



Veterans Treatment Courts



**Veterans Treatment Court
Participant Handbook**



Overview of Veterans Treatment Court

Welcome to the Kentucky Department of Specialty Courts, which supports and oversees the operations of Drug Courts, Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC), and Mental Health Courts statewide. This handbook will provide participants with information on the VTC program.

There are many instances in which veterans return home after discharge and find it difficult to transition back to civilian life. This difficulty is often due to physical and mental wounds such as Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Some veterans self-medicate with alcohol or drugs; some are suicidal.

Joining VTC means you want to improve your life by working closely with the treatment team to achieve your recovery goals, develop job skills, connect to available treatment services, rebuild family and community ties, live a drug and crime free life, stabilize your living situation, and reconnect with positive veteran peers.

VTC is a shining example of Kentucky's success in Specialty Courts, which gives eligible participants the opportunity to make positive changes in their lives. Instead of spending time in jail, participants complete an intensive community supervision program overseen by a judge. VTC provides case management and partners with outside agencies to provide veteran-specific services. Veteran's Affairs (VA) or other agencies may provide substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, behavioral health services, and/or drug testing.

Personalized case plans are created with each participant to meet individual needs. These plans may include classes or services in the following areas: parenting, education, employment readiness, financial restoration, family services, etc.

VTC graduates are more likely to maintain productive lives with stable employment, paying child support, and meeting other obligations.

Your VTC Team looks forward to working with you in each phase of the program and wishes you success as you begin to set and achieve your goals.



**The mission of
Specialty Courts
is to restore
lives and reduce
recidivism through
judicial oversight
and behavior
modification.**

Anti-Racism Statement

Specialty Courts purposely identify and challenge racial inequities, biases, and discrimination. Specialty Courts serve a diverse population, and it is important to be sensitive to the diverse needs involved among individuals in the judicial system. The Specialty Courts community is caring, welcoming, respectful of diversity, and determined to work toward social justice. Specialty Courts must analyze racism beyond the actions of individuals because racism is embedded in the very fabric of our society.



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4 Pillars of **LASTING RECOVERY**

Veterans Treatment Courts focus on the 4 Pillars of Lasting Recovery, taking a holistic approach to address SUD and encouraging long-term health for participants and graduates.



Home: Home is more than a place to live – it’s stability, safety, and a place for your support system to thrive. Home is a place where you belong, so we focus on ensuring everyone has a home.



Health: Health includes both physical and mental health. We have to address all health concerns that can be barriers to recovery. It’s important to be linked to professional treatment services (like comprehensive care centers) early so proper treatment plans can be created.



Purpose: Purpose includes meaningful, enjoyable activities – such as employment, education, or hobbies. It’s essential to find prosocial activities (sports, art, music, exercise, etc.) you enjoy and that bring a sense of purpose.



Community: Community is a network of support. Your community may include multiple groups of people – family, friends, co-workers, peers in Drug Court, exercise partners, bandmates, etc. It’s important that your community provides positive influence and support.



How Veterans Treatment Courts Works

Program goals are a set of goals all participants are expected to meet. These include, but are not limited to:

- To provide on average two (2) random urine drug/alcohol screens per week and appear for any drug tests for which the participant is scheduled (if applicable)
- Complete a treatment assessment and follow the treatment plan, as directed by the treatment provider
- Attend all scheduled appointments with behavioral health staff (therapist, case manager, peer support, etc.)
- Create a case plan with VTC staff/team and begin working the case plan
- Attend all scheduled appointments connected to the participant's case plan
- Obtain and/or maintain court-approved housing
- Attend all scheduled meetings with VTC staff/team
- Indicate an understanding of any diagnosis, such as SUD and/or mental health (MH) disorders
- Attend a recovery support program (options include, but are not limited to, AA, NA, Celebrate Recovery, SMART Recovery, Life Coach services, Veteran Centered Support Groups, etc.)
- Remain free from the use of addictive substances, including alcohol, marijuana, and prescription medications that are not directly prescribed to the participant by a medical practitioner
- Eliminate positive messaging of alcohol and drugs by not wearing clothing that advertises or promotes drugs, alcohol, or paraphernalia
- Improve time management skills by maintaining a calendar, scheduling appointments, and appearing for all appointments prepared and on time
- Improve prosocial skills by engaging with VTC staff, Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Specialists, treatment staff, the judge, the team, and others who provide positive influence and guidance
- Follow any additional rules set by the VTC judge and team





