



# TRUANCY ASSESSMENT AND CONTRACT

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A Reference for Juvenile Courts

# Truancy Assessment and Contract: A Reference for Juvenile Courts

## INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to provide a reference for juvenile courts when requesting assessments and recommendations from schools and multidisciplinary teams working to address moderate to chronic truancy, whether truancy is the primary reason a juvenile is before the court or whether truancy is part of a larger cluster of issues. Older students should take part in developing the plan and contract directly; even young students benefit from being engaged as responsible and direct participants in developing the contract.

It is best to direct those writing the assessment report (most often the lead case manager, the multidisciplinary team, a mental health provider or a school social worker) to provide brief and specific recommendations, specifically focused on truancy reduction, at the beginning of the report, followed by concise background information directly related to the recommendations. The assessment report should reflect a plan for action and accountability specifically aiming to get students to school, on time, every day, which is put into action through a student-parent-school contract. Assessment reports totaling no more than 4 to 5 pages are optimal.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING FULL ATTENDANCE

Recommendations outline the key interventions, service components, responsible persons and rewards/consequences required to address needs and build resources directly related to achieving full attendance.

Recommendations are most effective when they include specific responsibilities and accountability for the student, parents/family, school and other involved service providers. This is where consequences for behavior and school attendance are laid out, as well as rewards for meeting goals.

### RECOMMENDATIONS MUST BE S.M.A.R.T.

**SPECIFIC:** Must be written simply and clearly; identify who, what, when, where, how; must address only one expectation at a time

**MEASURABLE:** Must recommend changes, interventions and expected behaviors; must be able to be observed, counted or otherwise quantified

**ACHIEVABLE:** Expectations must take in to account from where the student is starting; high expectations, not perfection, are essential; expectations may be broken down to sub-expectations

**RESULTS-ORIENTED:** Interventions must be clearly aligned with specifically stated expectations

**TIME-BOUND:** Must be clear and reasonable time parameters; must be stated for each expectation

## Components of Recommendations

- Recommendations should identify specific needs that must be met, strengths and resources available and needing to be leveraged or identified, and anticipated challenges to overcoming the reasons for truancy and ensuring school attendance.
- Recommendations should explain how progress will be monitored and what outcomes (e.g., change in behavior, consistency of behavior, etc.) are expected.

**EXAMPLE:** (a) Sally will check in with the attendance (Mr. Smith) office every morning at 8:30am; (b) Mr. Smith will visit Sally's parent (Ms. Green) at home every Friday at 1pm; (c) the truancy team (including Sally, Ms. Green, Mr. Smith, social worker, students' favorite teacher) will meet every two weeks for one hour to review the plan, note progress and stumbling blocks, and adjust the plan as necessary. It is expected that Sally will be on time every morning (and not miss an 8:30am check in with Mr. Smith).

- Each recommendation should include the rewards and the consequences (including further legal consequences) for students and parents/guardians as part of the plan.

**EXAMPLE:** Starting the morning after her court date, Stephanie agrees to get up at 7am to get ready and catch the bus by 7:45am even though her mother leaves for work at 5am. Stephanie's mother will buy a loud alarm clock and she and her mother will ensure that it is set for 6:40am and that the alarm is switched on before going to bed each night. Stephanie is allowed to hit the "snooze" button two times, and will be out of bed at 7am. At this time, she will text her mother's cell phone to let her know that she is up and out of bed. Stephanie will shower and eat the cereal her mother left out for her on the counter, and leave the house at 7:40 to go to the bus stop.

- It will be clear that Stephanie made the bus on time if she arrives on time for homeroom. The homeroom teacher (Ms. Wilson) will report to the Attendance Office each day to let them know if she was on time. When she is not on time, the Attendance Office (Mr. Smith) will text her mother's cell phone at (555-555-5555).
- Every day that Stephanie makes the bus on time she will get to help out in the office instead of going to study hall. Every day that Stephanie does not make the bus on time, she agrees to do the dishes in the evening at home. If she does not make it to the bus on time more than once, she and her mother will meet with her probation officer.

- Overall, each recommendation should include a statement of the problem related to truancy being addressed, the key service or intervention, the ultimate expectation or goal, specific responsibilities for the student, parents/guardians and school personnel, and a plan for monitoring success and accountability (including identifying rewards and consequences and a plan for when/how those will be given out).

## Background Summary

### Academic and School Engagement History

- This section should include a summary of current grades, attendance, learning strengths and challenges, specific disabilities, as well as any pertinent history of previous educational plans and academic assessments/testing and outcomes. The need for any academic testing or other learning needs should be noted, including dates by which this should be completed, and how the report results are expected to affect the plan.
- This section should include key social factors that might either hinder or help success of the plan, including those that might be related to truancy. Relationships with peers, teachers and staff (including where strong, supportive relationships exist, as well as where conflicts and difficulties exist) should be described. Any student concerns regarding safety or social rejection, and how these may be related to poor academic performance and/or truancy, should be noted.
- This section should include the student’s personal academic/career goals including age appropriate vocational goals, as well as the parent/guardians’ goals for the student. The students’ academic and vocational capabilities, motivations, and personal challenges should be noted and linked to the overall plan.
- This section should include specific opportunities for engagement and the students’ school-related interests, such as interest in sports participation, desire to spend more time with a favorite teacher, trouble in tutoring with a specific tutor despite a desire to attend tutoring. *These are often the strongest motivators for getting students to school.*

### Reasons for and History of Truancy and Involvement in Juvenile Justice

- This section includes history of attendance and interventions, including how and why truancy started and was perpetuated from the point-of-view of the student, parents/guardians and school personnel.
- If the student has been involved in the juvenile justice system for any reason, it should be described here.

### Relevant Personal, Family and Social History

- This section should include other personal, family, or social history related to the students’ truancy, including family and student strengths and competencies, as well as trauma, disadvantage, lack of opportunity, mobility/stability, and other difficulties.

### Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Trauma Screenings or Diagnoses

- Results from empirically validated screening instruments should be reported and linked, as is relevant, to the student’s truancy.

- This section can also provide a brief history of prior treatment or other mental health interventions, with focus on how these past experiences relate to current needs and the plan.

## THE CONTRACT

- The contract between the student, parents/guardians and school can serve as the formal plan that includes specific responsibilities and accountability for the student, parents/family, school and other involved service providers. The contract also states how progress will be monitored and what outcomes (e.g., change in behavior, consistency of behavior, etc.) are expected.
- There must be a statement describing the way that rewards and consequences will be delivered, including how and by whom success will be monitored, who will deliver rewards/consequences, and when they will be delivered.
- Rewards and consequences must be delivered in very close proximity in time to having earned them. Regular monitoring and feedback to all involved is important to minimize disconnect between behavior and consequences, reward or consequences.
- It is important that earned rewards not be withheld or removed due to failure to comply with other family, school, or legal concerns; these should be addressed directly but separately. It is not advisable that rewards be taken away as a consequence – rewards and consequences should be separate.
- Students, parents/guardians and relevant school personnel should sign the contract indicating their understanding and agreement with their responsibilities and willingness to comply with the contract. There should be signature lines for all named parties, which may read:
 

**“I agree to the plan as outlined in the contract above. I understand I am expected to meet all the expectations described above. At any time needed, I agree to talk with Mr. Smith [case manager] about any questions or concerns I have with the contract and what I, my parents/guardians or school personnel are expected to do.”**
- Court orders to follow the contract can be important. Setting a review date to monitor progress is also recommended.

**For more information:**

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