



RESEARCH REPORT

Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation

Rethinking Strategies to Promote Long-Term Change

Samantha Harvell

Hanna Love

Elizabeth Pelletier

Chloe Warnberg

*with Teresa Derrick-Mills, Marcus Gaddy, Constance Hull, Akiva Liberman, Megan Russo,
Janeen Buck Willison, and Mary K. Winkler*

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Chapter 1. Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Justice

Over the past several decades, we have learned a great deal about what works to improve public safety and outcomes for youth¹ who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. States and localities across the United States have increasingly embraced this knowledge and implemented several changes to the way they respond to and manage system-involved youth. For example, research has shown that removing kids from their homes disconnects them from critical family and social supports, interferes with prosocial development, and generally does a poor job of preventing reoffending, particularly for those at low risk of future delinquency (Fabelo et al. 2015; NRC 2013; Ryon et al. 2013). Between 1999 and 2015, the number of youth detained or placed out of home was cut in half.² Practitioners point to this shift as one of the most effective applications of research in practice, but a number of other gaps remain (Love et al. 2016). This report aims to fill one of those gaps, synthesizing the best research available into concrete recommendations for juvenile probation officers who interact with hundreds of thousands of youth every year.

The Case for Bridging Research and Practice

Research over the past several decades has significantly improved our understanding of what works to improve outcomes for youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. It also has revealed distinct differences between youth and adults—differences that have important implications for understanding how and why youth engage in delinquent behavior (NRC 2013). These differences also inform effective strategies for holding youth accountable, promoting skill development, strengthening family connections, improving perceptions of the legitimacy of the law and legal actors, and reducing recidivism.

Though practitioners are increasingly aware of the importance of understanding and responding to the unique needs and strengths of youth, they have expressed a need for more concrete guidance on incorporating developmentally appropriate practices in their day-to-day work (Love et al. 2016). By leveraging what we know about both how youth differ from adults and what works to improve outcomes, we can develop new, more effective strategies to meet the three primary goals of juvenile justice: enhancing public safety by holding youth accountable, preventing future delinquency, and promoting healthy development (NRC 2013).

BOX 1

Why Successful Strategies Should Consider the Unique Context of Adolescence

Youth differ from adults in many ways that are relevant for juvenile justice interventions. Youth typically have less capacity for self-regulation than adults and can have a hard time managing their emotions and behavior, especially when they are nervous, excited, or stressed (Somerville, Fani, and McClure-Tone 2011; and Tottenham, Hare, and Casey 2011; as cited in NRC 2013). Youth are typically more likely to take risks that will result in an immediate reward, are more susceptible to peer pressure, and have a harder time considering the long-term consequences of their actions (Figner et al. 2009; Gardner and Steinberg 2005; Steinberg 2009a). In short, youth are primed to experiment with risky behavior and lack mature capacities for self-regulation and judgment.

Research shows that the majority of youth age out of this experimentation phase, and most youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system do not continue offending into adulthood (see Farrington 1989; and Moffitt 1993; as cited in NRC 2013; along with Steinberg, Cauffman, and Monahan 2015). Social contexts, including families, school and work opportunities, and prosocial peer groups, provide critical supports to promote healthy development (Steinberg, Chung, and Little 2004; as cited in NRC 2013). Fair and just treatment—and the *perception* of fair and just treatment—are also critical to youth’s moral development and legal socialization—that is, the processes through which youth develop a sense of self, gain an understanding of their place in the community, and adopt societal norms about prosocial behavior (see Fagan and Piquero 2007; Fagan and Tyler 2005; Tyler and Huo 2002; and Woolard, Harvell, and Graham 2008; as cited in NRC 2013). Justice system responses that acknowledge these differences, respect the critical importance of social contexts in youth’s lives, and promote positive youth development are often better able to get youth on track to successful adulthood than more traditional, punitive approaches (NRC 2013).

The Need to Focus on Juvenile Probation

The latest national data suggest that nearly 300,000 cases processed through juvenile courts across the United States resulted in formal or informal probation (Hockenberry and Puzanchera 2018). In fact, nearly every youth who comes into contact with the juvenile justice system interacts with one or more probation practitioners (Development Services Group 2017c; Steiner, Roberts, and Hemmens 2003; Torbet 1996). Though specific responsibilities vary by jurisdiction, juvenile probation officers perform a wide range of tasks, including conducting intake interviews and investigations; making decisions or recommendations to the court about diversion, case processing, and placement; and supervising youth placed on probation or returning to the community from confinement (Torbet 1996).³ They play a critical role in the justice process and have a unique opportunity to intervene in a youth’s life and help get him or her back on track to successful adulthood.

Despite the significant role that probation officers play in the lives of system-involved youth, they may not always be well informed about important differences between youth and adults or equipped to leverage what we know about adolescence to effectively hold youth accountable and promote long-term changes. A recent study found that only one in three probation officers received any training on adolescent development (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2017a), and a review of state codes in all 50 states found no appreciable differences between juvenile and adult probation officers' responsibilities or tasks (Steiner et al. 2004). Further, the limited research that exists suggests that traditional probation models that employ intensive surveillance do not reduce recidivism (WSIPP and University of Washington Evidence-Based Practice Institute 2017). Increasing the use of developmentally appropriate practices in youth probation holds significant potential to improve efficient use of resources as well as promote youths' individual skill development, improve family functioning, and reduce recidivism—all of which build stronger families and safer communities (NRC 2013).

A range of national juvenile justice leaders have recognized the need for improved practices in juvenile probation, and many are working to reform practices in specific jurisdictions to align with the latest research on adolescent development and effective practice. Some recent examples are listed below:

- In 2018, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University released *Transforming Juvenile Justice Systems to Improve Public Safety and Youth Outcomes*, which synthesizes findings from interviews with key juvenile justice experts and practitioners to provide research-based guidance on transforming juvenile justice system practices.
- Stoneleigh Foundation Visiting Fellow Robert Schwartz made the case for a developmental framework to youth probation in a [monograph](#) released in October 2017 (Schwartz 2017).
- The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) [passed a resolution in 2017](#) on the importance of integrating developmental science in youth probation (NCJFCJ 2017). The council also released a bench card, "[Applying Principles of Adolescent Development in Delinquency Proceedings](#)" (NCJFCJ, n.d.) to provide guidance for judges on recognizing the developmental differences between youth and adults.
- With funding from OJJDP, the American Probation and Parole Association, The Council of State Governments Justice Center, and the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice launched a [Juvenile Probation Reform Academy](#) in 2015, offering a professional development opportunity for youth probation administrators to learn about what works to improve youth outcomes, including the critical importance of developmentally

appropriate practice. In 2018, this collaborative hosted a symposium on the “[Future of Juvenile Probation](#)” at the annual American Probation and Parole Association training institute that synthesized lessons on effective practice and key considerations for effective implementation.