Case Plans

With the assistance of the VTC case manager, participants will create individual case plans with unique goals. Some examples of individual goals may include, but are not limited to:

- Obtain employment
- Maintain court approved housing
- Regain custody or visitation with the participant's children
- Improve finances and develop budgeting skills
- Develop better time management skills
- Engage in prosocial activities

Treatment Plans

Treatment plans are developed by a therapist/clinician, with the assistance of the participant, after the participant completes an assessment with the behavioral health provider. Assessments help the therapist/clinician to determine the appropriate level of care for the participant. Some examples may include individual therapy, group attendance, intensive outpatient treatment (IOP), medication-assisted treatment (MAT), etc.

VTC staff help support the treatment plan by collaborating with the therapist/clinician, discussing progress (such as attendance) with the participant, and helping to work through any barriers that may affect the participant and their participation/progress with treatment.





Costs Related to the Program

There are no direct costs for participating in VTC. However, participants are responsible for any court costs, fees, fines, child support or restitution owed to the court. Payments are determined by the court and participants must provide payment receipts to VTC staff for their case file.

The treatment provider may require a minimal co-payment from participants for treatment services, unless the participant is declared indigent.

VTC maintains contracts with local comprehensive care centers, which allows the program to cover costs of treatment if a participant is uninsured (and not eligible for Medicaid) or is covered with private insurance. If participants choose to seek treatment from an agency that does not have a contract with VTC, the participant will be responsible for any costs associated with treatment.

Many participants maintain health insurance through the VA. VTC collaborates with the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist who can assist with treatment through the VA.

Phase Requirements

VTC consists of five phases. The program can be completed in a minimum of 18 months for felony participants and 15 months for misdemeanor participants. However, it is not uncommon for participants to remain in the program longer than the minimum time frames. Promotion from one phase to the next is dependent on each person's individual progress.





Phase I: Stabilization

- Provide, on average, two (2) random urine drug/alcohol screens per week (if applicable).
- Complete treatment assessment and begin treatment plan, as directed by the treatment provider.
- Create a case plan with the VTC staff/team and begin working case plan.
- Attend all required court sessions.
- Obtain and/or maintain court-approved housing.
- Attend at least one (1) weekly individual contact with VTC staff.
- Attend at least one (1) weekly individual contact with VTC mentor (if applicable).
- Indicate an understanding of any diagnosis, such as SUD and/or MH disorders.
- Attend recovery support programs as outlined in their Case Plan
- Remain free from the nonmedically indicated use of intoxicating or addictive substances, including alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), and prescription medications, regardless of the licit or illicit status of the substance, for at least thirty (30) consecutive days before being considered for promotion to the next phase.





Phase II: Treatment Stabilization

- Provide, on average, two (2) random urine drug/alcohol screens per week (if applicable).
- Follow all treatment recommendations, as directed by the treatment provider.
- Create a case plan with the VTC staff/team and begin working case plan.
- Attend all required court sessions.
- Obtain court-approved full-time employment, training, education, community service, or court-approved community engagement activities when ordered by the court.
- Maintain court-approved housing.
- Attend at least one (1) weekly individual contact with VTC Staff.
- Attend at least one (1) weekly individual contact with VTC Mentor (if applicable).
- Indicate an appropriate understanding of recovery principles (which include but are not limited to finding a purpose, developing self-care and creating connections to the community)
- Attend recovery support programs (as outlined in case plan if applicable); and
- Remain free from the nonmedically indicated use of intoxicating or addictive substances, including alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), and prescription medications, regardless of the licit or illicit status of the substance, for the at least forty-five (45) consecutive days before being considered for promotion to the next phase.



