



Maine Veterans Treatment Court Participant Handbook

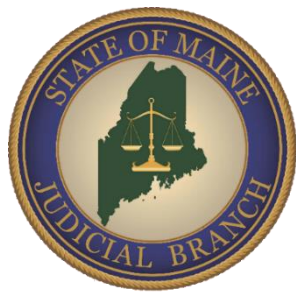


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Maine Veterans Treatment Court Participant Handbook

State of Maine Judicial Branch

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Contents

Welcome	1
Mission.....	2
What to Expect: The Basics	3
Other Expectations	7
Your Rights	8
Bail Contract Conditions	10
The Court Team	13
Moving Through the Program	15
Advancement, Expulsion, and Graduation	21
Incentives, Sanctions, and Treatment Responses	23
Treatment and Recovery	28
Complaints and Grievances	31
Handbook Acknowledgement	32
In Their Own Words	33

Welcome

Welcome to the Maine Veterans Treatment Court (VTC). Congratulations on your choice to participate. **We are glad you are here.**

This handbook describes what is expected of you and will help answer your questions or tell you where to turn for more information. Feel free to share it with your family and friends. If there is anything you do not understand, do not be afraid to ask a treatment court team member.

As a participant you will be expected to follow the instructions provided by the Judge and the VTC Team.

Four simple rules will make you a HERO and ensure your success:

H Honesty

This is often your most difficult task. The Team expects honesty at all times. If you try to lie or cheat your way through the program you will not succeed. This includes attempting to hide your drug/alcohol use, including tampering with or diluting drug tests.

E Effort

You will be examining many choices and patterns in your life and your reasons for pursuing them. The process will be difficult and require much effort.

R Responsibility

When you do something against the rules, own up to it and accept the consequences. This is not an easy program and you may make mistakes. Own your successes, too. If you do something positive such as turning down a drink, getting a job, or simply showing up on time, take pride in your making the choice to succeed.

O On Time

There will be many appointments, including court, treatment, case management, and other services. You are expected to show up and be there on time.

You are worth it!

Mission

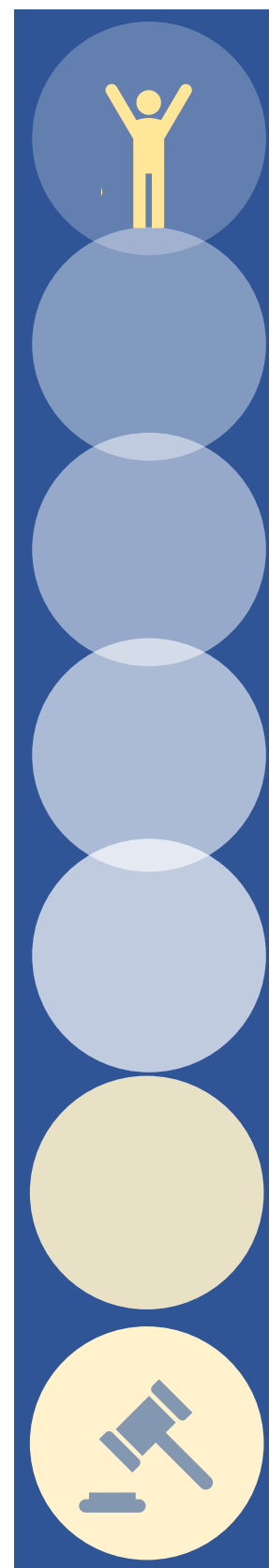
The Maine Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) is designed for people like you who have served their country but have found themselves in trouble with the law. Veterans from any branch of the United States military or National Guard qualify. As a person whose problems stem from alcohol or drug use, mental illness or trauma and the commission of a crime, often serious, this court provides you an opportunity to understand your behavior, engage in treatment, and obtain resources to carry on with your life.

It will introduce you to other veterans who have been through similar things as you and who have made positive changes in their lives. Some of their thoughts appear at the end of this handbook.

This voluntary program consists of enhanced supervision, regular meetings with a judge who will personally track your progress and encourage you along the way, and treatment for your problems (including medications as needed).

In a nutshell, our mission is to help you help yourself. By reaching this goal your life will become healthier, more fulfilling, and the community will benefit as a result.

Our team is here to guide you through your recovery. We believe you have the skills to reach your goal.



What to Expect: The Basics

The VTC is a combined effort of the Judicial Branch, the Office of the Attorney General, the District Attorney's Office, the defense bar, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Department of Corrections, local law enforcement, community treatment providers, the Veteran's Administration, and the recovery community. In addition to treatment, you will be assisted in obtaining health care, educational and job skills assessments, housing and job placement services. The program length, determined by your individual progress, will be at least thirteen months; the average for most people is about eighteen months.

Regular Court Appearances

You are required to appear for status review hearings in court on a regular basis, sometimes as often as weekly but generally every other week. The judge will receive reports on your progress from the VTC team, speak to you directly about your progress and discuss any specific problems you are experiencing. Other VTC participants will be present.

If you are progressing, you will be encouraged to continue with the program and may earn incentives such as applause, recognition, phase advancement, certificates, or gift cards. If you are not progressing, the judge will discuss the reasons with you and the treatment team to determine possible further action.

You are encouraged to ask the Judge any questions and voice any concerns you may have about your program.

You must attend all scheduled court sessions. If you don't show up, a warrant for your arrest could be issued.

If you cannot appear as scheduled, you must notify your case manager and your probation officer (if you have one) as soon as possible to explain why. Claiming illness or transportation problems will not automatically excuse you from a scheduled court date; you must also provide documentation.

Communication and honesty are the keys to your progress. The more informed the treatment team is about your circumstances, the better it can assist you.

Supervision by a Case Manager

The case manager is your "go-to" person. They work with you to develop a healthy living plan addressing housing, relationships, physical needs, and mental health needs. You will meet with your case manager regularly. This is the person you contact when things are going particularly well or if you find yourself in trouble. As

with everyone else, being honest with your case manager will prove very helpful, even if you mess up.

Support from a Veteran Mentor

You will be supported by another veteran who may have experienced what you are going through now. One organization which works with some courts to train and supply such supportive peers is Veteran Mentors of Maine. Your mentor will connect with you one-on-one, will meet with you frequently, and will be available whenever you need some extra help.

Treatment

You must attend all treatment sessions. This includes both individual and group sessions and mental health appointments. If you are unable to attend a scheduled counseling session, you must *contact your treatment provider before the session*.

If you are unable to attend any other scheduled activities such as educational sessions, job placement or training sessions as well as pro-social events, you must *notify your case manager before the scheduled activity*.

Failure to appear at a treatment session or scheduled activity without notice generally may result in a sanction; in addition, you may be required to pay for the cost of the missed session or appointment.

Medication

VTCs are very strict about medications because it is easy to make a mistake and harm a participant's recovery from misusing substances.

Prescribed: You are not allowed to purchase or fill a prescription without first notifying your case manager. If take home narcotic and/or addictive medications are prescribed to help your recovery, their usage will be monitored by the TRC.

Over-the-counter: You are not allowed to use any over-the-counter (OTC) drugs or medicines without first notifying your case manager.

OTC medications can become a serious problem for people recovering from a substance use disorder. Pain relievers that contain acetaminophen and ibuprofen can be toxic if taken too frequently or in larger-than-recommended doses. Improper use can lead to relapse, health problems, and death.

Homeopathic preparations, vitamins, and other supplements can sometimes interfere with drug testing and are prohibited without prior case manager approval.

Seeking medications: If you seek medical attention, you must inform the physician that you are in a court-supervised Veterans Treatment Court program and have them sign a release.

If you are administered medications in an inpatient or supervised setting, you must submit documentation to your case manager within twenty-four hours of release.

