

Strategies for Addressing Challenges with Parents in Juvenile Cases

*Hon. Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt, Moderator
Judge, 449th District Court*

Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones, Judge, 126th District Court

Hon. Ryan Palmquist, Associate Judge, Williamson County

Hon. Cyndi Porter Gore, Director, Collin County Juvenile Services

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Hypothetical #1 - Eric

- 13-year-old boy
- Lives with 2 parents and 1 sibling
- Apprehended by police for burglary
- Lengthy juvenile history
- Mom tells JPO that neither she nor Dad will come pick Eric up after his arrest
- Mom and Dad say they are exhausted and “done” with Eric
- Neither of Eric’s parents appear at the initial detention hearing

Discussion Questions

- How would you handle this situation?
- What are some suggestions to work with this family?

Hypothetical #2 - Michael

- 15-year-old boy
- Lives with elderly grandparents who adopted him and his siblings
- Michael is struggling in school, using marijuana, exhibiting signs of mental illness, and is a frequent runaway
- Makes posts on social media threatening to commit a school shooting, which results in him being detained for terroristic threat
- Grandma and Grandpa indicate that Michael is out of control, very angry, and self-destructive
- Grandma and Grandpa say they do not know how to handle Michael's behavior but refuse to give up on him

Discussion Questions

- How would you respond to the grandparents' concerns?
- What are some suggestions to work with this family?

Hypothetical #3 - Monica

- 17-year-old girl
- Lives with father?
- Committed 3rd Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle one month before 17th birthday; on probation until her 18th birthday
- Several prior adjudications involving thefts and drugs
- Not reporting to her JPO or complying with terms of probation
- When the JPO made home visit, Dad answered the door and appeared to be on drugs
- Dad said sometimes Monica stays with her boyfriend, who is 23 and on adult probation

Discussion Questions

- If Dad appeared in Court, how would you address his parenting and substance use?
- What are some suggestions to work with this family?

Hypothetical #4 - David

- 16-year-old boy
- Lives with Mom and 2 younger brothers; Dad's whereabouts unknown
- Pled true to Continuous Violence Against the Family
- At the contested disposition hearing, Mom testifies to the following:
 - Several prior, unreported incidents
 - All injuries from assaults were minor
 - David witnessed his father assault her on multiple occasions
 - Mom is afraid and does not want him to return home
 - There are no friends or relatives who can take David in
- No prior adjudications and no other evidence of violent conduct

Discussion Questions

- What are the barriers to rehabilitation for David?
- What services would be helpful for David and his Mom?
- What are some suggestions to work with this family?

Hypothetical #5 - Ana

- 16-year-old girl
- Lives with Dad and 1 sibling; Mom is in prison
- Started a fire in the restroom at school; No injuries but significant property damage
- Ana's 17-year-old sister brings her to Court, father has missed every court setting
- A few months into the case, Dad finally comes to court. He arrives late and is visibly angry. Dad yells in court that he knows from his experience that the system is corrupt, the judge is corrupt, that this is a waste of his time, and he's losing money by being here.

Discussion Questions

- How do you respond to Ana's dad? Can you de-escalate the situation?
- How does Dad's attitude and behavior impact Ana's case?
- What are some suggestions to work with this family?

Hypothetical #6 - John

- 14-year-old boy
- Lives with his mom and 4 younger siblings
- Probation for 18 months - Agg. Assault with a Deadly Weapon case
- Has not met with his JPO or attended any counseling sessions, not attending school
- Mom has a prior finding of RTB for neglectful supervision, but DFPS is not currently involved with the family
- When JPO asked about missed appointments, Mom indicated that she cannot transport John to appointments or take time off work
- After 4 months of noncompliance, the prosecutor files a motion to modify John's probation requests placement outside of the home

Discussion Questions

- What are the barriers to John successfully completing his probation?
- What are the alternatives to placement?
- What are some suggestions to work with this family?

Hypothetical #7 - Kim

- 15-year-old girl
- Parents recently divorced
- No prior juvenile referrals; Found in possession of 1 gram of fentanyl at school
- Mom said the allegations are “impossible” and that she and Kim are “best friends” and do everything together
- Deferred prosecution fails since Kim skips school, misses counseling, and chooses to “hang out” with Mom instead
- At disposition hearing following a jury trial, Mom testified that Kim is not in need of any rehabilitation and made it clear that she disagreed with the jury’s verdict

Discussion Questions

- How does Mom's attitude and behavior impact Kim's case?
- How would you address Mom's feelings about the case?
- What are some suggestions to work with this family?

Additional Resources

- National Resource Center for the Transformation of Youth Justice
<https://nrctyj.org/our-work/dual-status-youth-reform/>
- Georgetown University Center for Youth Justice
<https://cjjr.georgetown.edu/our-work/crossover-youth-practice-model/>
- Texas Child Welfare Bench Book
<https://texaschildrenscommission.gov/for-judges-attorneys/bench-book/>
- Texas Juvenile Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Law Bench Book
<https://www.texasjcmh.gov/publications/bench-books-code-book/>
- Texas Juvenile Law Book
<https://www.tjjd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/texas-juvenile-law-9.pdf>

Questions?

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Thank you!