- In 2014, the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched its Probation Transformation Initiative,⁴ which promotes probation reform grounded in principles of adolescent development. In May 2018, the foundation released “[Transforming Juvenile Probation: A Vision for Getting it Right](#),” which synthesizes the evidence and rationale for reducing the number of youth on probation and transforming the interventions for youth who remain on probation officers’ caseloads.
- Since 2005, the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice has partnered with individual youth probation departments in an intensive technical assistance effort—the Probation System Review⁵—to analyze and align their systems with best practices.

BOX 2

Understanding Probation in the Broader Juvenile Justice Context

Though this report focuses on how probation officers can align their practices with a research-informed approach, probation officers may be limited in their ability to shift practice. In some jurisdictions, probation officers have significant discretion to make decisions about diversion, develop and adjust case plans, respond to youth behavior with incentive and sanction options, and limit the circumstances in which cases must be sent back to court for review or revoked. In other jurisdictions, probation officers may have no involvement in pre-court diversion decisions, be forced to use a laundry list of standard supervision conditions, have limited options to incentivize youth or reward progress, and have strict orders from the court to revoke youth even for minor infractions. In every jurisdiction, other system actors—particularly judges and prosecutors—hold significant control over case processing decisions.

Furthermore, probation officers may have limited opportunities to coordinate with other systems, such as the child welfare system, to improve outcomes for youth on their caseloads. Some places have few formal mechanisms for communication and information-sharing between staff for child welfare and juvenile justice systems, leading to structural challenges serving youth enrolled in both systems (Herz et al. 2012). This can cause significant barriers for probation officers; according to rough estimates, as many as half the youth referred to the juvenile justice system are also enrolled in the child welfare system (NJJN 2016). Ensuring that all stakeholders are united in applying a research-informed approach to youth supervision is critical to success. This topic will be covered in some depth in the companion Bridge Project materials on implementation. Ultimately, though some recommendations in this report may not be feasible in every jurisdiction, most, if not all, practitioners should be able to identify promising opportunities for leveraging the opportunities that they do have and adopting more developmentally appropriate practices in their day-to-day work.

The Development of the Bridge Project

Despite the targeted efforts outlined above, few resources exist that provide concrete guidance on how juvenile probation officers, specifically, can integrate lessons from research on adolescent development and effective interventions in their daily practices. To fill this gap, the Urban Institute (Urban) is working to translate this information into actionable policy and practice recommendations through the [Bridging Research and Practice to Advance Juvenile Justice and Safety project](#) (Bridge Project), a cooperative agreement with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention that launched in 2015.

- In the first phase of the project, Urban’s multidisciplinary researchers focused on identifying areas where research is not fully informing policy and practice. Using a systematic approach, the Urban team identified a need for practical guidance on how juvenile justice practitioners can change daily practices to respond to the unique needs and strengths of adolescents (Love et al. 2016). Practitioners, stakeholders, researchers, and national experts agreed that few practical tools for translation exist in this area. This foundational research also identified three key target populations for translation tools: probation officers, judges, and policymakers.
- Building on this work, the second phase of the project focuses on bridging research and practice in youth probation and aims to develop tools to help probation officers and agencies align their practices with research on adolescent development and what works to reduce recidivism and improve youth, agency, and community outcomes. This report provides concrete guidance for frontline probation staff to align their work with our best knowledge of the unique needs and strengths of youth and successful strategies to promote positive youth development, maximize the efficient use of limited supervision resources, reduce recidivism, and ultimately improve public safety. It is the first of several Bridge Project probation products, all of which focus on translating research on adolescent development and what works to reduce recidivism and improve positive youth development outcomes for youth in the probation context.
- Future Bridge Project products are planned in two tracks: practitioner-oriented, hands-on materials (e.g., fact sheets, wallet cards, videos, and/or worksheets) that summarize key lessons from the report in more accessible formats; and implementation products that address key considerations for probation administrators and supervisors establishing a research-informed approach at the agency level. Implementation products summarize how probation agency routines and expectations may need to change to support developmentally appropriate practice, including staff skills and training needs, agency culture and dynamics, policies and

procedures, data systems and quality assurance protocols, stakeholder relationships, and leadership engagement.

BOX 3

The Bridge Project Methodology

The Bridge Project uses key findings from a large body of multidisciplinary research to develop detailed, practical recommendations for the field. To promote rigor, generalizability, and replicability in the research translation process, Urban will release a detailed summary of the methods used to review, synthesize, and translate information into the practice recommendations included in chapters 2 through 6 of this report (see Harvell et al., forthcoming).

The Urban team combined findings from research syntheses published by the National Research Council (2013; *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach* and 2014; *Implementing Juvenile Justice Reform: The Federal Role*) with targeted, supplemental literature reviews on additional topics relevant to effective practices in youth probation (e.g., risk and needs assessment, graduated sanctions models, positive youth development programs, restorative justice programs and practices, case planning and case management strategies, and parental engagement strategies, among others). Following this research review, and with input from external research and practice partners, Urban identified five core probation practices necessary to align supervision with research on adolescent development and what works to improve outcomes for youth. Urban then identified two to four specific practice recommendations within each core practice. For each practice recommendation in the report Urban summarizes *what* research suggests is best practice, a brief justification for *why* it is important to effective practice, and multiple strategies for *how* it could be operationalized. In each case, the *what* and *why* are grounded in high-quality research on adolescent development or impact research on effective practices for reducing recidivism or promoting positive youth development outcomes. The strategies for implementing these practices (e.g., the *how*) include both research-informed and emerging practices in the field.

A Framework for Research-Informed Juvenile Probation

In the probation context, aligning practices with research requires shifting the way practitioners work with youth, including moving away from more traditional, surveillance and sanction models and toward new strategies for holding youth accountable, focusing on long-term behavior change, and promoting positive youth development. It also requires shifting thinking about why and how youth engage in risky behavior and how best to hold them accountable for their actions, including recognition that diverting youth from the justice system and toward supports in their home communities can be more effective

than further justice involvement. Along with these shifts, aligning practices with research may require reconsidering the role and expectations of the probation officer toward being an agent of change who collaborates with youth to change their thinking and behavior over time. The potential payoff for these shifts in thought and approach is significant; juvenile justice professionals hold the power to improve youth outcomes, promote respect for the law, and reduce the likelihood of future delinquent behavior (NRC 2013). The challenge is figuring out how best to support youth in their transition to adulthood while making sure that they—and the broader communities in which they live—are safe.

Research points to five core probation practices critical to supporting a research-informed approach in action:⁶

- screening, assessment and structured decisionmaking
- case planning
- matching services and promoting positive youth development
- structuring supervision to promote long-term behavior change
- incentivizing success and implementing graduated responses

These practices align closely with existing frameworks of evidence-based supervision in criminal justice (see, for example, Crime and Justice Institute 2009; Taxman 2002, 2012; and Taxman, Shepardson, and Byrne 2004). The Bridge Project, however, examines research-informed supervision strategies through a youth-specific orientation to highlight key considerations for working more effectively with youth.