Medication-assisted treatment: VTCs support the use of FDA-approved medications for treatment of substance use disorders. These medications will be monitored by the VTC team.

Substances *Not* Allowed

Maintaining an alcohol- and drug-free lifestyle is very important in the recovery process. While in the VTC you are not allowed to possess or use any unapproved alcohol or drugs in any form regardless if they are legal or illegal.

You cannot use any *synthetic* or *designer* drugs/stimulants that can be purchased legally or illegally. Any products sold or marketed with the warning *not for human consumption* are prohibited.

You are allowed to smoke, but not to use any *smoking mixtures* other than products specifically designated to contain only tobacco.

Alcohol and Drug Testing

You will be randomly and frequently tested, at least twice a week, maybe more, for the presence of metabolites of alcohol or other drugs. You will be required to sign the participant testing policy.

Altering or tampering with a test specimen or using someone else's fluids including urine and saliva will be grounds for a sanction. The judge will be made aware of violations.

Testing Policy

1. I am expected to be honest and admit use prior to testing.
2. It is my responsibility to call the testing line daily.
3. Specimen collection will be observed by a collector of my identified gender. If an appropriate collector is not available, I will be subject to a search of my clothes and body prior to testing.
4. A confirmed positive test will result in the loss of my documented negative testing time and dishonesty about use may result in a sanction.
5. A missed test is considered a positive test.
6. A dilute test is considered a positive test.
7. I am responsible for what I eat and drink and I will not attempt to claim, as a reason for a dilute or positive test, inadvertent exposure by consuming certain foods or beverages.
8. At the time of testing I will disclose any prescription medication, over-the-counter medication, or supplements I am taking.
9. The inability to produce a urine specimen may be considered a positive test, may result in the loss of my documented negative testing days, and may result in additional sanctions.
10. If I am unable to provide a sufficient specimen, I will be asked to give another specimen. My inability or unwillingness to provide a sufficient second specimen within one hour of request will be considered a positive test, will result in the loss of my documented negative testing days, and may result in additional sanctions.
11. Urine specimens must be within 90F°–100F° as determined by the temperature strip on the test. If I submit a specimen that does not fall within the proper temperature range, I will be asked to give a second specimen. My inability or unwillingness to provide a second specimen that is within the proper temperature range will be considered a positive test, will result in the loss of my documented negative testing time, and may result in additional sanctions.
12. Altering or tampering with a test specimen will be grounds for sanction which may result in my expulsion from the program.
13. Using someone else's urine will be grounds for sanction which may result in my expulsion from the program.

Other Expectations

Travel

You must remain in your county of residence unless you have permission to travel. You may be given permission for day travel outside of your county by your case manager or probation officer. Overnight travel requires permission from the VTC judge.

People

It will be hard to stop using drugs and alcohol if you hang around with others who do. That is why it is not allowed. Your case manager will help you identify who these people are. You will be given help in knowing what to say if they try to contact you.

Places

You may not work in or visit places where alcohol is the primary item being dispensed, sold, or marketed, including the bar area of a restaurant.

You may not work in or visit places where drugs, legal or illegal, are the primary items being dispensed, sold, or marketed. This includes any medical or recreational marijuana grow locations or dispensaries.

Things

You may not have drug paraphernalia, medications that have *not* been prescribed to you, marijuana or alcohol containers in your possession or in your vehicle.

Dress Code

You must dress appropriately and conservatively for court and court-related activities. Revealing clothing is not permitted. You are expected to wear a collared shirt or blouse, dress pants, dress, or skirt. Shorts, pajama pants, tank-tops, flip-flops, and hats are not permitted for court or court-related activities.

Clothes bearing alcohol- or drug-related themes or promoting/advertising alcohol or drug use are not permitted. Sunglasses are not to be worn at court or court-related activities unless medically approved. Shoes must be worn at all times.

If you need assistance with appropriate clothing, please speak with your case manager or another member of the VTC team.

Behavior

For your benefit, as well as that of others, you are expected to act appropriately at all VTC locations including the courtroom, court hallways and public areas, treatment centers, case managers' offices, and at any court function or event.

- While in court, you are expected to wait quietly for your case to be called and listen to the proceedings. You can learn from others' experiences.
- You cannot disrupt treatment sessions, or case management meetings. If you do, you will be removed and the session will be treated as missed.
- Do not engage in conduct that is sexual in nature (such as unwanted comments, gestures, writing, or physical contact) toward other participants or staff.
- Discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, or gender identity will not be tolerated and will be reported to the court.
- Do not make threats toward other participants or staff or behave in a violent manner. In most cases violence will result in expulsion from the VTC.
- All cell phones or electronic devices must be turned off in the courtroom and at treatment sessions. If found in use, these devices will be removed from your possession.

Restitution and Court Fees

If you owe restitution, child support or fines, a payment plan will be implemented during your participation in the VTC.



Your Rights

Your identity and privacy will be protected consistent with Maine and federal law. Policies and procedures which have been developed to guard your confidentiality. You will be required to sign a release authorizing transfer of information among participating agencies.

Federal statute prohibits the use of your treatment records in criminal, civil, or administrative proceedings, unless authorized by a court order or with your consent.

Although you have waived certain rights upon entry, you retain Constitutional rights such as equal protection and due process, and other basic rights, including without limitation, the following:

- The right to confidentiality under federal and state laws relating to the receiving of services except as waived above.
- The right to be informed of various steps and activities involved in receiving services.
- The right to humane care and protection from harm, abuse, and neglect.
- The right to consult with an attorney.
- The right to make an informed decision as whether to participate in, or to decline entry into, the program.
- In the event of a potential sanction involving incarceration, the right to a hearing and to be represented by counsel at the hearing.

Your identification will be protected in all research and evaluation activities. However, you have a right to elect not to participate.

You are also expected to respect and maintain the confidentiality of other participants. This means you will not reveal any information about them to others.

Bail Contract Conditions

As a VTC participant, you are required to understand and follow the conditions of your bail contract. Failure to follow the conditions below will result in sanctions. The bail contract provides, I must:

1. Be honest and answer truthfully all questions posed to me by the justice, judge, or staff of the VTC, including full disclosure of any use of alcohol and drugs.
2. Appear for all VTC status review hearings as directed.
3. Participate in all VTC programs, activities, and assignments as ordered by the court.
4. Comply with all treatment and case management recommendations as identified in the treatment and case plans developed by my providers to address my specific needs, including (but not limited to) attending all substance use counseling sessions, both group and individual, and participating in a meaningful way in all sessions.
5. Comply with all conditions listed in the Physicians and Pharmacy Conditions policy, including taking all medication as prescribed.
6. Appear for all meetings with my case manager, treatment provider, and/or probation officer as directed by the court.
7. Report as required or requested by any team member for alcohol and/or drug testing, not tamper with any drug test, and comply with the Participant Testing Policy.
8. Not use or have in my possession, in my vehicle, or in my residence the following: alcohol, scheduled drugs (legal or illegal) including marijuana, marijuana products and marijuana concentrate, or prescription medications unless approved by my treatment provider in writing; drug paraphernalia of any kind, including hypodermic apparatus (unless prescribed); mind- and/or mood-altering substances, including but not limited to: inhalants, synthetic or “designer drugs,” dangerous weapons, including firearms and knives.
9. Not be on the premises of any establishment that serves alcohol without written permission of my case manager and/or probation officer.
10. Not be on the premises of any establishment that dispenses cannabis, cannabis products, or cannabis derivatives, and comply with the Prohibited Substances Agreement.
11. Submit to a random search of my person, possessions (including any and all data and content of a cell phone), vehicle, and residence, including the common areas of my residence, at any time as requested by the judge, staff of the VTC, or member of law enforcement. If the residence is occupied solely by myself, or myself and my family members and/or a significant other, the entire residence shall be subject to search.

