



Community Corrections

BUREAU



Writing Effective Case Notes in Community Corrections

“If it’s not documented, it never happened”

*Fostering Community Partnerships
Enhancing Community Safety
Reducing Harm to Citizens
Positively Impacting Lives*

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Writing effective case notes



Our agenda today

- Why do we need to write case notes?
- How do we write case notes?
 - Getting focused
 - Case Note content
 - Keeping it relevant and concise
- What do you bring to the process as a parole Officer?

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Why do we need to write case notes???

- It has an historic place in community supervision
- It is a permanent legal record of interactions
- It provides an orderly and systemic management of cases
- “If it isn’t written down, it didn’t happen”
- It’s a tool used to reflect on our service delivery and to learn and improve our services

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It's the age of accountability.

Case notes capture these important factors that funders (legislature) need to know:

- Determine if the services offered match offender needs.
- Programs are performing as expected, are cost effective, and produce results.
- Documents the full story of the officer's and offender's actions while on supervision.

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Do it for yourself and the offender.

- Case Notes reflect your efforts as a professional in Community Corrections
- Case Notes reflect acknowledgement of offender's issues within a case plan during reentry.
- Case Notes acknowledges our responsibility to offenders as a service provider
- Case Notes documents the relationship we have with offenders during their time on supervision

Case Notes
shouldn't be kept a
secret. They need
to tell a story that
any reader can
appreciate.



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- Lets get started



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What are Case Notes?????

Case notes are:

- A written **note** recording information, interactions and observations of an offender through the course of their supervision.
- Ideally, case notes can cover progress or lack of progress towards goals within the offender's supervision plan. Notes may include:
 - Documenting general information about the offender
 - Identifying strategies that address risk/needs of the offender
 - Recounting conversations, observations and interactions with the offender
 - Documenting stakeholder information and interactions

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- **Case Notes should also...**

- Describe behaviors reported by the offender and collateral contacts
- Record statements made by the offender/stakeholder
- Record your observations
- Substantiate conclusions and judgements
- Link services to documented deficiencies
- Address case plan elements

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- How to Write Case Notes
 - Write Case Notes that are
 - Clear and Brief
 - Concise and precise
 - Accurate and complete
 - Readable with acceptable grammar
 - What should you avoid?
 - Avoid “Clichés”
 - Avoid “Street Talk”
 - Avoid “Jargon”
 - Avoid stereotypes and prejudices
 - NO “returps” and copying and pasting prior case notes

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Strong verbs to use...

- Advised
- Assessed
- Assisted
- Clarified
- Confronted
- Directed
- Encouraged
- Recommended
- Referred
- Summarized
- Supported
- Urged

Words to avoid...

- Abnormal
- Disturbed
- Hysterical
- Immature
- Impulsive
- Irrational
- Troubled
- Uncooperative
- Unfit
- Dirt Bag
- Crazy
- Crook

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Considerations when writing case notes:

1. Timing of case notes. Case notes should be written as soon as possible after the contact (TM 1003.8-1.0-1.2)
2. Consistency and content of case notes.
 - What kind of contact was it (phone, office letter, text etc.)?
 - Where did the contact take place? (office, employment treatment center)
 - What was accomplished at the contact or meeting The case plan must be discussed! Note any progress made or barriers identified.
3. Case notes must be objective in nature. Avoid bias by leaving personal opinions and assumptions out.
4. Documentation should be fact based to the greatest extent possible. Facts are observations (what you saw). What you heard, and information that was provided.

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One accepted method of writing case note is the
DAP method using

- Description (data)
- Assessment
- Plan.

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The “DAP” System Notes can be brief, but they need to include the following:

- **DESCRIPTION (data)** : An objective description of pertinent information
 - WHEN:** Note ACTUAL DATE contact happened: month, day, and YEAR, and TIME of day
 - WHERE :** Note location where contact occurred. Note the specific address if it’s a new location.
 - WHO:** Note EVERYONE who was present.
 - WHAT:** What did you and the subject do (offender, sponsor, counselor)? Note purpose of visit, topics discussed, reactions, and outcome of contact.
- **ASSESSMENT:** How is offender working toward his/her goals? How are they presenting him/herself? (i.e. what did you see?)
- **PLAN:** Statements about what will happen next. Make a plan for next step; a date for next visit. What needs to be done? When and by whom? Note any upcoming major changes/issues. Try to relate it back to the case plan.

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The “DAP” System Notes can be brief, but they need to include the following:

Example of a good and bad case note

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Scenario: Offender Sherry: It was reported that Offender Sherry, reported 20 minutes late to her counseling session today. The provider reported when participants are over 10 minutes late, they do not get credit for attending. When you confronted the offender that you would not be able to count her as attending counseling, she got mad at you, yelled about her child having a doctor's appointment and then left the office. You tried to talk to her about the counselor's attendance policy, but she left too quickly. You suspect she didn't have a doctor's appointment since this is her typical behavior and you are frustrated.

Poor Case Note: Sherry came to her counseling session late as usual. I told her that you can't be late and get credit for the session. She told me her kid was at the emergency room. I think she is lying about this. She got mad at me and stormed off. I will call and talk to her about her excuse if it isn't a lie.

Better Case Note: It was reported that Offender Sherry came to her counseling session 25 minutes late today. The counselor's policy is that if offenders are over 10 minutes late, they will not get credit for the class which was explained to her. In a loud and angry voice, Sherry said she was late because she had to bring her daughter to the emergency room. Sherry walked out my office before I could explain acceptable behavior. Verification from emergency room doctor will help determine if she had a valid excuse. I will request appropriate documentation by phone tomorrow morning when I call Sherry.

If a co-worker or supervisor had to "read" your case notes, would he/she be able to understand and get a clear picture of what is going on with the offender?

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Writing effective case notes activities



- **Scenario:** Offender Jerry Intake appointment: You are meeting with Offender Jenny at her initial intake appointment. You have never met Offender Jerry before, but know he is the brother of another offender on your caseload who is difficult, gets sanctioned a lot for not following through with her employment plan, and you suspect has a meth problem. For these reasons you were not looking forward to meeting Offender Jerry. Jerry comes to the appointment and seems to be really hyper. He talks fast, keeps getting out of his chair, looks at his cell phone, and seems generally distracted. Despite this behavior, he is quite pleasant and cooperative. Although, you are pleasantly surprised that he is nice, you are suspicious. He doesn't report any barriers besides being nervous about finding employment and moving from his mother's house. He reports his mother is becoming demanding which is stressing him out. You write the employment plan to make an appointment with Arizona @ Work to start job readiness classes and job search activities. When the meeting is over, he leaves quickly.
- **Poor Case Note:** Offender Jerry came into the office today for an Initial Intake Interview. During the interview he said he was worried about staying at his mother's house. I gave him information for Arizona @ Work Resources and instructed him to make an appointment with them to help him find work. I don't know if he has any intention of following the plan. At the end of the meeting, Jerry ran out of the office. Jerry was acting so weird and hyper that I question whether he has a meth problem, which runs in the family.
- **Better Case Note:** Jerry came into the office today to complete his Initial Intake appointment. Jerry does not report any barriers to employment. He was instructed to make contact with Arizona@ Work for job readiness classes and job search activities. I gave him contact information about Arizona @ Work and walked him to meet the job specialist, Ray. Throughout our meeting, Jerry frequently checked his cell phone. He also got up and sat down in his chair 5 times. He answered all intake questions, but responded with rapid speech. His next appointment is in 30 days at which time his progress with Arizona @ Work will be discussed.

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Case Notes 101

<https://vimeo.com/89653856>