In short, bridging research and practice in juvenile probation draws from what we know about youths' development and effective interventions to identify strategies that motivate short- and long-term behavioral change; promote healthy development; and decrease the likelihood of future misbehavior. Developmentally appropriate screening and assessment are the foundation of the approach: they promote an efficient use of resources, help distinguish youth who require additional attention from those who do not, and identify targets for intervention and services (NRC 2013; Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). The core of developmentally appropriate youth probation, however, is based in developing a dynamic case plan—in partnership with youth and caregiver(s)—to guide supervision goals. This case plan should set clear, targeted, and attainable expectations and goals for each youth (Goldstein et al. 2016; Schwartz 2017). Successful case management requires matching each youth to services that address his or her unique criminogenic needs, building on his or her assets to promote positive youth development, and incentivizing success through a system of rewards and graduated

responses to noncompliance that provide opportunities for youth to experience success quickly and clearly connect positive outcomes with achievement of short-term goals (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010; Goldstein et al. 2016; NRC 2013). A research-informed approach empowers probation officers to act as an intervention in and of themselves, using each interaction with a youth to review progress toward goals, reassess supervision priorities, and promote long-term behavior change. It also provides an alternative framework for accountability—consistent with the Balanced and Restorative Justice Model—that focuses on taking responsibility for one’s behavior, understanding how delinquent behaviors impact others, and making changes to avoid similar choices or actions in the future (OJJDP 1998).

Chapters 2–6 in this report offer concrete, actionable guidance for aligning core probation practices with research on adolescent development patterns, effective recidivism reduction approaches, and strategies that have improved development outcomes for youth. These chapters include a brief justification for each practice, several strategies for aligning practices with a research-informed approach, specific guidance for probation officers, the rationale for this guidance, and concrete ways to adopt this guidance. The chapters also link to relevant available tools and highlight examples of organizations and agencies whose practices align with the research. Words in **blue** are defined in the report glossary, which begins on page 60.

BOX 4

The Importance of Trauma-Informed Care

Research has consistently demonstrated the link between trauma and justice system involvement, showing that youth with childhood exposure to trauma are at higher risk for juvenile and criminal justice system involvement (Dierkhising et al. 2013). Up to 90 percent of confined youth have been exposed to a traumatic event; most often, this trauma began early in life and persisted over time (Abram et al. 2004). In addition, detained youth are more likely to have been exposed to more than two types of traumatic events—a condition known as **polyvictimization**, which puts them at higher risk for misbehaviors that could involve them with the justice system (Abram et al. 2004; NCMHJJ 2016). Girls in detention, in particular, have disproportionate rates of mental health concerns and prior histories of sexual victimization (Watson and Edelman 2012), while LGBTQ youth have disproportionate rates of being bullied, being victimized by family members, experiencing homelessness, and expressing suicidal ideation (Development Services Group 2014b). Beyond individual trauma experiences, exposure to community violence has been shown to increase youth’s likelihood of justice involvement (Finkelhor et al. 2009).

From a developmental perspective, trauma exposure can fundamentally alter youth’s brain and nervous systems, leading to increased reactivity, anger, and impulsivity (Teicher and Samson 2013) and often interfering with their ability to regulate emotions and learn from their experiences (NCMHJJ

2016). Practically, exposure to trauma can manifest in youth being unable to think past an immediate problem, trust caregivers, or control emotional outbursts—which contributes to misbehavior and increases their likelihood of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. When shifting practices toward a research-informed approach, it is important to recognize how trauma can interfere with youth’s normative development.

Juvenile justice system practitioners can become trauma-informed in their practices in many ways, including the following:

- Routinely screen all youth for trauma exposure and conduct follow-up assessments with youth identified by the screener as having exposure to trauma (NCMHJJ 2016). Trauma screening instruments include the [Adverse Childhood Experiences Study](#), the [Childhood Trust Events Survey](#), the [DSM-5 PTSD Screening Checklist](#), and the [Traumatic Events Screening Inventory for Children](#).
- Embrace the principles of trauma-informed practice, including using motivational interviewing, screening for risk, teaching emotional regulation skills, teaching relapse prevention skills, and providing education about trauma and grief reactions.^a
- Recognize the negative impact confinement can have on youth, especially youth who have experienced trauma, and advocate for youth to stay in the least restrictive settings possible (Pilnik and Kendall 2012).
- Provide access to trauma-specific services, including therapeutic assessments, evidence-based interventions, and rehabilitative programs targeted for youth with trauma-related disorders. Cognitive behavioral therapy for PTSD is an example of a trauma-informed intervention (NCMHJJ 2016). For a list of empirically supported and promising examples of trauma-informed interventions, see the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s list of interventions](#).
- For more information on gender-specific trauma experiences, see [Trauma among Girls in the Juvenile Justice System](#).
- For more resources on trauma-informed care, see OJJDP’s [Tips for Agencies and Staffs Working with Youth Exposed to Violence](#) and visit the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network website](#).

^a See the “Trauma Treatments” page on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network website, <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/treatments-that-work/promising-practices>.

Chapter 2. Screening, Assessment, and Structured Decisionmaking

Where to Apply This Lesson

The guidance included in this chapter is relevant during multiple points in the case process including intake, pre-disposition investigation, informal and formal supervision, and aftercare. Note that while risk information can and should be used to inform decisions about diversion and informal disposition, it should NOT be considered in formal adjudication decisions which should be based solely on the facts of the case and not take into account the youth's likelihood of future delinquent behavior. For more information on appropriate uses of risk assessment information and strategies for effective implementation, see chapter 4, "Preparing Policies and Essential Documents for Use of Risk Assessment in Decisionmaking," in *Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Guidebook for Implementation* (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012).

Bridging Research and Practice in Assessment and Case Processing Decisions

Using a risk-needs-responsivity (RNR) framework during youth probation can inform case processing decisions, guide case management, support more efficient use of resources, and reduce recidivism (Andrews and Bonta 2010a, 2010b; Bonta and Andrews 2007; NRC 2013). The research-based RNR model suggests that effective juvenile justice interventions target youth at high risk of reoffending (the *risk* principle); address the specific criminogenic needs that will reduce the youth's likelihood of reoffending (the *need* principle);⁷ and are delivered in a way that is responsive to the youth's individual learning styles, motivations, abilities, and strengths (the *responsivity* principle). Several validated risk and **needs assessment** tools are available to determine risk and criminogenic needs, and research has shown that they better predict the likelihood a youth will reoffend and identify the needs that must be addressed to reduce recidivism than unstructured professional judgment alone or the crime the youth committed (Andrews and Bonta 2010a, 2010b; NRC 2013; Schubert 2012; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Vincent 2015). Using RNR in a way that is responsive to the unique context of adolescence is essential for effective, efficient, and fair case management and processing, although careful attention is required to ensure that tools do not exacerbate bias.

