

Being a Parent in Adult Treatment Court: What it Means & Why it's Important

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**National Drug Court
Resource Center**

Disclaimer



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National Drug Court Resource Center (NDCRC)



Our mission is to equip treatment court practitioners with an array of resources relevant to the field. Housed at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) in Wilmington, North Carolina, our work focuses on providing treatment court professionals with the information needed to design and implement programs that align with best practice standards, expand and enhance court operations, as well as collect and analyze program data.



NDCRC resources are featured on the website (www.ndcrc.org) and include original publications, interactive maps, operational materials organized by court type, seminal readings for treatment court stakeholders, calendar of professional development opportunities, and more.

Session Objectives



1. Increase knowledge regarding how to incorporate the parenting identity among treatment court participants.
2. Increase knowledge regarding evidence-based practices & strategies that support parents in recovery.
3. Identify specific data to be collected related to parenting within your program's target population

Overview of Session



- Research on the parent identity in treatment court participants
- Making adult treatment courts more responsive to parents
- Evidence-based resources for parents with children
- Suggested family/parent-related data to be collected by treatment courts

Why talk about parenting?



- *Cause a lot of 'em that are going into the program are going through an issue with possibly losing their child and...you know, ...as they're learning with how to cope with life, drug free, they're also learning to parent drug free.*
- *I've seen these women struggle with how do I take care of my kids sober. If you've only ever dealt with your kids high, that's, you know that's gotta be scary.*

Why talk about parenting?



- Negative impacts of parental CJS involvement and/or substance use on children is well-documented
- ~50% of ATC participants are parents of minor children
 - 20% of those are primary caregivers (Rossman et al., 2011)
- Little research/data available regarding the role/impact of parenting in adult treatment courts

Why talk about parenting?



- Simply being in an ATC doesn't improve outcomes for families
(Sieger et al., 2021)
- Family can function as a protective factor **or** risk factor
- All treatment courts are family treatment courts (CFF)

What does it mean to be a parent in Treatment Court?



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What do we mean by “parent”?



Biological or
non-
biological

Parent of
children of
any age

Custodial or
noncustodial

Possible Experiences as a Parent in Treatment Court



Restricted freedoms

Family members are vulnerable

Understudied: What is the experience from the “inside”?

Self-Determination Theory & Motivation

(Deci & Ryan, 1985)



Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness
Being the author of your life	Believing that your actions affect your outcomes	Loving and caring for others who love and care for you
“I don't have control of my life right now. They hold the key to my life right in the courtroom” - 44 y.o. White mother	“You know, you kinda get high to forget about things. So, when you feel capable of doing the right thing, you don't have as much of a need to want to get high.” - 47 y.o. White father	‘Mom’, they said, ‘I am so glad that you got yourself together, because you are all that we have now.’ - 50 y.o. African American mother

Study 1 Questions



Are self-perceptions of parenting (autonomy, competence, & relatedness) related to internal motivation in treatment court?

Do parents in treatment court differ from parents not in treatment court in their sense of overall and parenting autonomy?

Do treatment court mothers differ from treatment court fathers with respect to self-determination (autonomy, competence, & relatedness)?

Study 1: Self-Determination: Are Adult Treatment Court Parents Different?



Treatment Court Sample

- 24 males, 18 females
- Ages 20-55 ($M=35.09$)
- 86.11% White
- 1-8 children ($M=2.67$)
- 75% experienced loss of custody

Non-Treatment Court Sample

- 29 males, 34 females
- Ages 24-58 ($M=41.13$)
- 82.53% White
- 1-7 kids ($M=2.22$)
- 6% of the sample experienced loss of custody

Tools & Measures



Treatment Motivation Questionnaire
(Ryan et al., 1995)

Index of Autonomous Functioning
(Weinstein et al. 2012)

Parent Scale (autonomy, competence, &
relatedness; Sanders & MacKain, 2021)

Results: General Autonomy (IAF)



Treatment Court Parents

- **Lower authorship scores**
- No difference in interest taking & susceptibility to control

Non-Treatment Court Parents

- **Higher authorship scores**
- No difference in interest taking & susceptibility to control

Results: Parental Self-Determination Among Treatment Court Parents



Parental autonomy & competence **not** related to treatment motivation

Higher parental *relatedness* predicted higher internal treatment motivation ($r=0.43$, $p<0.05$)

Parental *relatedness* was the best predictor of both internal & external motivation ($p<0.01$)

Results: Differences in Relatedness Between Treatment Court Mothers & Fathers



Mothers

- Higher relatedness scores ($M=6.32, p<0.05$)

Fathers

- Lower relatedness scores ($M=5.92, p<0.05$)