12. Obey all rules, conditions, and directives of the VTC. The VTC may impose additional conditions, rules, or directives, or may adjust or eliminate condition(s) or term(s) as required to complement my individualized treatment plan.
13. Commit no unlawful conduct; reliable information of such conduct may result in expulsion from the VTC and imposition of the unsuccessful plea agreement sentence. A conviction is not required.
14. Identify myself as being in the VTC whenever I have contact with a law enforcement officer and/or probation officer and notify my case manager and probation officer within 24 hours of the contact, regardless if it led to my arrest.
15. Not leave the State of Maine or _____ County without the written approval of my case manager and/or probation officer.
16. Reside at the following address: _____.
I shall not change my residence without the permission of the VTC presiding judge.
17. Obey the following curfew ordered by the court: _____. Absence from my residence during curfew hours is permitted solely for travel to and from court-related activities, treatment, medical emergencies, and employment unless otherwise granted by the court.
18. Have no contact, direct or indirect, with the following:

19. I will not be at their residence, place of employment, or place of education.
20. Follow all terms and conditions of other release or probation, if any.
21. Sign all release of information forms as required by the VTC. If I revoke these forms it will result in non-compliance with the conditions of the VTC.
22. I shall not associate with non-law-abiding individuals or individuals who are actively using alcohol or drugs, legal or illegal.
23. Maintain or seek gainful employment, participation in an approved educational program, participation in a vocational rehabilitation program, or performance of community service work.
24. Dress appropriately for court.
25. Maintain the confidentiality of all fellow VTC participants.
26. Make payments on all financial obligations, including, but not limited to, any court-ordered restitution, child support payments, and/or fines, including those which may result from other pending charges, subject to ability to pay.
27. Pay all fines and/or restitution in the amount of \$ _____ at a rate of \$ _____ per month as ordered.

28. Pay for alcohol and/or drug testing if I am dishonest or if expensive testing is required because of my conduct.
29. Make every effort to obtain a valid driver's license, if applicable.
30. Not operate a motor vehicle unless ~~you~~ I have a valid driver's license, registration, and insurance.
31. Contact my case manager as directed.
32. If on probation prior to my admission to VTC, I understand that my probation will be tolled while I participate in the VTC, but I am still required to follow all probation conditions, including reporting to my probation officer while participating in the VTC.
33. Accept the representation at VTC court sessions by the lawyer of the day, unless I make arrangements for other representation.
34. Participate in electronic monitoring if ordered by the court.
35. I will waive extradition to the State of Maine from any other state of the United States, from the District of Columbia, from any territory of the United States, and from any other jurisdiction whatsoever, for prosecution on my charge(s).



Conditions may be added or deleted. If conditions are added or deleted, the VTC will inform me of the changes.

The Court Team

The VTC Team manages the day-to-day operations of the treatment court and consists of people from many disciplines. Your case manager will identify who is on your team for each of these roles:

Judge

The judge presides over the VTC and is the final decision-maker. You will meet with the judge at every court session to discuss your progress and struggles. Judges are compassionate and they are looking for honesty and effort.

Prosecutor

The prosecutor thinks about public safety, victim interests, and holding people accountable for their actions. They may also help to resolve pending legal matters that impact your legal status or charges.

Defense Attorney

The defense attorney is there to protect your constitutional rights and legal interests.

In addition to the defense attorney on the VTC, you may have your own who will represent you on specific matters; for example, if you have done something that prompts a sanction of going to jail for several days or more. If you are not clear about your legal representation, ask your case manager.

Probation Officer

Some people enter the VTC from probation and have a probation officer. Others don't. If you do, the probation officer should communicate and coordinate with your case manager in collecting information and providing supervision. Since they work for the Department of Corrections, probation officers must follow the Department's rules.

Case Manager

Like many other members of the Team, the case manager is not a court employee, but works under its guidance. *The case manager is your go-to person.* They work with you to develop a healthy living plan addressing housing, relationships, physical needs and mental health needs. You will meet with your case manager regularly, generally each week. This is also the person you contact when things are going particularly well or you are in trouble. As with everyone else, being honest with your case manager will prove very helpful, even if you mess up.

Treatment Representative

This is a clinician who helps to figure out participants' specific issues with substances or mental health and how to address them. This person may be your therapist or work for an agency where you get treatment. Everyone in VTC gets standard treatment for alcohol and drug use and criminal thinking and, if needed, additional treatment tailored to their specific needs.

Law Enforcement Representative

Not all teams have one, but it may be a police officer, deputy sheriff, trooper, or jail official who typically assists with home or employment visits, observing VTC participants in the community, and acting as a liaison with the police department, sheriff's office, jail, or correctional system.

Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator

These individuals act as a liaison between the VTC team and the VA. VJOs provide information on veteran eligibility for VA services, the types of services available, and assist with coordination of referrals within the VA. The VJO spans the boundaries between VA, treatment staff, the judicial system, and the correctional system.

Peer and Community Supports

VTCs include involvement with veteran mentors. Veteran mentors are veteran volunteers who will engage, encourage, and empower you during your time in VTC. Veteran mentors ensure that we "Leave no veteran behind". The Veterans Mentors will be involved with you continuously throughout the process of the VTC. In addition to veteran mentors other community representatives, community physicians, or other veterans who have been through the program are there to assist you. They think about what is happening from your perspective and what resources may be available to assist with your particular needs.

Project Evaluator

Working at the state level, this person gathers data about how well treatment courts are working and what can be done to improve them. Your participation in providing information is voluntary and you will never be identified individually.

Coordinator of Specialty Dockets

Also working at the state level, this person helps the VTCs by providing information, expertise, and guidance on best practices, current research, and relevant legal issues.

Moving Through the Program

The program is set up in phases. It generally takes about a year and a half to complete them. You need to complete the requirements of each phase before moving to the next, sometimes called “phasing up.”

You can ask to move to the next phase only after you completed each task in your current phase. Your request to phase up must be in writing.

Phase 1: Orientation and Acclimation

Length: 30 days (minimum)

Court Attendance: Weekly or as directed

You will begin recovery or other treatment care by working with team members to make plans for *treatment and healthy living* by addressing housing, relationships, physical and mental health needs.

Goals

- Honesty with the court and team.
- Work with your treatment provider and case manager to develop plans.
- Work toward obtaining safe housing if needed.
- Begin medical and psychiatric care as needed.
- Abstain from the use of alcohol and drugs. Tell the case manager about prescription medication prior to testing and use prescriptions only as directed by your physician.
- Identify a friend or family member as community support who will communicate with the VTC team.
- Start changing your people, places and things.
- Sign the following documents: Acknowledgement of the Drug Testing Rules and Procedures, Prohibited Substances Agreement, and a release allowing receipt and disbursement of medical and treatment records and communication among the VTC team and providers.
- Call the drug testing line EACH DAY before the deadline set by the VTC.

Phase 1 Requirements to Advance

1. No court-imposed sanctions for the last 7 days.
2. Negative drug test for the last 14 days including no missed, diluted, or altered tests.

3. Meet with your case manager each week.
4. Engage appropriately in all court and treatment sessions.
5. Comply with your curfew.
6. Comply with all bail and/or probation conditions.
7. Report any contact with law enforcement to your case manager within 24 hours.
8. Work with your case manager to find safe housing and do not change housing without permission.
9. Comply with all prescription counts as directed by a member of the VTC team.
10. Attend all treatment-recommended recovery support.
11. Follow all recommendations for additional services.

