurable goals should address how often the youth will attend (school, treatment, etc) and what score or grade is required to meet the goal.

Attainable Goals should be realistic to make sure it is possible to achieve the goal. The goal should be challenging, but still remain possible and within the youth's control. More importantly, goals should take into account each youth's own abilities and resources.

Relevant Goals should be worthwhile and target the needs addressed by YLS/CMI. They should focus on outcomes (e.g., increase positive peer networks, decrease substance use) to help reduce the risk to re-offend.

Time-bound Goals should include a manageable time-frame for the youth to accomplish the goal which conveys a practical sense of urgency and allows them to prioritize their time. The time-frame should be realistic given the youth's term of probation and other court-ordered obligations.

SMART Goals in Action

Case plan goals should address the dynamic risk factors identified by the YLS/CMI and focus on skill-building and include necessary services3. Let's take a look at a common goal found on probation case plans regarding education and compare it to a similar goal developed using the SMART method.

| Common Goal	SMART Goal
Keep grades up and enjoy the rest of the school year.	Grades in all enrolled classes at least 70% or higher, as measured by school/tutoring attendance and final grades at the end of the semester, by attending school and attending tutoring sessions every Wednesday, between September 1st and December 31st.

This common goal is very vague, lacks a way to measure success, and does not have a deadline. The SMART goal is **specific** because it clearly states that the youth's grades for all classes need to be 70% or higher by attending school and tutoring sessions. The goal is **measurable** because attendance and final grades are numbers that can have a specific value that can be compared to the benchmark set. It's **attainable** because it is very possible for the youth to attend school and tutoring every Wednesday and the youth is in control of their attendance. It is **relevant** because it helps further the goal of improving grades and **time-bound** because dates have been set for this goal.

A simplified formula to help develop SMART goals:
Do (*specific action*) in order to accomplish (*measurable, attainable, and relevant*) results by (*within a specific time frame*).

Monitoring Progress and Encouraging Success

It's important to help youth monitor and evaluate their goals over time and document their progress. Using a progress scale can also help providers evaluate compliance and determine if it is necessary to modify or adjust goals to address unforeseen barriers or challenges.[4]
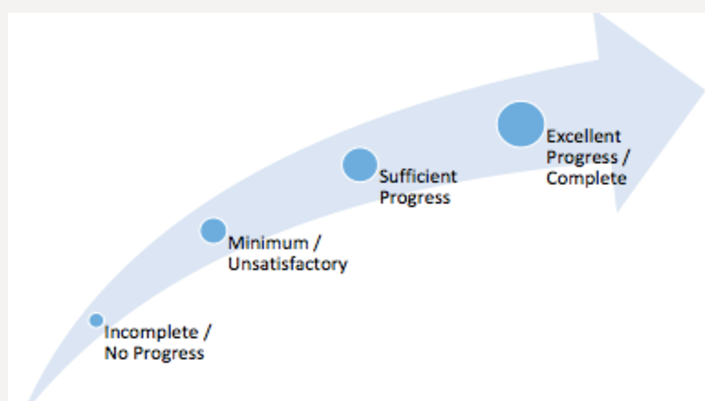
Consider using a graduated response model, with a focus on incentives, in order to encourage youth buy-in and compliance. Research shows that positive behavior change in youth is more influenced by incentives than sanctions.[5] Incentives can include verbal praise and recognition, extended curfew, and early case closure, while sanctions may include verbal reminders/redirection, restricted curfew, or writing an apology letter.[6] Taking the time to develop SMART goals that are supported with structured incentives and sanctions can help and encourage youth to make progress on their case plan and chart a path towards a successful future.

[Visit the Nevada Center for Juvenile Justice Innovation]

References

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