

# Opportunity-Based Probation

Pierce County Juvenile Court

**Goal:** To enhance youth well-being through effective and supportive probation supervision practice.

**Objective:** To integrate principles of adolescent development and effective behavior management into probation supervision.

**Outcomes:** Reduce probation violations, increase family involvement in probation, and increase youth involvement in development promoting opportunities in the community.



## Brief Description

Opportunity-based probation (OBP) is based on the science of adolescent brain development. It recognizes that adolescent brains are more responsive to rewards than the threat of punishment. Adolescence is a time of intense identity development and family systems play an important role in shaping and supporting positive behavior.

OBP is based on the understanding that:

- Youth's decision-making and emotional regulation skills are still developing
- Youth are highly influenced by their current environmental context when making decisions

By identifying the characteristics above as strengths rather than barriers, OBP structures probation in a way that guides youth to achieve their goals through positive reinforcement. As youth complete pre-defined objectives in accordance with their case plan, rewards increase. At the end of supervision, youth are

connected to partners in the community through employment and/or internship opportunities.

Positive reinforcement is not a new concept. These practices have been utilized in academic settings, parent practice, sports/coaching, and substance abuse treatment which work to support the development of pro-social behaviors.

## Guiding Principles

The workgroup members identified the following guiding principles for the OBP approach based on prior experience working with youth on probation.

1. Positive recognition and rewards help youth develop an identity tied to achievement and potential.
2. Rewards work best when they are frequent and administered immediately following desired behavior.
3. Rewards work best when they are concrete and meaningful to the youth.
4. Families are a critical part of supporting and sustaining strengths-based behavior management.
5. Accountability is a key piece of behavior management and consequences are most effective when administered immediately after undesired behavior.

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