Phase 2: Clinical Stabilization

Length: 90 days (minimum)
Court Attendance: Weekly or as directed

Here you will begin to focus more on treatment, working with a provider to develop your treatment strategies. You will continue working with your case manager in developing a *healthy living plan* addressing housing, relationships, physical needs and mental health needs.

Goals

- Honesty with the court and team.
- Attend and engage in (group and/or individual) treatment services as outlined in your treatment plan.
- Complete all treatment assignments in a timely manner.
- Follow the directives of the court and team.
- Continued sobriety and abstinence.
- Maintain safe and stable housing.
- Demonstrate changes to your people, places, and things.
- Begin addressing financial issues.

Phase 2 Requirements to Advance

1. No court-imposed sanctions for the last 7 days.
2. Engage appropriately in all court and treatment sessions.

3. Meet with your case manager each week.
4. Test negative for substances for the last 30 days including no missed, diluted, or altered tests.
5. Comply with your curfew.
6. Comply with all bail and/or probation conditions.
7. Report any contact with law enforcement to your case manager within 24 hours of the contact.
8. Do not change housing without permission from your case manager.
9. Comply with all requested prescription counts.
10. Attend all treatment-recommended recovery support groups.
11. Comply with treatment recommendations regarding a sponsor or peer support.
12. Follow all recommendations for additional services.

Phase 3: Social Stabilization

Length: 90 days (minimum)

Court Attendance: Every other week or as directed

Your treatment plan will be updated by you and your treatment provider to identify and monitor your treatment goals and objectives. Treatment and meetings will begin to focus on *relapse prevention or other healthcare needs*, and help you identify ways of coping with stressful situations.

Goals

- Honesty with the court and team.
- Attend and engage in treatment services.
- Continued sobriety and/or abstinence by using the recovery tools learned in previous phases.
- Develop a relapse prevention plan.
- Develop a community-based support network.
- Develop a pro-social activity plan.
- Maintain safe and stable housing.
- Demonstrate changes to your people, places, and things.

Phase 3 Requirements to Advance

1. No court-imposed sanctions for the last 14 days.

2. Engage appropriately in all court and treatment sessions.
3. Meet with your case manager each week.
4. Test negative for substances for the last 45 days including no missed, diluted, or altered tests.
5. Comply with your curfew.
6. Comply with all bail and/or probation conditions.
7. Report any contact with law enforcement to your case manager within 24 hours of the contact.
8. Do not change housing without permission from your case manager.
9. Comply with all requested prescription counts.
10. Attend all treatment-recommended recovery support groups.
11. Comply with treatment recommendations regarding a sponsor.
12. Follow all recommendations for additional services.

Phase 4: Maintenance and Community Involvement

Length: 90 days (minimum)

Court Attendance: Monthly or as directed

You will continue to focus on ways to prevent relapse and identifying ways of coping with stress. An increased focus will be placed on *daily living skills* and on your adjustment to *returning to the community* as an unsupervised, productive, successful citizen able to care for yourself and others.

Goals

- Honesty with the court and team.
- Attend and engage in treatment services.
- Continued sobriety and/or abstinence by using the recovery tools learned in previous phases.
- Demonstrate strong engagement in recovery and pro-social activities.
- Maintain engagement in a community support network.
- Maintain safe and stable housing.
- Obtain or maintain employment or attendance at school.
- Demonstrate changing people, places, and things.

Phase 4 Requirements to Advance

1. No court-imposed sanctions for the last 14 days.

2. Engage appropriately in all court and treatment sessions.
3. Meet with your case manager each week.
4. Test negative for substances for a minimum of 60 days including no missed, diluted, or altered tests.
5. Comply with your curfew.
6. Comply with all bail and/or probation conditions.
7. Report any contact with law enforcement to your case manager within 24 hours of the contact.
8. Do not change housing without permission from your case manager.
9. Obtain or maintain gainful employment or participate in an educational program.
10. Comply with all requested prescription counts.
11. Attend all treatment-recommended recovery support groups.
12. Comply with treatment recommendations regarding a sponsor or peer support.
13. Follow all recommendations for additional services.

Phase 5: Ongoing Recovery

Length: 90 days (minimum)

Court Attendance: Monthly or as directed

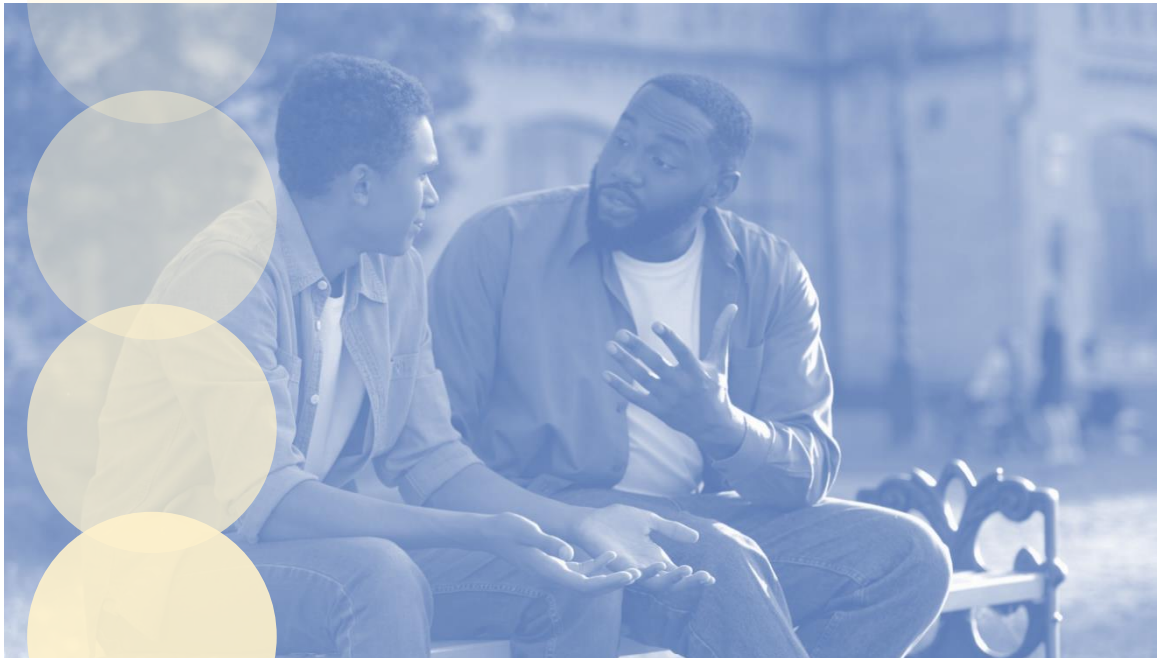
You will address your *ongoing recovery needs* to maintain abstinence from alcohol and drugs. You will also focus on developing and implementing a *continuing care plan* to bolster your success after completing the VTC.

Goals

- Honesty with the court and team.
- Attend and engage in treatment services.
- Complete an aftercare plan.
- Continued sobriety and/or abstinence by using the recovery tools learned in previous phases.
- Remain actively engaged in recovery and pro-social activities.
- Maintain engagement in a community support network.
- Maintain safe and stable housing.
- Maintain employment or attendance at school.
- Demonstrate changing people, places, and things.

Phase 5 Requirements to Advance

1. No court-imposed sanctions for 14 consecutive days.
2. Engage appropriately in all court and treatment sessions.
3. Meet with your case manager each week.
4. Test negative for a minimum of 90 days including no missed, dilute, or altered tests.
5. Comply with your curfew.
6. Comply with all bail and/or probation conditions.
7. Report any contact with law enforcement to your case manager within 24 hours of the contact.
8. Do not change housing without permission from your case manager.
9. Maintain gainful employment or participate in an educational program.
10. Comply with all requested prescription counts.
11. Attend all treatment-recommended recovery support groups.
12. Comply with treatment recommendations regarding a sponsor or peer support.
13. Follow all recommendations for additional services.