An “inside” look at what it means to be a parent in treatment court



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Study 2: Qualitative Study of What it Means to be a Parent in Treatment Court



- 10 biological parents
- 5 mothers & 5 fathers
- 7 White, 2 African Americans, 1 Biracial
- Ages 24-52
- Children ages 3-27 years

Dominant Themes for Treatment Court Parents



Mothers

- Strong relationships
- Sacrifice

Fathers

- Responsibility
- Providing
- Guiding

Autonomy over one's life in general



*"I don't look at the treatment court as being controlled by someone; I look at it as someone who is trying to help you better yourself and try to better your life. But it's **also your choice if you want**. So, you still have control over it"*

-24 y.o. Biracial mother

Autonomy over one's life in general



*"I **don't have control of my life** right now. They hold the key to my life right in the courtroom...you know, and I don't think that they're here to cause me malice, I think that I need structure in my life right now. You know, I think they care about me very much. Even so far as to say, the head solicitor here, he's given me so many chances."*

- 44 y.o. White mother

Parental Autonomy



*“Now I feel in control, because now like I said **we built our relationship**. We talking every day. They checking on me, making sure I’m doing okay. I’m checking on them. It’s just amazing.”*

-50 y.o. African American mother

Parental Competence



*“Now I’m doing everything I can possibly do to get to where I need to be, so I can be there for them. **Like we plan on buying a house**”*

- 39 y.o. White father

*“As a father, you know, **providing, making sure they have what they need.** Not necessarily what they want, but you know clothes, food, and keeping them **on the right path.**”*

-47 y.o. White father

Parental Relatedness



*"I **want to be a part of her life** for the rest of my life. Continuing on the path that I was on, I was not going to do that. I'd like to see my grandchildren one day. I'd like for her to trust me with them and my behavior while I'm with them."*

-52 y.o. Caucasian mother

*"It means everything to me. I'm there for my kids. Actually, that's why I chose this program, so that I can get my life back together, to be straight back with my kids because we were rocky at one point when I was, you know, doing drugs. But now everything is back to normal. I'm clean, and **we have built that relationship again.**"*

-50 y.o. African American mother

Parental Relatedness



*“Knowing that my son hasn't given up on me. Because, like when I was in prison this last time for 90 days, and he sent me, you know, a card, and it says ‘I know it's hard mom I understand you're an addict but just please try harder this time. ‘ You know he hasn't written me off yet. You know what I mean? He's still there. **He knows, he empathizes with me, and my mother does as well.** And I have like, I said in the beginning, I have a great support system, so it's **comforting most of the time to be a parent.**”*

-44 y.o. White mother

Summary of Findings

Fewer differences between TC parents & non-TC parents than hypothesized

- Autonomy (authorship) lower among TC parents
- More similar than different

Need to foster autonomy in what is often seen as a coercive environment

- Interviews reinforced quantitative findings

Summary of Findings



Differences in relatedness between mothers & fathers

- Supported by quantitative data & interviews
- Higher levels of relatedness/belonging especially in mothers
- Opportunities to foster greater relatedness in fathers is needed

Avoid assumptions about your participants who have lost custody of their children

- Relatedness & motivation for change were high among TC parents regardless of custody status

Parenting Adult Children: Special issues



- Acceptance: they are responsible for their own choices
- Substance use in adult children & risks to own recovery
- Physical distance: Shared activities, time?
- Self-Compassion & Forgiveness for past
- Communication & Problem-solving skills challenges
- Assertive communication: boundary setting & conflict management skills
- Listening skills & expressing empathy
- Express positive feelings
- Emotion regulation skills-alternatives to substance use

Adapting Multidimensional Family Therapy for Treatment Court Parents of Adult Children



Engaging Moms Program for Family Court (Dakof et al. 2010)

Core areas of change:

1. Mother's motivation & commitment to succeed in drug court & change her life
2. Emotional attachment between mother & her children
3. Relationships between the mother and her family of origin
4. Parenting skills for minor children
5. Mother's romantic relationships
6. Emotional regulation, problem solving, and communication skills

Suggested adaptations for Treatment Court parents with adult children

Core areas of change:

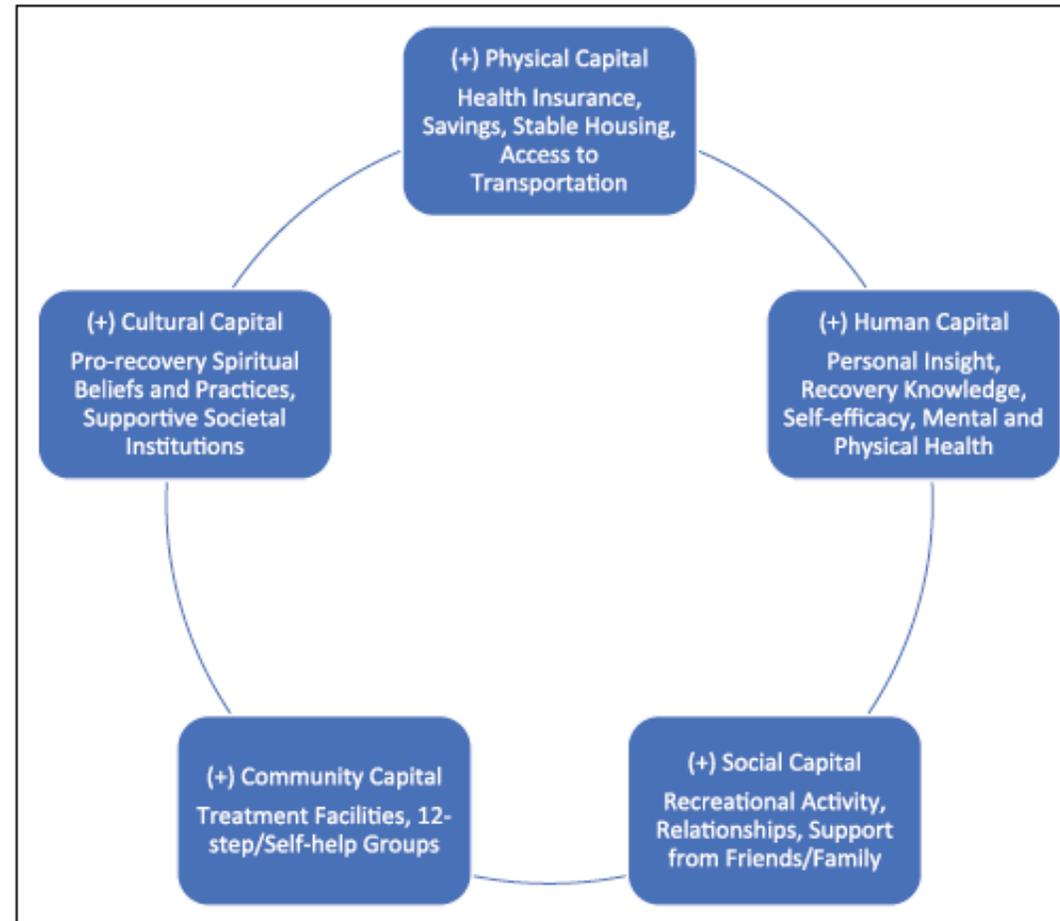
1. Mother/father/figures' motivation & commitment to success in court programs & change their lives
2. Emotional attachment to adult children
3. Explore relationships with own families of origin
4. Knowledge & skill acquisition regarding parenting adults, healthy boundaries
5. Bolstering social support
6. Emotional regulation, problem solving, & communication skills.

Moving to a Family Centered ATC



- Consider role of recovery capital (Palombi et al., 2019)
 - physical, human, social, community, cultural

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Moving to a Family Centered ATC



- Consider role of recovery capital (Palombi et al., 2019)
 - physical, human, social, community, cultural
- Treatment
 - Offer parenting classes (lower recidivism & costs; Carey et al., 2012)
 - Offer parent skills w/behavioral couples therapy (Lam et al., 2008)
- All team members
 - Know names & ages of children
 - Ask about children & family well being, progress & challenges
 - Ask about parenting skills learned & used
 - Understand the intersection between the CJS & Child Welfare System

Screening & Assessment



- *Alabama Parenting Questionnaire*
- *Parent Child Communication scale*
- *Behavior Assessment Systems for Children*
- *North Carolina Family Assessment Scale – General + Reunification (NCFAS-G+R)*
- *Relationship Inquiry Tool (RIT)*

- **Children**
 - *Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3); (Drotar et al., 2008); 1 mo. -5^{1/2} years*

Curricula & Resources



- Strengthening Families
- Celebrating Families!
- Parenting Inside Out

- Community Mapping
- Children & Family Futures (cffutures.org)
- National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges (ncjfcj.org)

Children/Family-Related Data Collection



- # of Child(ren)
- Ages of Child(ren)
- Ever lost custody?
- Currently have custody?
 - If no, current caregiver?
- Marital Status
- # of babies born while enrolled
- # of drug-free babies born while enrolled
- Previous/current involvement with the child welfare system

Thank you!



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Visit the www.ndcrc.org website for additional resources!

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