

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SYSTEMS WORKING WITH YOUTH INVOLVED IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

American Probation and Parole Association

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POSITION STATEMENT

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The juvenile justice system is designed specifically to separate juveniles from adults to meet the individual needs of each youth. To this end, the system depends on a wide range of agencies and organizations to address the holistic nature of youth who come to the system for law violating behavior. While the juvenile justice system handles youth with both delinquency and dependency issues, this paper provides a set of guiding principles designed specifically for agencies that engage youth involved in the justice system because of their law-violating behavior:

1. Justice system interactions should be specific to the individual needs of the youth. Interventions should be equally accessible and specific to all socio-economic levels, cultures, jurisdictions, sexual orientation, and ethnic groups.
2. To determine the individual needs of the youth, agencies should adopt an assessment process that includes a validated risk assessment, target those areas that are likely to lead the youth into future delinquent behavior, and provide services that are shown to improve youth outcomes. Moreover, agencies should assess for responsivity issues to ensure that any plans are developmentally appropriate, culturally and ethnically sensitive, and reasonable given identified barriers.
3. The juvenile justice system should approach its work from a human development perspective, understanding that each youth is unique, and that developmental growth continues to be shaped throughout a person's teens and into their mid-20s.

4. Juvenile justice personnel must be specifically trained to work with a wide range of culturally and racially diverse youth who come from different backgrounds, experiences, and value systems. Staff should maintain a working knowledge and skill set that allows them to work with individuals with mental health issues and those who have experienced significant traumatic events in their life. Staff should be selected for interpersonal qualities and should be trained in techniques that increase success. They should also receive on-going training and consistent feedback on their work as well as be updated on the latest research related to effective interventions.
5. Juvenile justice agencies should select and train supervisors to provide coaching and support staff in areas of effective delivery and fidelity of evidence-based practices. They should be trained to employ a learning model across the staff they supervise.
6. The juvenile justice system must have available a full continuum of culturally and developmentally appropriate, integrated services in the community to meet the broad range of needs of children and youth who have become involved in the system regardless of the means in which they entered the system. The priority of this continuum should be on the provision of primary prevention, early intervention and community-based supervision in the least restrictive setting without compromising public safety. The continuum should offer diversionary and educational programs as well as specialized therapeutic services that are supported by research. Responses should incorporate incentives as well as sanctions. If, sanctions are necessary, they should focus on least restrictive sanctions first and custodial placement last while keeping an emphasis on reentry and aftercare. Care should be taken not to mix low risk youth with high risk youth in programs across the continuum to avoid any contagion effect.
7. Court-ordered conditions should be applied judiciously, be consistent and equitable as well as contribute toward the child's healthy emotional and social development. If monetary sanctions are imposed, the system should consider the context of youth's ability to pay and the impact on family's functioning. The conditions should provide opportunities for additional skill building through use of positive reinforcement that is responsive to the youth's developmental stage and learning style.
8. The restoration of the victim, youth, and community should be included as part of any service system response that is addressing juvenile delinquency.
9. Positive family and social support networks should be fully integrated into the juvenile justice system. Juvenile justice systems should be family-friendly, engaging family and social support persons in critical decisions regarding their youth's treatment and program services and supporting long-term change. Research has shown that family engagement has resulted in improved recidivism reduction.
10. Youth involved in the juvenile justice system are often engaged in cross system services. Agencies should adopt an integrated care model that emphasizes the importance of interagency collaboration and partnerships with other youth and family serving organizations on behalf of the child or youth. Stakeholders such as schools, child welfare agencies, mental health and substance abuse services, health services, employment and training programs and other community supports should be mobilized to assist the youth in mitigating risk factors and strengthening protective factors. Frequent communication and planning about delinquency prevention and restoration efforts should occur among all stakeholders.

11. Juvenile justice agencies should be key participants in community engagement activities to connect families with appropriate services, practitioners, individuals with lived experiences, as well as to enhance and influence the design and delivery of services to strengthen families and communities. Community engagement is vital to successfully addressing issues facing the juvenile justice system.
12. Quality improvement and quality assurance are essential to implementing effective juvenile justice strategies. Juvenile justice agencies should regularly review intermediate and long-term goals and outcomes to determine if their policies and practices align with current evidence-based practices. In addition, agencies have a responsibility to monitor and provide feedback to service providers to ensure fidelity to the service delivery process. Agencies should develop memorandums of understanding (MOU) and execute contracts that require tracking and monitoring outcomes.

All agencies and organizations involved in the life of a child or youth must accept the resulting responsibility to provide services or assist in securing appropriate services which guide and nurture children and youth toward healthy and productive adult lives.

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