Phase III: Social Development

- Provide, on average, two (2) random urine drug/alcohol screens per week (if applicable).
- Follow all treatment recommendations, as directed by the treatment provider.
- Create a case plan with the VTC Staff/team and begin working case plan.
- Attend all required court sessions.
- Maintain court-approved full-time employment, training, education, community service, or court approved community engagement activities when order by the court.
- Maintain court-approved housing.
- Plan to satisfy court costs, fees, or fines.
- Attend at least one (1) individual contact with VTC Staff per week.
- Attend at least one (1) weekly individual contact with VTC mentor (if applicable)
- Indicate an appropriate understanding of recovery; (which include but are not limited to finding a purpose, developing self-care and creating connections to the community).
- Begin criminal thinking curriculum through the treatment provider.
- Establish prosocial activities – e.g., hobbies related to sports, exercise, art/music, reading, gardening, etc.
- Establish a recovery support system such as joining a veteran’s support group for PTSD or attending a 12 step program: and
- Remain free from the nonmedically indicated use of intoxicating or addictive substances, including alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), and prescription medications, regardless of the licit or illicit status of the substance, for sixty (60) consecutive days, before being considered for promotion to the next phase.



Phase IV: Self-Motivational

- Provide, on average, two (2) random urine drug/alcohol screens per week (if applicable).
- Follow all treatment recommendations, as directed by the treatment provider.
- Create a case plan with the VTC staff/team and begin working case plan.
- Attend all required court sessions.
- Maintain court-approved full-time employment, training, education, community service, or court approved community engagement activities when ordered by the court.
- Maintain court-approved housing.
- Continue to satisfy court costs, fees, or fines.
- Attend at least one (1) individual contact with VTC Staff every other week.
- Attend at least one (1) weekly individual contact with VTC mentor (if applicable).
- Indicate an appropriate understanding of any diagnosis, such as SUD and/or MH disorders;
- Engage in prosocial activities – e.g., hobbies related to sports, exercise, art/music, reading, gardening, etc.
- Attend recovery support programs such as joining a veteran’s support group for PTSD or attending a 12 step program; and
- Remain free from the nonmedically indicated use of intoxicating or addictive substances, including alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), and prescription medications, regardless of the licit or illicit status of the substance, for a total of ninety (90) consecutive days before being considered for promotion to the next phase.



Phase V: Continuing Care

- Provide, on average, two (2) random urine drug/alcohol screens per week (if applicable).
- Follow all treatment recommendations, as directed by the treatment provider.
- Create a case plan with the VTC staff/team and begin working case plan. Attend all required court sessions.
- Maintain court-approved full-time employment, training, education, community service, or court approved community engagement activities when ordered by the court.
- Maintain court-approved housing.
- Continue to satisfy court costs, fees, or fines.
- Attend at least one (1) individual contact with VTC Staff each month.
- Attend at least one (1) weekly individual contact with VTC mentor (if applicable).
- Develop a continuing care plan through treatment provider that includes a Relapse Prevention Plan (if applicable);
- Maintain a recovery lifestyle.
- Maintain prosocial activities – e.g., hobbies related to sports, exercise, art/music, reading, gardening, etc.
- Maintain a recovery support program.
- Remain free from the nonmedically indicated use of intoxicating or addictive substances, including alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), and prescription medications, regardless of the licit or illicit status of the substance, for at least ninety (90) to one hundred eighty (180) consecutive days during Phases 4 and 5 before program completion.

Participants may be ordered to comply with additional requirements while in the program, which include, but are not limited to:

- Visits to the participants place of employment, school, and/or home by VTC staff. VTC staff may be accompanied by a law enforcement officer for any visits.
- Curfews as established by the court
- Medical and/or MH referrals and treatment recommendations
- Ancillary services as needed





Suspension

If a participant is unable to meet VTC requirements or be supervised by VTC staff, the judge shall issue an order placing the participant on suspended status. Examples that may lead to suspension include but are not limited to, contagious or infectious disease, short-term medical care for the participant or a family member, or any other reason that would cause a temporary inability to meet court requirements.

Once the participant has had the opportunity to resume participation, the judge shall enter an order resuming active status and the participant will resume standard VTC participation.

During the time a participant is in suspended status they will not earn any credit toward completion of the VTC phases. If the suspended status is the result of inpatient treatment, it shall be at the discretion of the VTC judge to determine whether any credit should be given towards the completion of a VTC phase.