BOX 5

Promoting Equity in Assessment

When implemented and used correctly, risk and needs assessments can increase uniformity in decisionmaking and case planning, but careful attention is required to ensure that tools do not exacerbate bias. Certain categories of youth—including LGBTQ youth (Developmental Services Group 2014a; Lambda Legal and Child Welfare League of America 2012), girls (Brumbaugh, Walters, and Winterfield 2010; Development Services Group 2018), youth of color (Moore and Padavic 2011), youth with developmental disabilities (Development Services Group 2017b), and youth with histories of trauma (APA 2008)—often experience unique challenges that can affect the accuracy of assessments and the effectiveness of interventions. Tools used for assessing youth belonging to special populations should have been validated with that population, and the assessment process needs to be tailored to each youth (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). It is critical to evaluate and treat children and adolescents with cultural competency and sensitivity to their diversity (NRC 2013). Specific guidelines include the following:

- Conduct assessments in the language in which the youth is proficient (Children’s Services Work Group 2015).
- Offer audio assessment to accompany youth with reading disabilities.
- Avoid risk assessment tools that rely heavily on arrest records, as they are especially susceptible to racial bias (Harcourt 2010; Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012).
- Consider supplementing standard assessment tools with instruments that have been developed exclusively for the population of interest (for example, the Early Assessment Risk List for Girls (EARL-21G)). Additionally, some tools such as the YLS/CMI have evidence of validity for a variety of populations (Pusch and Holtfreter 2017).
- Test for interrater agreement—or agreement in results among those administering the assessment—of the tool, especially as the tool is used with youth from different cultural groups or from cultural groups that differ from that of the person administering the assessment (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012).
- Consider how **unconscious bias** (attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect how people view and react to others) may shape interactions with youth and their caregivers or supportive adults. For more information on unconscious bias, see chapter 5, Structuring Supervision to Promote Long-Term Behavior Change.

Incorporating the RNR framework and the use of validated assessment tools creates more efficient and effective interventions, increases uniformity in disposition and case management decisions, and

helps limit overall system involvement (Bonta and Andrews 2007; Luong and Wormith 2011; NRC 2013; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Vincent et al. 2016). Research has also shown that using RNR in decisionmaking can result in fewer youth removed from the home without any increased risk to public safety, which is a positive outcome in itself (NRC 2013; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Vincent et al. 2016). However, careful attention to several organizational factors is necessary to ensure effective use of the RNR model. Poor implementation, lack of validity with the relevant population, lack of compliance by direct care staff, and an absence of available services all have been shown to undermine the potential benefits of RNR (Mair, Burke, and Taylor 2006; Miller and Maloney 2013; Shook and Sarri 2007; Vincent et al. 2016).

Aligning practice with research suggests probation officers (1) screen each youth at intake and divert youth from formal system involvement where appropriate; (2) use validated assessment tools to comprehensively assess risk, needs, and strengths; (3) use risk information to inform recommendations and decisions at key points; and (4) use information on needs and strengths to inform case planning.

BOX 6

Screening versus Assessment

Though “screening” and “assessment” are often used interchangeably, they refer to two different processes. Mental health and other needs screening refers to a brief evaluation used to identify youth who have immediate needs or require more in-depth assessment. Screening tools are typically used early in the justice process (e.g., at court intake or when youth enter a detention facility), can be administered quickly (in less than 30 minutes), and provide a cost-effective option for evaluating which youth require additional attention (Grisso, Vincent, and Seagrave 2005; Kerig, Ford, and Olafson 2014; Vincent 2012). Screening tools cannot be used to make actual diagnoses, and the results are only reliable for two to four weeks (Vincent 2012; Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). Assessments are more comprehensive, clinical evaluations used to determine whether youth meet the criteria for a specific diagnosis or require treatment and can be used to guide long-term intervention and case planning decisions (Kerig, Ford, and Olafson 2014; Vincent 2012).

In the context of risk and needs assessment, “screen” is more often used for tools that assess needs rather than risk, but some brief risk assessments can be used to screen youth for their likelihood of reoffending. Comprehensive risk and needs assessment tools produce a more complete and individualized profile of a youth, including the identification of dynamic risk factors (or criminogenic needs) that might influence the risk of reoffending (Vincent 2012). It is important to remember that while criminogenic risk is an important consideration for many case processing decisions (e.g., diversion, disposition, probation term), youths’ needs should not determine out-of-home placement decisions.

BOX 7

Detention Risk Assessment Instruments

Some jurisdictions use a brief screening tool to inform decisions about pretrial placement in detention. These detention risk assessment instruments (DRAIs) differ from the others discussed in this chapter because they measure both risk of reoffending and failure to appear in court (Steinhart 2006; Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). DRAIs are locally developed and unique to each jurisdiction, but they offer stakeholders an opportunity to base decisions about detention placement on objective, uniform, and risk-based information (Steinhart 2006). Less research has been conducted on the use of these tools and their accuracy in predicting both reoffending and failure to appear, but many jurisdictions have documented a correlation between the use of DRAIs and a reduction in the number of youth detained (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). Given the harmful impact of incarceration, particularly for youth at low risk of recidivating, DRAIs are a potential tool for avoiding unnecessary detention. For more information on DRAIs, see Annie E. Casey's *Juvenile Detention Risk Assessment: A Practice Guide to Juvenile Detention Reform* (Steinhart 2006).

Screen Each Youth at Intake, and Divert Youth from Formal System Involvement Where Appropriate

What: Use validated tools at referral or intake to screen for risk of reoffending and mental health and substance abuse needs, including a history of trauma (NRC 2013). Use risk information to inform decisions or recommendations to the court about diversion, ensuring that youth receive the least restrictive appropriate intervention (NRC 2013; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg 2010).⁸ Where appropriate, link youth who have identified behavioral health needs with community-based programming or services that focus on [positive youth development](#) (Catalano et al. 2004; Development Services Group 2014c; NRC 2013).

Why: Juvenile justice interventions are most effective when targeted to youth at high risk of reoffending (Andrews and Bonta 2010a, 2010b; Bonta and Andrews 2007; Howell and Lipsey 2012; Lipsey et al. 2010). Most youth who engage in risky behavior will naturally stop as they mature (Moffitt 1993; NRC 2013); especially for youth identified as having a low risk of reoffending, minimal to no intervention may be appropriate to hold youth accountable for wrongdoing while supporting normative, healthy development (NRC 2013). Though findings are mixed, research shows that youth diverted from the system at initial referral are less likely to engage in future delinquent or criminal behavior than those who are formally processed (Fine et al. 2017; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg 2010;

Wilson and Hoge 2012). There is also evidence that the likelihood of reoffending increases as youth move deeper into the juvenile justice system.⁹ Community-based programming that addresses underlying behavioral health needs, focuses on promoting positive youth development, and is responsive to youth's diverse attitudes, values, and beliefs can reduce recidivism and improve other outcomes (Development Services Group 2014b, 2014c; NRC 2013). Thus, aligning practice with research requires minimizing each youth's involvement with the juvenile justice system, identifying youth at low risk of reoffending, and diverting them away from formal system involvement as appropriate.