Advancement, Expulsion, and Graduation

Phase Advancement

Advancing to the next phase is not dependent on time, but on completing the requirements. In addition to those listed above, there are *overall requirements* that apply to each phase.

You should not expect to be approved to advance if you:

- Are dishonest.
- Do not comply with your treatment provider's directions regarding attendance and participation.
- Have not completed a sanction ordered during your current phase.
- Have not been communicating or participating in services.
- Are disrespectful.

You may submit your petition to advance in phase only after you have completed and can initial each *individual* phase requirement on your phase-up petition. You are responsible for tracking your progress and knowing when you should be eligible to advance. **Work with your case manager on this.**

Withdrawal or Expulsion

Withdrawal: You may elect to withdraw voluntarily from the VTC, especially if you think a motion for termination is about to be filed. Your defense attorney will review your options with you, recognizing you will be returned to probation or to court for sentencing under your original plea. Your sentence shall be determined by the VTC judge unless you request a different one.

Expulsion: You may be expelled from the program if you disappear, stop attending court and treatment sessions, stop making an effort to progress, are charged with an offense that disqualifies you from participating, make threats or engage in violent acts towards other participants or VTC staff.

Expulsion from VTC is evaluated on an individual basis and depends on your circumstances and history. A decision to end your participation will be made by the judge after input from the team. Again, you will be returned to probation or to court for sentencing under your original plea and your sentence will be determined by the VTC judge unless you request otherwise.

Graduation (a.k.a. Commencement)

If you entered the VTC as part of a plea agreement, when you successfully complete the program, the judge will determine if any charges will be reduced and finalize any remaining sentence. If you entered the VTC as a condition of probation, the judge will determine any remaining time you will need to remain on probation.

Approval for graduation (also known as commencement, to represent your new beginning) will be determined by the VTC judge with input from the team. They must believe you have learned from the structure and support of the program; simply completing each phase is not enough.

Before graduating, you may be asked to complete a program exit survey.

Your family and close pro-social friends will be invited to join you in court for your graduation ceremony as the judge congratulates you on successfully completing the VTC and achieving your goal of establishing an alcohol, drug, and crime-free life.



Incentives, Sanctions, and Treatment Responses

VTC is structured to recognize your efforts to do well, and to call you out when you violate the rules laid out in this handbook. It does so by handing out *incentives* and *sanctions* (also called *program responses*), generally during your court appearances. VTC also uses another tool called *treatment responses*. They are different from sanctions in that they are not punishments. Instead, they are changes to your treatment plan if you continue to struggle with substance use or inappropriate behavior.

Incentives or rewards come in many forms, both symbolic (such as praise and applause) and material (such as gift certificates for gas). Program responses are fairly immediate, predictable, and consistent. Sanctions generally increase your accountability or restrict your actions. They match where you are in the program: early, middle, or late. They are tailored to your individual progress, needs, and capabilities. **You will not be held accountable for failing to meet a goal or adhere to a rule that you are not capable of meeting at the current time.** As you move through the phases, what is expected of you will increase, as will your incentives for doing well. The same can be said of your sanctions.

Incentives

The VTC recognizes the effort required to improve behaviors, choices, and lifestyles. Incentives help promote both your compliance and your success. Examples of behaviors and accomplishments that lead to incentives are included below, followed by examples of incentives:

Behaviors and Accomplishments

- Honesty
- One day of abstinence from alcohol and/or drugs
- No violations for 60+ days
- Multiple days of abstinence from alcohol and/or drugs
- Obtaining driver's license
- Obtaining employment
- Maintaining employment
- Obtaining GED or high school diploma
- Outstanding accomplishment
- Paying restitution
- Perfect attendance
- Phase advancement
- Recognition of investment in VTC program

Possible Incentives or Responses

- Applause
- VTC outings, including game days, disc golf, or softball
- Books
- Candy
- Curfew extension/removal
- Early release from court session
- Moving ahead in testing line
- Fishbowl drawing entry
- Gift certificates
- Praise from judge
- Recognition certificate
- Reduction of supervision
- Standing ovation
- Travel privileges

These are only examples. The judge makes the final determination for all incentives.

Sanctions

If you fail to comply with bail contract conditions, commit program violations (such as dishonesty or missed drug tests), fail to attend individual or group treatment sessions, fail to attend court or pro-social activities, or fail to meet with your probation officer or case manager, the judge may impose sanctions.

Sanctions also are graduated and individualized. Together with incentives, they are given in an effort to modify your behavior. Sanctions are not negotiable.

Sanctions are not imposed arbitrarily; they follow detailed discussion among team members and between you and the judge. The judge makes the final decision.

Sanctions are given on an individual basis. Other participants may receive different sanctions for conduct that may appear to be for the same violation. This is usual and appropriate. You are viewed as an individual and your individual progress, attendance, and history are taken into account before any sanction is imposed.

The ultimate sanction is expulsion from the program. Possible reasons for expulsion are explained elsewhere in this handbook and listed below.

Examples of infractions that lead to sanctions—not an exhaustive list—are provided below. As needs arise new sanctions may be added.

Unacceptable Behaviors

- Absconding
- Dishonesty or deliberately omitting information to the court
- Falsifying documents
- Behavioral issues, including poor attitude, being disruptive and threatening violence
- Providing a diluted or altered alcohol and/or drug test
- Failing to abide by curfew
- Failing to attend scheduled events
- Failing to appear at scheduled court sessions
- Failing to complete community service hours
- Failing to engage in services
- Failing to follow treatment and/or case manager instructions
- Failing to follow court instructions
- Failing to submit pro-social or sober-support meeting slips
- Filling prescription(s) without authorization
- Missing alcohol and/or drug test
- Missing treatment appointment
- Missing probation appointment
- Missing treatment group session
- Not complying with approved medication
- Positive alcohol and/or drug test
- Tardiness to treatment or court
- Using or possessing synthetic and/or designer drugs or alcohol
- Committing a new criminal offense

Possible Sanctions or Responses

- Keeping a calendar
- Peer review
- Removal of privileges
- Conference with VTC team
- Sitting in jury box
- Verbal or written apology
- 1–9 hours of community service
- 10–19 hours of community service
- 20 + hours of community service
- Additional meetings with your case manager
- Disapproval from the judge
- Court observation days
- Educational workbooks
- Essay on topic related to infraction
- Extension of curfew
- Fines
- Increased court appearances
- Increased drug testing
- Increased supervision
- Incarceration
- Expulsion from VTC

Again, these are only examples. The judge makes the final determination for all sanctions.

Treatment Responses

If you are not responding to treatment interventions, but are otherwise complying with treatment and supervision requirements, you will not receive a punitive sanction. Instead, you will get a treatment response that alters or increases your level of treatment. Treatment responses help you learn from your choices and not to repeat them. Particularly, if you are struggling with sobriety and are honest with the VTC team, the judge will work with you to adjust your treatment plan based on the recommendation of treatment providers.

Typical Behaviors that Lead to Treatment Responses

- Dishonesty about use of alcohol or drugs
- Dishonesty about struggling with recovery
- Failing to meet treatment plan goals
- Positive alcohol or drug test

Examples of Treatment Responses

- Educational workbooks
- Increased level of treatment
- Increased alcohol or drug testing
- Phase extension
- Essay on topic related to infraction
- Increased attendance at sober-support meetings
- Increased contact with treatment provider

Sanctions Leading to Jail Time or Expulsion

If your behavior leads to a sanction involving going to jail, but for fewer than three days, the issue will be addressed during your regularly scheduled court hearing. You may be represented by the VTC defense attorney unless you have made prior arrangements for your attorney to be present or the court agrees to a delay if your attorney cannot be there.