Treatment and Education

Participants will be assessed to determine what best will meet their needs regarding their SUD and MH needs.

Participants connected to, or interested in establishing connection, to the VA may receive treatment services from those facilities. If a participant is not eligible for VA services, they will be referred to other agencies for necessary services.

All VTC participants will be required to participate in any treatment services recommended, based on the assessment conducted by the therapist/clinician and outlined in the participant's treatment plan. Additional services may include, but are not limited to:

- Programs for domestic violence victims or perpetrators
- Anger management and parenting classes
- Family counseling
- Mental health treatment services
- Medical services
- Substance Use Disorder treatment
- Inpatient or residential treatment or recovery-based facilities
- Moral Reconciliation Therapy

Participants are required to sign Release of Information (ROI) forms to allow VTC staff to communicate with all outside agencies. VTC staff will verify participant attendance at all appointments by communicating with the agency providing the service.



Drug Testing Process

The Department of Specialty Courts contracts with a vendor to provide drug testing services to the courts at no cost to participants. Drug tests performed by facilities or individuals other than the contracted vendor, staff, or team will not be admissible in VTC proceedings.

If drug testing is part of a participant's case plan, participants must access the drug testing notification system daily and be present at the designated testing location during the designated testing hours when randomly selected to do so. Participants may be asked to produce a valid picture ID in order to be allowed to test.

The drug testing collection protocols include the following:

- Participants must remove any coats and/or heavy garments and empty all contents from their pockets prior to entering the collection area;
- A collection technician of the same gender will accompany participants into the collection room;
- Participants must wash their hands before providing a specimen;
- Participants agree to shift their clothing, raising shirts/ undershirts above the navel, rolling up long-sleeves above the elbow, and lowering pants and undergarments to mid-thigh until collection is complete;
- Participants may be asked to start voiding then stop voiding prior to the collector providing a specimen cup;
- The collection technician must have an unobstructed view of urine flowing from the participant's urethra into the collection cup;
- Participants must provide at least 30 ml of urine during the time allotted; and
- Samples will be tested to ensure the sample is not diluted, therefore participants should not ingest large quantities of liquid prior to testing.

Tampering with or adulterating drug screens is a criminal offense in Kentucky and may result in sanctions and/or criminal charges.





Medical Appointments

Participants must collect verification for all medical appointments and provide documentation to VTC staff for the case file. Verification may include, but are not limited to, the Specialty Court Medical Verification Form, return to work/school forms, lab test results, follow up appointments, lists of medications, etc.

Participants must sign a ROI for any medical providers so that VTC staff may collaborate with the provider(s) as necessary.

Prescription & Over-the-Counter Medications

Participants must notify VTC staff of any medication prescriptions prior to filling the prescription. Participants must also report any intended use of over-the-counter medications to the VTC staff prior to taking them.

If the situation is an emergency, the prescription may be filled; however, the participant must immediately report the prescription to VTC staff in the approved method (voicemail, email, etc.) and bring the medicine, along with all medical verifications, to the Specialty Court Office the next business day. Failure to comply with the proper procedures may result in sanctions.



Employment, Training, Education, Community Service, or Community Engagement

Two vital components to building lasting recovery is finding a purpose and developing prosocial connections. In order to support these two components, participants will be required to obtain and/or maintain some form of employment, training, education, community service, or court approved community engagement.

VTC Staff will routinely verify participant's engagement in these activities. Verification may include phone contact with a supervisor, copies of paystubs, or signed verifications from reputable community members and/or agency representatives. VTC staff may also conduct on-site visits.

Participants must sign ROIs for employers, community service supervisors, and others to allow VTC staff to collaborate with the partner agency.

Incentives, Sanctions, and Therapeutic Adjustments

Incentives, sanctions, and therapeutic adjustments are used to promote behavior modification. Specialty Courts intends to reinforce positive behaviors and respond to criminal or anti-social behaviors. Incentives, sanctions, and therapeutic adjustments shall be administered by the VTC judge. The judge will be assisted by the VTC team who will advise the judge from their areas of expertise. VTC Staff may coordinate incentives, sanctions, and therapeutic adjustments outside of court sessions, at the judge's direction. Otherwise, these responses will take place during court sessions.