How:

- Administer brief (5–30 minutes) **screening** tools at referral or juvenile justice system intake for all youth, ensuring that tools
 - » have been developed for adolescents,
 - » can be administered in a standardized way, and
 - » have established reliability and validity with the relevant population and jurisdiction (Grisso, Vincent, and Seagrave 2005).
- Carefully document results of all screening and assessment instruments to support case review and agency-level quality assurance measures.
- Divert youth with a low risk of recidivating from further system involvement. Consider that no further intervention—where appropriate given the circumstances of the case—can still hold a youth accountable and may be most effective for getting youth back on track to healthy adulthood (NRC 2013).
- Consider informal supervision and targeted programming for youth at medium risk of reoffending as a way to hold the youth accountable while limiting the negative impacts of further system involvement. Programs that use a restorative justice model, take a cognitive-behavioral approach, and promote skill development align well with research on effective programming (Lipsey et al. 2010; NRC 2013). For an overview of diversion program types and benefits, see the [Youth.gov](https://www.youth.gov) information site.
- Use screening tools to identify youth who require immediate attention or further assessment for substance use, mental health, trauma-related symptoms, family dysfunction, and other risk factors. Numerous tools are available, including the [Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument—Version 2 \(MAYSI-2\)](#), the [Global Appraisal of Individual Needs-Short Screener \(GAIN-SS\)](#), and the [Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children \(TSCC\)](#).

- Refer youth at low risk of recidivating who have significant needs to services outside the juvenile justice system. Some youth may be better served through informal activities, such as connections to positive peer and adult supports in their community or referrals to positive programming that interests them (for more information, see chapter 4).
- Avoid “net widening.” Use diversion programs to serve youth who otherwise would have been formally processed in the system, and avoid involving youth who would have been diverted from formal processing (Development Services Group 2017a).
- For an overview of the screening process for mental health and substance use issues, see *Mental Health Screening within Juvenile Justice: The Next Frontier* and the US Department of Justice’s *Screening and Assessing Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*.
- For examples of overviews of screening processes in different jurisdictions, see Illinois’s *Overview of Screening and Assessment*, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice’s policy on screening, and the *Colorado Reference Guide* to juvenile screening instruments.
- For information on proven and promising diversion programs, see the *CrimeSolutions.gov Practice Profile on Juvenile Diversion Programs*, *Model Programs Guide (MPG)* literature review, and the *MPG I-Guide on implementing effective diversion programs*.

CASE STUDY 1

Screening and Assessment in Florida

Many states have implemented the use of brief screening tools to inform case processing and referrals. Florida has developed and implemented a comprehensive assessment process that begins the moment a youth enters the system, including validated screening and assessment tools to be used at different stages of the system. The Community Positive Achievement Change Tool (C-PACT) has a [prescreen component](#) that can identify youth with a low risk of recidivism who are good candidates for diversion and potentially youth with higher risk levels in need of the [full assessment](#). For more information about Florida’s screening and risk assessment process, including additional resources for implementing PACT, see the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice website, <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/partners/our-approach/PACT>.

CASE STUDY 2

The Adolescent Diversion Program

The Adolescent Diversion Program at Michigan State University is one example of a strengths-based intervention proven to reduce recidivism.^a Through the program, university undergraduate students serve as caseworkers for youth who have been diverted from formal system processing. Over 18 weeks, caseworkers work with each youth for six to eight hours a week to promote skill development, improve family functioning, and build connections with community resources. Youth who participated in the programming were less likely to reoffend than those who were formally processed in the system (Davidson et al. 1987; Smith et al. 2004).

^a See “Program Profile: Adolescent Diversion Project,” CrimeSolutions.gov, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=332>.

Use Validated Assessment Tools to Comprehensively Assess Risk, Needs, and Strengths

What: Youth formally processed in the system should receive a developmentally appropriate, comprehensive assessment of risk, needs, and strengths (Andrews and Bonta 2010a; Vincent 2015; Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). This would include a validated assessment of risk to reoffend (Andrews and Bonta 2010a), assessment of mental health and substance abuse issues if indicated by the initial screen (Grisso, Vincent, and Seagrave 2005), and a thorough assessment of individual and caregiver strengths and assets (Singh et al. 2014; Viljoen et al. 2012).

Why: Matching intervention and services to each youth’s needs is instrumental in reducing recidivism (Luong and Wormith 2011; Peterson-Badali, Skilling, and Haqanee 2015; Singh et al. 2014; Vieira, Skilling, and Peterson-Badali 2009; Vitopoulos, Peterson-Badali, and Skilling 2012). A comprehensive, high-quality assessment process is necessary to tailor system responses for each youth and to account for the ongoing physical, emotional, psychological, and social changes that define adolescence.

How:

- Before administering any assessment, clearly explain to youth and caregivers the purpose, use, and importance of the tool. An example script for introducing assessment tools can be found in appendix 1 of the [Jefferson Parish Screening and Assessment Manual](#). Avoid using acronyms and professional jargon that youth and caregivers may not understand. Understanding why they are being asked certain questions and how that information will be used may increase

youth and caregiver buy-in to the assessment process and commitment to responding accurately and truthfully.

- Use a validated tool to assess each youth's risk of reoffending and identify the criminogenic needs that must be addressed to reduce the likelihood that youth will reoffend (NRC 2013; Vincent 2012). For a more comprehensive list of risk factors, see the [National Association of Forensic Counselors worksheet](#). For a more detailed analysis of the most predictive risk factors for each adolescent age group, see [Predictors of Serious Delinquency in Adolescence and Early Adulthood](#).
- Ensure that each youth is reassessed regularly (Vincent 2012). Some states recommend reassessments every six months, when supervision levels change, and/or when significant changes occur (Weber 2015).¹⁰ It is important to ensure, however, that assessment does not become so frequent that it is burdensome to the youth, their caregivers/supportive adults, or the administering officer.
- Examples of risk/needs assessment tools with evidence of validity (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012; Lovins and Latessa 2013; Hamilton, van Wormer, and Barnoski 2015) include the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory ([YLS/CMI](#)), the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk for Youth ([SAVRY](#)), the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument ([YASI](#)), and the Positive Achievement Change Tool ([PACT](#)).
- Assess mental health and substance use needs where indicated by the initial screen (Vincent 2012; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014). If the chosen tool requires a specialist for administration, refer youth to the specified professional for assessment.
 - » Behavioral health assessment instruments with evidence of validity include the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale ([CAFAS](#)), the Behavioral Assessment System for Children ([BASC-2](#)), and the Practical Adolescent Dual Diagnosis Interview ([PADDI](#)) (Vincent 2012).
 - » For a more comprehensive list of mental health and substance abuse assessment instruments, as well as guidance on choosing an instrument, see [Screening and Assessing Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System](#).