If a sanction of more than three days incarceration or expulsion is being considered, further discussion of the matter will be continued until the next VTC session and your attorney will be notified.

The judge will determine whether you are to be incarcerated pending the outcome of the sanction hearing.

At any sanction hearing, the District Attorney will have the burden of proof and must convince the VTC judge of the violation of VTC rules by a preponderance of the evidence. You will be represented by your attorney or the assigned VTC attorney.

Monitoring Devices

If you do not comply with the rules or need additional monitoring for specific circumstances, you may be required by court order to wear a monitoring device. Such devices may be a GPS ankle monitor, a SCRAM alcohol monitoring device, or a drug testing patch. VTC has established policies and procedures pertaining to the application and removal of such devices.

If there is a cost associated with wearing a device, you may have to pay the device provider yourself. If you are unable to do so for a legitimate and verifiable difficulty, you should speak promptly with your case manager.

Motion to Revoke Bail

When there is an alleged violation of the VTC rules, which is also a violation of your conditions of release, the District Attorney may file a motion to revoke bail. If a motion to revoke bail is filed and approved by a judge, a warrant will be issued for your arrest, and you will be arrested and held until the next regularly scheduled VTC court session. If a motion to revoke bail is not filed, the alleged violation will be considered at your next regularly scheduled VTC meeting.



Treatment and Recovery

You will be engaging in structured treatment throughout the program, much of it in group settings with other participants. You will be seeing providers associated with or approved by the VTC or the Veterans Administration.

You will be required to complete court-approved, evidence-based programs addressing substance use and criminal thinking. You may be required to purchase treatment manuals. You may also engage in mental health treatment such as individual or group counseling.

At first you may need to be placed in a residence with others in treatment. Your treatment provider will determine that and make a recommendation to the VTC. If you are assessed for outpatient services, a multi-component outpatient program will be developed for you. If you are admitted to a residential treatment program, your treatment plan will include the requirements of that program.

Treatment Plans

An initial treatment plan will be developed by you and your treatment team following an overall assessment of your strengths, challenges, and needs. The plan will be a guide for your initial treatment phase and through it you will set goals, select methods for meeting those goals, and develop target dates for meeting them. The plan will be maintained by your treatment provider and will be updated as you progress, through periodic meetings. You will attend and participate in these updates to your plan.

You should request and receive a copy of your treatment plan and refer to it often. If, at any time, you feel that you are not receiving the outlined services or are not meeting the goals you have identified, contact your treatment provider and case manager for assistance.

Unexcused absence from treatment is a serious violation and will likely result in a sanction.

Outpatient Treatment

Outpatient substance use counseling is comprised of two separate formats: *individual* and *group*. You may be required to participate in both types of counseling at various times.

Together they are designed to help you *develop self-awareness, realize your self-worth, and develop the strength to practice self-discipline*. Individual and group counseling sessions will include identifying problems and new ways to address them. Your treatment provider may use more than one method to help you reach your goals. All these methods have been shown to work in research studies with people having similar issues to you.

Your attendance and level of participation in treatment will be reported to the team as part of your overall progress.

Residential Treatment

Based on clinical recommendations, you may be required to participate in a residential program. Residential treatment programs provide services in a 24-hour residential setting. They follow a scheduled treatment regimen that consists of diagnostic, educational, and counseling services. You may be referred to other support services as well including when you leave the program.

Residential programs may involve either an unlocked or locked facility. The length of time will be determined by your progress and clinical recommendations. Leaving or checking yourself out of a residential program without prior approval of the VTC may result in a sanction, up to and including expulsion and thus returning to court for sentencing.

After residential treatment you will resume the traditional VTC services.

Medication Assisted Treatment

Your treatment provider may recommend that you receive medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for either alcohol use disorder or opioid use disorder. MAT will be monitored pursuant to VTC policy and any diversion or misuse of your drugs is not permitted.

Mental Health Treatment

Your treatment provider may recommend that you meet with a mental health professional for assessment and treatment, including medication management. If medication is required to treat your condition appropriately, your physician will consult with the VTC team to ensure that you are provided with approved medication. Any prescribed medicine will be monitored according to VTC policy.

Ancillary Services

If needed, the VTC team may refer you to other services to support your recovery such as sober supportive housing, vocational training, veterans support groups and educational services.

Recovery, Support Groups and Pro-Social Events

Participation in recovery support groups, pro-social events, or support meetings is required throughout the VTC. ***These meetings are important to your recovery.*** Many will help you to understand recovery philosophies, develop levels of trust, create social bonds with others in recovery, and establish a community-based support system for use when you are finished with VTC.

The most common recovery support groups are Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). These organizations are considered spiritually-based due to their identification of a higher power. Alternatively, you may attend secular meetings that are also recognized as recovery support or pro-social meetings. You will discuss your choice of recovery support meetings with your case manager who can provide links to meetings in your area.

You will be asked for proof of attendance at your recommended number of recovery support or pro-social meetings, by filling out and providing to your case manager a form containing information about all meetings you attended. If anything is falsified on this form this is considered dishonest and will result in a sanction.



Complaints and Grievances

You have the right to express your opinions about the program, and to make recommendations about ways to improve it. You also can file a complaint without fear of negative consequences and expect a response within two weeks. To make a complaint you can email the State Coordinator and leave your contact information so he can get back to you: Richard.Gordon@courts.maine.gov or specialtydockets@courts.maine.gov.



Handbook Acknowledgement

The VTC was developed to help you treat your mental health needs, abstain from alcohol, drugs, and criminal activity, to promote self-sufficiency and to return you to the community as a productive and responsible member.

Your signature indicates that you have reviewed the **Participant Handbook**.

Welcome to the Veterans Treatment Court.

Participant Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Date

In Their Own Words

Excerpts from the writings of other Treatment Court Participants



Why does the Drug Court Program take it so seriously if you miss even one treatment session?



This is a question that I am sure every single one of us has asked ourselves at least once, so as someone that had been a Drug Court Client long enough to have a little bit more understanding about it, I would like to address the newer clients and perhaps bring them a little bit of perspective on this particular subject.

I know that this program can be very overwhelming, especially when you are first starting out. There are so many different things that you are expected to do. Random drug tests, check-ins, meetings, treatment. It's very easy to wonder "WHY?!" I mean, as long as you're showing up to do your drug tests, and passing them, then that should be good enough right? WRONG. That is simply not true, and here is why. While yes, showing up to your drug tests, and passing them is very important especially in terms of keeping you from getting into further legal trouble, there is a lot more to this program than just getting and staying out of trouble. That is where the treatment comes into play.

The truth is, the testing portion of this program is very short term. Anyone can stay sober long enough to pass a drug test. In fact, S_____ said something to me once, something along the lines of "Drug court is a very short period of time when you think about the big scheme of things." She's right. It really is. Treatment is designed to help you more in the long term.