Some examples of incentives may include, but are not limited to:

- Promotion to the next phase
- Certificates and tokens
- Decreased supervision
- Praise from the judge and team
- Tangible items – such as candy, hygiene products, gift cards, etc.
- Other individual incentives approved by the VTC team





Some examples of sanctions may include, but are not limited to:

- Admonishments from the VTC judge
- Additional community service
- Additional contacts with VTC staff/team/mentor
- Additional homework assignments
- Home incarceration
- Incarceration in a detention facility
- Other individual sanctions approved by the VTC team

Some examples of therapeutic adjustments may include, but are not limited to:

- Recovery-related writing or journaling assignments
- Increased level of outpatient treatment
- Inpatient treatment
- Increased attendance at support groups
- Medication management
- Individualized treatment – trauma-based services, anger management, etc.

These treatment-related responses are designed to address issues that present barriers to a participant's recovery process and enhance their overall treatment experience.





Successful Completion of the Program

The participant will have successfully completed the VTC program when it is determined that the participant has:

- Completed all five (5) VTC phases;
- Paid all restitution owed, unless the participant is unable to pay restitution in full while in VTC, in which case the VTC Team may require a reasonable amount be paid prior to completion
- No pending criminal charges;
- Paid all court costs, fines, and/or fees owed pursuant to KRS 533.030 before graduation if required to do so by the VTC judge after consultation with the VTC team; and
- Remained free from the nonmedically indicated use of intoxicating or addictive substances, including alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), and prescription medications, regardless of the licit or illicit status of the substance, for at least ninety (90) to one hundred eighty (180) consecutive days during both Phases 4 and 5.

Upon successfully completing VTC, the sentencing judge may choose to:

- Dismiss the underlying charge(s) if the participant was on diversion, but only when restitution, if any, has been paid in full;
- Modify the probated sentence to be conditionally discharged, but only when restitution, if any, has been paid in full; or
- Enter an order resolving, dismissing, or disposing of a contempt charge.





Exit Interview

Prior to graduation, VTC participants will be asked to complete an electronic exit interview where they will have the opportunity to explain how their involvement in VTC has affected their life. A participant's input may be anonymous and will be utilized to assess the effectiveness of the program.

VTC Graduation/Completion Ceremonies

Upon completion of the program, VTC participants will be recognized for their achievement and receive a certificate at a graduation/completion ceremony. Ceremonies are hosted by local VTC teams and may be open to the public. Participation in the ceremony is voluntary and participants may choose not to take part in the ceremony.

If the participant decides not to participate, the VTC Staff will present their certificate of successful completion apart from the official ceremony.

Separation From the VTC Program

There are three ways a participant can exit the VTC Program other than successfully completing it: administrative discharge, voluntary termination, and involuntary termination.



Administrative Discharge

If a participant cannot complete VTC through no fault of their own, they may be administratively discharged. Reasons for granting administrative discharge include, but are not limited to:

- Medical health makes it impossible for the participant to continue in the program; or
- Continuing in the program would not be in the participant's best interest, per the judge's discretion.

If the VTC judge determines that administrative discharge is appropriate, the VTC judge will inform the participant in a VTC session and VTC staff will provide the judge with a Notice of Administrative Discharge. Administrative discharge does not preclude future eligibility for VTC. Participants who receive an administrative discharge will be assigned to the appropriate circuit or district court judge for further proceedings.

Voluntary Termination

VTC participants may petition the VTC judge for termination from VTC utilizing the Request for Voluntary Termination form. If the VTC judge determines that the termination request is knowingly and voluntarily made, the VTC judge may voluntarily discharge the participant from VTC.

Following termination, the case will be assigned to the appropriate circuit or district court judge for further proceedings.

Involuntary Termination

The VTC staff/team may recommend terminating a participant because of non-compliance.

If the VTC judge decides termination is appropriate, a Notice of Termination shall be filed. The participant will be notified of their termination during the VTC session, unless the participant has absconded. Upon termination, the case will be assigned to the appropriate circuit or district court judge for further proceedings.