BOX 8

Validation, and Why It Is Important

Risk assessment tools that claim to predict future system involvement need to demonstrate that they work—in other words, that youth who score higher on the scale are more likely to recidivate than those who score lower. The ability of an instrument to predict the outcome it is measuring is called “predictive validity.” The process of testing for this ability is called validation. Ensuring that tools have been tested and validated and/or normed with a group similar to the population it will be used to assess (with particular consideration to special populations, such as girls, youth of color, and LGBTQ youth) is critical. Generally, organizations can feel comfortable using a tool that has evidence of validity in a wide variety of settings with diverse groups of youth (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). Although local validation (i.e., confirming the assigned risk scores accurately predict reoffending for youth in the jurisdiction where the tool is being used) is often recommended, it is only required in certain situations; for specific guidelines about when local validation is and isn’t required, see *Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Guidebook for Implementation* (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). In general, tools that have been widely tested, normed, and/or use structured professional judgment do not require local validation.

Use Risk Information to Inform Recommendations and Decisions at Key Points

What: Assess a youth’s level of risk regularly, and incorporate risk information into decisions at each processing point (Andrews and Bonta 2010a; Bonta and Andrews 2007).

Why: Because youth are growing and changing so quickly, assessment results are only reliable and valid for a limited time (NRC 2013; Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). Assessments should be readministered periodically to account for the dynamic nature of adolescent cognitive and psychosocial development (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). Further, since aligning practice with research includes limiting system involvement where appropriate, frequent reevaluation can provide opportunities to reduce the level of supervision or the intensity of interventions, further minimizing involvement. Research has identified reductions in placement, use of maximum levels of supervision, and use of community services when properly implementing risk and needs assessments in probation supervision (Vincent et al. 2016).

How:

Probation Intake/Court Referral

- Use screening at intake to divert youth assessed as low risk from formal court processing (NRC 2013; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Vincent 2012).

Pre-Disposition/Disposition Recommendation

- Use a structured process to incorporate risk scores into disposition recommendations without eliminating flexibility to tailor decisions to a youth's individual case. Submitting a pre-disposition report for each case provides an opportunity to synthesize key information about risks, needs, and strengths to inform disposition decisions and appropriate supervision and service requirements. In addition, a disposition matrix uses risk level and primary offense to match youth to the most appropriate level of supervision; such matrixes have been associated with lower recidivism rates across genders, race/ethnicity, and risk levels (Baglivio, Greenwald, and Russell 2015). See [Florida's Disposition Recommendation Matrix](#) as an example. However, they do not necessarily consider youth needs and may provide insufficient information for determining effective service matching.
- Recognize that a "high risk" assessment does not automatically warrant residential placement (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012). Supervision options for youth assessed as high risk include probation supervision, residential treatment, and confinement (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014).
- Where confinement is necessary in cases involving a serious offense or a youth with a high risk of reoffending or failing to appear, ensure that recommendations are consistent with the shortest period necessary to complete corrective action.

Supervision/Case Planning

- Base the intensity of supervision on the risk to reoffend (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014). For example, require less frequent meetings for youth at medium risk than those at high risk of reoffending.
- Reassess a youth's risk of reoffending every six months, upon each change in supervision level, or following a major life change (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012).
- Wherever possible, use updates in risk level information to reduce an adjudicated youth's contact with the justice system. This could include reducing the number of supervision contacts or releasing a youth early from supervision.

Use Information on Needs and Strengths to Inform Case Planning

What: Target interventions and resources to each youth's needs with a focus on building strengths and developing skills (Bonta and Andrews 2007; Luong and Wormith 2011; NRC 2013; Peterson-Badali, Skilling, and Haqanee 2015; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Singh et al. 2014; Vieira, Skilling, and Peterson-Badali 2009; Vitopoulous, Peterson-Badali, and Skilling 2012).¹¹ When creating case plans, consider both general responsivity principles (the use of cognitive social learning approaches to promote behavior change) and specific responsivity factors (such as mental health disorders, a history of trauma, and learning styles). Requiring youth to engage in too many services may be overwhelming; prioritize targets for interventions and limit them to two or three at a time (Goldstein et al. 2016).

Why: A growing body of research suggests the importance of aligning intensity, duration, and type of services to needs and strengths of a specific youth in order to successfully reduce recidivism.¹² Further, interventions that work systematically to expand youth's competencies and help them develop in a supportive environment are the most successful in positively shaping the ongoing adolescent development process (NRC 2013); for more information on such interventions, see chapter 4, Matching Services and Promoting Positive Youth Development. Positive peer influence, opportunities to exercise independence, and support from adults and caregivers all contribute to positive youth development (NRC 2013; Scott and Steinberg 2008). Information gleaned from assessments can be used to tailor each youth's case plan to support these goals.

How:

- Clearly explain to youth and caregivers the purpose and use of any strengths-based assessment tools used.
- Target case plan requirements to address criminogenic needs (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Vincent 2012). For more on case planning, see chapter 3, Case Planning.
- Use conversations with youth and caregivers to enhance the targeting of criminogenic needs by tailoring services to address underlying issues (such as unresolved trauma) that might be causing other needs (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014).

- Take into account specific responsivity factors—things that may affect a youth’s ability to respond to treatment or interventions—when determining an appropriate case plan (Bonta and Andrews 2007).
 - » Remove or address barriers that limit the impact of interventions, including a lack of access to transportation or acute mental health needs (Lachman 2016).
 - » Consider learning disabilities or a history of trauma when crafting expectations and goals (Lachman 2016).
 - » Some risk/needs assessments include an assessment of responsivity factors. For example, part III of the [YLS/CMI](#) includes assessment items for several potential responsivity factors.

- All youth, caregivers, and communities have strengths (Barton 2016), and these assets—or [protective factors](#) (which have been shown to reduce the impact of criminogenic risk factors)—can be supported in the case plan. See the Search Institute’s website for a list of 40 developmental assets for adolescents that can be used in case planning (e.g., caregiver support, commitment to learning, [cultural competence](#), and self-esteem).¹³

- Work with youth and caregivers or supportive adults to examine strengths on which to build.
 - » Some comprehensive risk and needs assessments include an assessment of strengths (e.g., the YASI and the SAVRY) and the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths ([CANS](#)) also has multiple forms that specifically assess strengths in addition to needs.
 - » The Short-Term Assessment of Risk and Treatability: Adolescent Version ([START:AV](#)) also has some evidence to support its incorporation of strengths into risk assessment and case planning (Viljoen et al. 2012).
 - » For an example of a standardized tool used for incorporating caregivers’ strengths and needs into case planning, see the [Oregon Family Strengths and Needs Assessment Tool](#).

