

FIRST DISTRICT MENTAL HEALTH COURT

EXPECTANCY MOTIVATION ASSIGNMENTS

The First District Mental Health Court program incorporates a variety of stage-based models, including the Transtheoretical Model of behavior change, not only as a way to conceptualize progression toward mental health recovery, but also as a practical tool for the resolution of self-defeating attitudes and behaviors that represent barriers to success. Often program participants will reach a plateau, where they begin to stall motivationally and demonstrate a loss of focus and direction as to what they need to change about themselves in order to progress in the program. As a result, the court may grow increasingly frustrated and impatient with the passive participant to the point of considering program termination.

In these instances, it may be helpful for the court to be able to articulate expectations for change and further help the participant identify reasonable goals and objectives that the court could assign the participant to work on in the therapeutic setting. This is an aspect of expectancy motivation, whereby the influence of expectation is used as a persuasive tool under the premise that such is legitimized through a principle referred to as “obligation by agreement.” As each participant enters the program under a mental health court agreement, an obligation is formed and the context of expectation is subsequently created and should be applied as necessary to help stimulate motivation for change.

The court applies the pressure or psychological dynamic of expectation in efforts to assist participants who demonstrate either passive or resistive postures with respect to their program involvement. In part, this approach may help to further structure the fulfillment of program success for those who struggle with issues of ambivalence and/or are developmentally arrested in either the pre-contemplation or contemplation stages of self-change.

A variety of change-oriented expectancy examples include the following and may be introduced through the phrase:

“I specifically want you to meet with your treatment provider within the next two weeks, and work to ...”

- Change your habit of procrastinating completion of assignments until the day you have to appear in court.
- Change your consistent pattern of failing to keep all your scheduled treatment appointments.
- Develop a variety of transportation strategies so you can get to your treatment appointments timely and consistently.
- Improve your income management skills to specifically include developing a workable and written monthly budget.
- Find a way to increase your ability to tolerate frustration and effectively manage your anger.
- Complete an assessment for vocational rehabilitation services.
- Acquire some basic goal setting and goal attainment skills.

- Apply for Medicaid benefits or other entitlements such as Social Security Disability.
- Design and carry out a plan to complete your GED within the next year.
- Enroll in a treatment group that will help you with pre-vocational skills such as job searching, job interviewing, developing a resume, or learning employer-employee relationship skills.
- Organize a monthly calendar to include a daily schedule of appointments, assignments, court appearances, and activities of daily living (e.g., grocery shopping, laundry, housekeeping, etc.).
- Outline the steps of your plan for mental health recovery over the next six months with specifically defined milestones, measurable objectives, and target dates for success.
- Enroll in a parenting class or otherwise work with your therapist in ways that will help you understand childhood behavior and develop more effective parenting skills.

Although not by any means an exhaustive list, the examples above are representative of a variety of possibilities designed to provide a specific direction for productive activity. These or other specified assignments, coupled with the influence of expectation and a requirement that the participant report progress to the court, will help ensure a greater possibility for fulfillment, which over time, may be sustained beyond the duration of the program.