Mentor Information

Mentor Program

Mentors are veterans of one of the branches of the United States Military (Army, Marine Corps., Navy, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard) or their corresponding Reserve or Guard branches. Each prospective Veteran Mentor must complete an application, submit to a background check, and provide their DD214 to the VTC Mentor Coordinator for consideration. The decision to accept or deny an applicant is made by the VTC Judge, Mentor Coordinator, and Team. Upon acceptance, mentors may be assigned to a participant based on their branch of service, military experience, age/gender, combat experience or specific skills. Mentors will have an honorable discharge from their respective branch.

Mentors are a valuable resource to VTC participants. While they are not a counselor, they can act as a coach, guide, role model and support system as participants make progress through the program. Mentors will listen to the participant's concerns and share their own experiences with overcoming obstacles. As participants work to build prosocial relationships, mentors can help address the need for connection and positive reinforcement. Most importantly, mentors are also veterans; therefore, they share many of the same experiences that civilians may not always understand. Meeting with a mentor is essential to VTC.





Active-Duty Status

Participants in VTC who remain in active-duty status may continue with their orders and responsibilities with their respective branches. The VTC judge and team will work with the participant's commanding officer regarding any trainings or deployments. The VTC may employ the use of Suspended Status (pg. 14) while a participant is fulfilling their military duties. This will excuse the participant from any court sessions, drug testing, mutual aid (recovery support) meetings, and therapy sessions.

Veteran Resources

Upon a participant's entry into the VTC program, a VTC case manager/VJO specialist will assess the participant's housing, transportation, and general living needs. If appropriate, a VTC case manager/VJO specialist will refer a participant to state and local agencies for additional assistance.

There are veteran-specific resources available- transition assistance, VA, employment opportunities, and moving forward to a life after service at www.militaryonesource.mil or by using the QR Code that follows.



General Information

Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect

The Department of Specialty Courts shall comply with state and federal laws and regulations, including the following:

- KRS 620.030 requiring the reporting of a child who is dependent, neglected, or abused;
- KRS 209.030 requiring the reporting of an adult who has suffered abuse, neglect, or exploitation;
- KRS 209A.030 providing victims of domestic violence, abuse, and dating violence with links to protective and therapeutic services to those who choose to accept them; and
- Federal law and regulations, which do not protect any information about suspected child abuse or neglect from being reported under state law to appropriate state or local authorities.

Participant Grievance Procedure

The Department of Specialty Courts is committed to providing high-quality services to all participants. However, if any individual participating in a Specialty Courts program believes they have been discriminated against in any way or has experienced a violation of their rights, the participant may complete a signed written statement and mail it to:

Kentucky Specialty Courts
Administrative Office of the Courts
1001 Vandalay Drive
Frankfort, KY 40601

Complaints may also be emailed to specialtycourts@kycourts.net or faxed to 502-782-8700. The complaint will be forwarded to the appropriate Specialty Courts Supervisor for investigation.



Disaster Preparedness Plan

In the event of a natural or man-made disaster, every Veterans Treatment Court participant must contact the Specialty Courts staff by either voicemail or email to report their status (ensure their safety) and leave information on how to contact them. If there are any changes to status or contact information during a disaster, participants should continue to report updates to Specialty Courts staff via voicemail or email.

Program Hours

The Specialty Courts Office generally operates Monday through Friday during typical business hours. Participants should contact their local Specialty Courts Office for its exact hours and additional office information.

Local offices are closed during all observed state holidays. If an office is closed, Specialty Courts staff will place signage on the office door with contact information and the anticipated date for operations to reopen.

State Holidays

- New Year's Day (two days)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Spring Holiday (one-half day)
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Presidential Election Day
- Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving (two days)
- Christmas (two days)



Contact Information

Specialty Courts Office: _____

Case Manager Email: _____

Sponsor, Mentor, Peer Support, Recovery Coach, Treatment Providers: _____

Sober Support Network: _____

Suicide Prevention: 988

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 or text 838255

Other: _____





Administrative Office of the Courts

1001 Vandalay Drive, Frankfort, KY 40601

SpecialtyCourts@kycourts.net

502-573-2350

kycourts.gov



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