- Use identified youth strengths and interests as motivation to engage in prosocial activities, such as community service centered on a youth’s interests and assets or an assignment of spending time with caregivers/supportive adults (Barton 2016).

BOX 9

The Limitations of Recidivism as a Measure of Success

The goal of a research-informed approach to juvenile probation is to promote positive youth development and improve youth outcomes (such as education, employment, and skill building) *while* improving public safety. Throughout this report, we often use recidivism to measure the effectiveness of probation programming and practices, because it remains the primary metric of success in the juvenile justice field. However, recidivism has limitations as a sole measure of effectiveness. Some scholars have argued that relying on recidivism may exacerbate bias against communities of color because it is not necessarily a measure of individual behavior; it reflects both an individual's behavior and the system's response to that behavior (Butts and Schiraldi 2018). If people are under more frequent surveillance, they are more likely to be identified. In short, recidivism may more accurately capture the intensity of surveillance a person is under than the frequency of the underlying behavior. Additionally, the likelihood of recidivism may be inconsistent for similarly situated people across jurisdictions, as law enforcement, prosecutorial, probation officer, and judicial practices vary widely (Butts and Schiraldi 2018). While recognizing the usefulness of recidivism as an outcome indicator, such limitations suggest that justice systems could also focus on measuring positive outcomes, such as social development, community well-being, social belonging, and employment.

Chapter 3. Case Planning

Where to Apply This Lesson

This chapter provides guidance on case management strategies. The guidance is relevant during the case planning process and appropriate for youth on informal and formal supervision, including diversion, postdisposition, and aftercare.

Bridging Research and Practice through Case Planning

Case plans provide a road map for accomplishing probation goals; they are written tools to orient youth to specific activities and outcomes (Carey et al. 2010) and provide a framework from which to monitor progress, outline terms and conditions, chart a path for problem-solving, and identify ways to meet youth's needs through referrals and connection to services (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014). Research from the criminal justice and child welfare context suggests effective case management helps prevent further involvement with the justice system (Enos and Southern 1996; Healey 1999).

Case plans that align with research on what works with youth would be developed in partnership with youth and families (NRC 2013), informed by youth's risk to reoffend (Andrews and Bonta 2010b), include incentives and proportionate responses to promote behavior change (Goldstein et al. 2016; NRC 2013; Schwartz 2017), and connect youth with services and interventions in their community matched to their needs and strengths (Andrews and Bonta 2010b; Vieira, Skilling, and Peterson-Badali 2009). Aligning research and practice in case planning also supports a shift toward a dynamic approach to supervision in which youth and probation officers jointly set short- and long-term expectations and goals (Goldstein et al. 2016; Schwartz 2017). Finally, timely case processing is critical for ensuring youth receive—and, importantly, *perceive* that they are receiving—fair treatment (Tyler and Fagan 2008; Tyler and Huo 2002). Minimizing delays in case processing and structuring case plans to move as quickly as appropriate help reinforce the connection between the system's response and the original delinquent behavior (Tuell, Heldman, and Harp 2017). Aligning case planning with research requires probation officers to (1) engage youth and caregivers or supportive adults (including community supports) in the development of case plans, (2) set targeted and incremental expectations for youth, and (3) ensure youth and caregivers understand what is expected of them and the consequences of noncompliance.

Engage Youth and Caregivers or Supportive Adults in the Development of Case Plans

What: To align research and practice in case planning, probation officers would meaningfully partner with youth and their caregivers or supportive adults to develop case plans and set and prioritize probation goals (NRC 2013).

Why: When youth feel listened to and respected, they are more likely to behave (Fagan and Tyler 2005). This is also true for adults, but it takes on added significance during adolescence, when most youth crave autonomy and the right to be heard (NRC 2013). For this reason, aligning research and practice in youth probation requires actively listening and engaging with youth in case plan development. Engaging supportive adults is equally important, as they insulate youth from risk factors associated with misbehavior and are critical for youth's healthy development (Laird, Pettit, Bates, et al. 2003; Laird, Pettit, Dodge, et al. 2003).

- When engaging youth and family members, it is important for probation officers to understand how family contexts may influence prior interactions with and perceptions of the justice system. Certain family structures (including single-parent households and households with four or more children) can increase youth's likelihood of contact with the juvenile justice system (NRC 2001). This correlation is linked to the socioeconomic conditions (i.e., access to wealth, education, and employment) within family structures rather than the composition of the family itself. Studies also demonstrate that being raised in a single-parent household increases youth's likelihood of system involvement because single parents find it difficult to get assistance, find child care, and supervise youth while providing for their families (NRC 2001). Growing up with one or more incarcerated parent has also been shown to increase youth's likelihood of system involvement (Kjellstrand and Eddy 2011). Like other environmental factors, parental incarceration disproportionately affects youth of color, as communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration (Nellis 2016). All these structural factors influence youth and family members' interactions with the justice system and are important to understand when trying to effectively engage youth and families.
- In focus groups with parents of system-involved youth, parents report difficulties engaging with juvenile justice actors; they report feeling blamed for youth's problems, being seen as obstacles, and being insufficiently involved in decisionmaking and planning processes (Burke et al. 2014; Osher and Shufelt 2006). A different series of 16 full-day focus groups conducted with families, youth, juvenile probation officers, and other juvenile justice system actors in Pennsylvania

found several common themes, barriers, and recommendations regarding experiences with family engagement. Generally, both families and system actors described the importance of respect as a basis for all interactions, recommended that practitioners reach out to families at each stage of the system, felt there needed to be greater access to early intervention, and felt statewide policies needed to be changed to eliminate barriers to effective family involvement (MHAPA and Pennsylvania Council 2009). Research in child service systems including education, mental health, and child welfare suggests that parental involvement in case planning is crucial and can facilitate positive youth outcomes, including educational achievement and improved mental functioning (Burke et al. 2014). There is no one proven model for engaging families within juvenile justice, but some emerging practices are listed below.