*Most addicts that I have met, including myself, did not become that way over night. It almost always goes back to some sort of trauma that you have had in your life, a pain that you are trying to numb out, a void you are trying to fill. It's always something more than just getting high or drunk. It may have never crossed your mind that the reason for your using goes a lot deeper than just having a good time, but it more than likely does. **So, what treatment does is help you identify and address your problems, so you can get down to the real reason why you use.** Not only that, but it helps you identify your triggers, and it helps you learn a lot of different skills than you can use to battle your addiction more successfully.*

I remember when I first started treatment. I was less than open. Sure, I would talk about certain things, I would interact with S_____ and answer her questions, but I wasn't really interested in getting to the route of things, because it was uncomfortable. Of course it's uncomfortable, but the fact is, it has to be done, because if it isn't, then you will always be trying to run from your past trauma, and you will always be trying to drown it with a substance. I'll tell you this, you can drink

and do drugs until the world ends, but when the buzz wears off, you will have the same problems that you had before you got high or drunk, and you won't be any closer to solving them. The truth is, *I have learned a lot in treatment ever since I started opening up, and really addressing the things that have gone wrong or hurt me in my life.* I will admit it. I used drugs as a way to numb pain out for years, but guess what? Every time the high wore off, the pain was still there, but because of the work I have done in treatment, my past does not own me anymore. Sure, there are still things that bother me, but *I have learned skills now to deal with those things instead of numbing them out with substances.*

Drug Court is not forever. Someday soon every single one of us will be out in the real world, free to do as we please, and if you don't participate in treatment, then you might not ever know the real reason that you became an addict. Not only that, but you might not have the skills that you need to help battle your addiction once you are out of the program. So yes, treatment is important. This program isn't just about legal trouble, it's about giving yourself a second chance. You all deserve that, so please, take treatment seriously, give yourself a second chance.

“

Where I See Myself

”

*I have stalled and put off this essay for a few days. I think because it is hard to think about where I am going to be or want to be in five years when I suffer from depression. My depression most days leaves me feeling hopeless and like I don't have a future at all. I have recently started to second guess myself and the relationships with the people closest to me. That second guessing caused a feeling of distance and pushed me to give in to my own dysfunctional way of thinking. The old way of thinking. *That old way of thinking at first seems like a life saver being thrown at me after being lost at sea for days, only to find myself being pulled aboard a burning ship.* At times I become so desperate to not feel or have to deal with the emotions and racing thoughts, the emptiness, and loneliness that I reach for the quickest way out. Even if it's the one thing that has never worked in the past.*

Voluntary insanity.

I hope the court can forgive me for starting this essay without knowing how it's going to end.

The truth is, I do not know if where I want to be is going to be where I end up. While I am in recovery yes...

I think I have proven that at this point in my recovery my disease is still very active and can rise to the surface and take hold without much fight in the right circumstances.

I do however know where I do not want to be and have recently found an outlet that allows me to be productive and proud.

I do not want to be dead.

I do not want to be back in prison.

I do not want to be anywhere that doesn't allow me to be a father to my now 10-year-old daughter.

Or any place that keeps my family from making the few random visits I am blessed to have with them when they have the time. Mainly my nephews and niece.

I do not want to be somewhere that causes them sadness when they are asked: Where's Uncle George?

I don't want to be homeless or back out on the streets hungry and desperate and untrusted, EVER Again.

This outlet I have found or was blessed with is the job I now have.

I am at times stressed to the max because the store and all its customers and employees has moments of pure chaos. And it does get to me, but I am able to see it for what it is. Just like when I give in and pick up a substance, lashing out or picking a fight for other people, their quickest way out. So, while it does bother me it doesn't cause me to become so stressed that I quit.

Being there in the store is most days the same thing, I clean. They call it deep cleaning and I have received praise from the manager, the regional manager and even some people from the corporate office during their walks through.

Yes, I enjoy being praised by the people in authority there, but it comes with a down side.

I am constantly being talked about as some kind of A-S-S-K-I-S-S-E-R. I guess one or two of the other crew members thinks I am on drugs because I don't stop. I show up and try to be the hardest worker not because I want to make others look bad but because I am just so damn grateful to have finally been given a chance to work.

When I am there, I get to serve the public, even if it's just their coffee it is still enough to make me feel human. I enjoy the regulars that come in everyday and order the same drink day after day. While I still have to ask them for the exact order I remember certain things and hope that eventually I won't need to ask them the makes of their coffee, I can just say hi, and tell or hear a joke and pass them their drink.

I have been called a retard and told that I should get a real job. And that didn't anger me like it would have a few months ago, instead I smiled and couldn't wait to share what had happened with some of the other crew members because I assumed it was like a badge of honor in the world of fast-food cashiers.

Like, hey guys look what I got to be called...Cool, right?

Apparently, it happens all the time though so yea....

I guess that the customer getting upset and resorting to name calling and the attempt to make me feel shamed for my job is another example of someone taking the quickest way out now that I think of it.

I have stayed later then I was supposed to a lot. And it's because I am so caught up in cleaning and fixing things in the store that I either lost track of time or refused to leave a task half done.

I feel responsible for the safety of the girls and the customers when someone is blowing their top in the store. While I know that I would probably get fired I still know that if I could do something to prevent or stop anyone there from being hurt, I would. Especially after already witnessing an assault on one of the female crew workers.

Also to be completely honest I finally am able to work hard and go above and beyond what is expected and I am selfishly hoping that by doing the 110% best I can that another door will open for me sometime down the road.

Who knows, maybe in five years I can be working for a commercial cleaning company after being hired with a good word from someone in Dunkin's corporate office, making enough money to save away and start my own commercial cleaning company ten years from now.

I know/pray/want in five years from now to be 5x more productive

5x as trusted

5x more established in my community

5x the support for my family

And have 5 years added to my recovery.

Right now I need to remain aware of the fact that I am still very green when it comes to my recovery and I need to be 100% honest at all times with the people that really want me to not only succeed but also know exactly what it is that I need to do, learn, and avoid in order to make it to five years from now.

I came into the court desperate to get out of jail, I figured I could skate through the program and get out in 9 to 12 months and then I'd be free to go back to the life that was killing me.

When I realized that there was no way that I was going to just skate, I did all I could to play around, mock and even disrespect not only the court but recovery and even my own life. Thinking... Might as well go out with a bang. But honestly the anticipation of the bang scared the hell out of me. So I danced around being sent to jail or back to prison because I was literally a scared and selfish A-S-S-H-O-L-E. While I said I cared about my family I really didn't because I was so willing to give up my freedom to prove a point if I had to. Knowing half the time and denying half the time that by losing my freedom I would have stolen my family's only ability and right to have ME in THEIR lives.

*I thought I had it in the bag, thought I had it all figured out after that I was convinced that after the last thought process, I was truly committed to the court 110 million %. What was happening at the time was stupid. I was holding on to my disease of addiction because I knew I could count on it to pick up for me when I got jammed up. **Addiction is known to be cunning, baffling, and powerful. Mine is also known for being Don Juan, or his at least his confused, and broke, stepbrother.** I thought It [would] be similar to autopilot. Addiction would take the wheel when it came to the interactions with people I couldn't or didn't want to be a part of. The tough ones. But what was going on was I got into a situation where I once again needed the disease to get through tough times. My addiction was in control fully in no time, and with that control I once again turned to substances to feed it. While the times I gave in were not routine and even though there were few of those moments at this time in my treatment they still happened and those moments were enough to set me back, not just in my program but also in the way that I thought of myself and made me think that I was just a no-good selfish A-S-S-H-O-L-E.*

*But something else was also happening during that same time, the response from the people I thought would shame me further made me realize I was building meaningful relationships with the treatment team and I was starting to actually see or recognize that the members of the court team and my caseworker and my doctors and even the bailiffs in the courtroom truly give a damn about me and **I saw that you guys and some other people in my life really did want to help, and not because it was your job but because you see the potential in me. you were able to make me really start believing I have a real shot at getting the life I deserve and along the way become the person in society that I was raised to believe I would never be.***

I now can say I trust the "The system". Getting as far as I am in the court now was at one time something I didn't see happening. I am not referring to phase or level. I mean getting to this point of taking my life and the opportunities to better my life serious and knowing don't have to doubt the support I have in the courthouse, from people that have shown me the love, and commitment they have for me and my process. The balance of patience and tolerance while assuming authority and giving me reachable goals and the correct amount of structure and freedom, I have a new sense of self-worth. And I no longer have the get in get out attitude.

But clearly, I still have much more to learn and I pray that the people I have come to care about haven't given up on me and gotten me confused with someone that is only looking to take advantage and manipulate or "play the system".

I lied about the slip for a few reasons. Obviously the first was I was scared to be thrown out of the court, but it also happened because I was afraid to slide back down and lose the friendships and trust that I feel I have from the team. I didn't want to admit defeat and have to come clean that I had gone against everything I have been taught. I clearly know now that by lying I have done just that. And then on top of the lying, right after coming clean I gave into my addiction again and that time it was something I wasn't thinking about when It happened. I know that by allowing the things to be left in my possession I had already relapsed before doing

the things. I pretty much ran to and dove headfirst into danger. And I am still upset with myself for even allowing someone into my home who I knew was most likely not well.

So right now, 2020, after 3 years in the court I am at a place and have the ability to think and use tools. I can notice old behaviors and I can identify my attitude and thinking during my journey through the court up till this point in time.

In five years, I want to be able to sit back in a comfortable chair and think about how much more I was able to get out of the Co-Occurring Court and be grateful for how much farther I went after writing this essay and finally considering what could be, even while I battled depression that left thoughts of hopelessness that induced fits of stinking thinking.

Five years from now I want to be someone that doesn't doubt myself, because I have put in the work to climb out of my hole of a past. I want to only think about the person that I once was when I am telling my story to someone that's going through all this and not to brag or one up them either. Five years from now I want to know the feeling one gets when someone sees who they are and can't believe who they were.

Farewell

Good-bye my love, my one and only
Or so I thought when I was lonely
My heart was empty
And you eased my mind
And I thought you were just being kind
You took everything and caused paranoia
And my love, you stole just for 'ya
I'm done with this mindset
You tricked me and I fell
This is good-bye and you will miss me
But my life is staying with me
In the end you made me strong
And you grow weaker as time goes on

Maine Adult Treatment Court Participant



What Do I Wish I Knew When I First Started Treatment Court

I have been asked to come up with some things that might help someone new coming into the court. I was kind of surprised that my caseworker asked me to do this. I mean I have not run a perfect program, not like some of the other participants. Instead of reaching graduation in the 10- or 12-month span, I have been in the court for 3 or more years.

If I could give you some advice, I would tell you:

The bail contract you were given, READ IT. There are a lot of things in the contract that get overlooked. We or our attorneys tend to focus on the biggies (no drugs, guns, and no new criminal conduct). There is a lot more, and some of it seems unnecessary but trust me you don't want to be the person trying to tell the judge that the reason you popped for Morphine on the Urine test is because you ate a poppy seed bagel.

Then there is the handbook, READ IT. I took the handbook from my lawyer and tossed it in trash. I made the mistake of assuming that the court handbook was the same as every other program, Rehabs, Group Homes handbook. It's not, I literally went the whole first year not knowing that I had to submit paper work (Phase Advancement Sheets) to the court after so many days of clean urines and being on point with all the requirements of the court. I thought the court advanced us and all I had to do was show up. This is not the case, it's on us. I was the guy that sat on phase one for over a year. Not because I kept messing up and getting into situations that set me back either. ***I didn't know about phase advancement because I didn't read the handbook.***

Plus, a lot of the questions you might feel silly about asking the caseworkers or any of the other people that make up the treatment team can be answered by looking in the Handbook and at your bail contract.

If you slip, fall off the wagon or relapse then own it. We naturally try and hide stuff like that from the courts (especially when we have a lot of time hanging over our heads), but I know from making the mistake myself that ***in treatment court lying is the worst thing you will chose to do.*** Oh and telling the truth doesn't mean you're off the hook and still won't receive a sanction but I promise you that by being honest BEFORE you melt the cup you will have saved yourself from a whole lot of unnecessary pain and misery.

Some people can beat the tests by switching urine or diluting their urine or saying they have medical issues or by going out and getting some type of prescription that shows up on the test the same as the substance they used. Some people have been able to do certain drugs without it popping on a panel test, playing chicken with the send outs. It never lasts long for them, there is always going to come the day that the tester is watching them so they can't pass off the fake urine,

or the day comes where the team sends their urine to the lab to be tested. Also, chugging a gallon of water might seem like a good idea but it's an immediate red flag when you go in for a urine test and are unable to produce a urine. There are many other methods of testing that court can and has used to determine whether or not we are being truthful and staying clean. The harder we make it for the court to find out the truth, the harder we make it when the court come down on us after finding out the truth.

You will hear it a million times while in treatment court, HONESTY is key.

The courts are fully aware of what we go through as addicts/alcoholics.

They know we suffer from a chronic relapsing disease

They know that the best of us fall from time to time

They see us at our worst and push us to be our very best

While sanctions do happen, sometimes even when we are honest, they happen for a reason.

They, sometimes, will be what it takes to keep some of us alive.

Total and complete honesty doesn't just apply to the court; it is also something we need to do with ourselves. Especially if you are a participant that also is a parent.

Take this seriously, the court is doing more than keeping us clean. It also is the reason you can be free. Watching a football game, hanging out with family and friends, playing an active role in your child's life/lives are things we take for granted while in addiction. Those are things that some people will never get another chance at. Being able to come back from the life of addiction and the old bathroom sized existence that comes with it isn't impossible.... for some. The people that come into the court are selected because we are the ones that can do it. Somebody somewhere took the time to actually look at our cases and had the heart to look past the words in black and white to point out that we could come back and deserved the chance to show and prove that we are more than a docket number. They went to bat for us.

I think that you should also know:

*While in the court you will meet people in treatment or group or the required NA/AA meetings that will at first seem like a good choice to hang out with. Few of them will be good for you. Don't think you need to isolate yourself from the world because if you do that then you will miss an opportunity to find the good people that are out there. Just keep your guard up and be aware that the people in these groups or meetings are struggling with their own issues and have the potential to bring you down by pulling you into their drama. We need constant positive support. Something that has almost cost me my freedom a couple times is friends. It starts with, "F**K that", "I can't believe this" and then "Me too", "Need a ride". Just because someone feels the same way about something you do does*

not mean we start calling them our new BFF. It means run, far away from them. We can't afford that kind of support. They call those people Negative Supports and that is just what they are.

Be on time. If you wait till the last minute to show up for treatment or testing, then your already late. Even more so now that COVID-19 is a thing. It takes time to get somewhere and then then a lot more time to wait in line behind the other people that showed up last minute. Also it feels good to be early when you can be. Get the good seat.

There is nothing rude in what I am about to say.

We have all heard of MYOB, and if you haven't it means Mind Your Own Business. What works for you might not be what works for someone else and that applies to everyone. Don't get caught up wondering why someone else is getting attention you're not or why it seems like they are being treated differently. Because they most likely are. It is because everyone is different, people come from all types of background and suffer from all types of issues, physical, spiritual, and mental.

FYI, the judge loves it when you dress up for court and after a while you will too. If you need help getting a nice shirt and tie to induce a smile from the court, then ask your caseworker for that help. They WILL get you looking sharp and it won't cost you a thing. Plus that free shirt and tie comes in handy for things like job interviews and other situations where you need to look your best.

Really, if you are struggling with anything like clothes, hygiene products, rent, rides any of the necessities that we need to live then reach out. There are services for just about everything you're going to need and your caseworker will be able to get you set up with those services at no cost in most cases. You don't need to suffer.

We must be patient. Sometimes it takes longer for everything the court teaches to sink in. Sometimes it's for a reason.