How:

- Engage youth in the development of case plan requirements and strategies, identification of short and long-term goals, and prioritization of focus areas.
- Let youth define who their caregivers or supportive adults are, and work with them to involve adults in their lives who will support their success over the long term (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2013).
- View caregivers as experts and valuable participants in the case planning process, not as negative influences or at fault for youth's misbehavior (Burke et al. 2014). Recognize that caregivers may have had negative experiences with the juvenile or criminal justice systems before, and this could make them less comfortable asking questions or engaging with probation officers.
- Clearly explain how probation works, caregivers' role in the process, and the negative impact noncompliance and confinement can have on youth's life outcomes. Educate caregivers, if necessary, about the potential dangers of confinement for youth.
- Consider hosting a team meeting with multiple supportive adults in youth's lives, including mentors and caregivers, to jointly develop tailored case plans (Pennell, Shapiro, and Spigner 2011). For more detailed strategies to incorporate caregivers or supportive adults in case planning, see Annie E. Casey Foundation (2016).
- If possible, connect caregivers with other adults who have had family members in the juvenile justice system (sometimes called "family engagement specialists" or "family peer advocates") to provide peer support and help parents understand the system (MHAPA and Pennsylvania Council 2009; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014).

- If possible, connect caregivers with a single point of contact who can help them navigate the processes associated with court hearings, meetings with agency staff, and service provision (MHAPA and Pennsylvania Council 2009).
- Hold meetings in a comfortable setting for youth and caregivers—for example, in their communities, homes, or other places where they feel safe (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Taxman, Shepardson, and Byrne 2004; Trotter 2009).
- Provide translators for non-English-speaking youth, caregivers, and supportive adults.
- Work around youth and caregivers' schedules¹⁴ and provide transportation, if necessary.
- If needed, use technology (e.g., calls, videoconferencing) to facilitate caregiver participation in meetings or planning sessions. These would be developed with family input and would not take the place of in-person meetings (MHAPA and Pennsylvania Council 2009; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014).
- For a detailed guide with tools and resources on how to engage caregivers, see the Council of State Government Justice Center's [Family Engagement and Involvement resources](#).
- For additional information on effectively engaging caregivers and supportive adults, see [Justice for Families](#) resources and tools.
- Some states have implemented case planning tools to assist Juvenile Probation Officers in using assessment information to create meaningful action. In Florida, the [Youth-Empowered Success \(YES\) Plan](#) serves this purpose; find a sample plan [here](#).

CASE STUDY 3

DYRS Youth Family Team Meetings

The Washington, DC, Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS) convenes [Youth Family Team Meetings](#) (YFTMs) to help tailor case plans to youth's individual needs (National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Annie E. Casey Foundation 2012). In addition to DYRS staff, YFTM participants are parents, other family members, mentors, teachers, and other people involved in the youth's life. They jointly develop an individualized success plan that outlines the services the youth needs (like tutoring, job training, or substance abuse prevention) and the progress the youth needs to make within treatment.

Set Targeted and Incremental Expectations for Youth

What: To respond to the unique differences between youth and adults and to position youth for success on probation, probation officers would set targeted goals that can be carefully tracked, monitored, and leveraged to successfully promote long-term behavior changes (Goldstein et al. 2016). Prioritize two or three goals at a time, and move on once they have been met.

Why: Often, youth on probation are asked to comply with a large number of requirements over months to years (Goldstein et al. 2016; NeMoyer et al. 2014). Research, however, suggests that youth often struggle in this type of environment. Youths' executive functioning skills (such as anticipating consequences, planning, reasoning, and problem-solving) are still generally developing into adulthood (Goldstein et al. 2016; NRC 2013; Steinberg 2009a). Youth also can be more prone to distractions when executing complex tasks, and they are generally less likely than adults to successfully learn from their mistakes (Davidson et al. 2006; Goldstein et al. 2016). Youth often are highly susceptible to peer pressure, engage in risk-taking behaviors, and act without thinking (Goldstein et al. 2016; Steinberg 2008). To encourage probation success and limit the potential for technical violations (NRC 2013, 2014; Ogle and Turanovic 2016), aligning research and practice in youth probation suggests that probation officers set incremental expectations with youth and focus on promoting positive youth development.

How:

- Ask youth and caregivers what goals and objectives are important to them (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010; Butts, Mayer, and Ruth 2005).
- Recognize that the judge typically determines probation orders and often has a stock list; limit the number of orders or conditions with which youth must comply when possible (Goldstein et al. 2016).
- Develop probation orders or conditions constructively, aligning requirements with goals to promote positive development (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010).
- Use positive language to frame goals and expectations. For example, explain what goals would be achieved by attending a class or program rather than simply requiring attendance.¹⁵ For examples of short- and long-term goals to encourage, see [Washington, DC, Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services Positive Behaviors Table](#).
- Jointly set goals that are tied to youths' interests, easily measurable, and defined by a specific window of time for easy evaluation of progress and case plan adjustment once goals are met.¹⁶

- Set goals that can be accomplished easily and in the short term (such as consistent or improved attendance at probation meetings or starting community service work), so youth are likely to experience successes early on (Goldstein et al. 2016).
- For additional guidance on how to promote positive development through probation orders, see the National Juvenile Defender Center's (2016) issue brief on [promoting positive development](#).

Ensure Youth and Caregivers Understand What Is Expected of Them, the Consequences of Noncompliance, and Incentives for Meeting Expectations

What: Ensure that youth and caregivers understand what is and is not allowed under their probation requirements (NRC 2013). Make sure the consequences of noncompliance are clear, ensuring that youth understand what actions automatically trigger a certain consequence, such as referral to the judge or revocation of probation. If certain violations can result in confinement, be clear and upfront with youth about this. Ensure rewards or incentives for positive actions are given consistently and frequently to reinforce good choices (Goldstein et al. 2016; NRC 2013).

Why: Youth interactions with the justice system can significantly affect legal and moral development, influencing how youth perceive legal authorities and how likely they are to comply with legal requirements in the future (Fagan and Tyler 2005; NRC 2013; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014). Ensuring that youth understand the reasoning behind their case plan is critical to procedural justice and both perceived and actual fairness; it can also help promote accountability, healthy moral development, and critical thinking skills (NRC 2013). In addition, youth who fully understand the terms of their probation may be less likely to fail to comply with probation conditions, reducing their likelihood of experiencing the harmful consequences of confinement from a revocation of probation (NRC 2013; 2014; Ogle and Turanovic 2016). Further, since youth can be more sensitive to immediate consequences than long-term consequences (Goldstein et al. 2016; NRC 2013; Steinberg 2009a), immediate rewards and incentives are more effective than sanctions alone. Remember, probation orders best align with research when they are written to encourage positive behaviors, so reinforcing these behaviors quickly is essential. Rewards and incentives also induce a change in perspective of probation officers to focus more on positive actions rather than mere compliance.

How:

- When developing the case plan with youth and caregivers, use age-appropriate language to help youth understand the probation process (LaVigne and Van Rybroek 2011; Peralta et al. 2012). For guidance on age-appropriate language, see the [Washington Judicial Colloquies Project](#). Also, see NCJFCJ’s [“Applying Principles of Adolescent Development in Delinquency Proceedings”](#) and the National Juvenile Defender Center’s [“Using Developmentally Appropriate Language to Communicate with Court-Involved Youth.”](#)
- Employ strategies to “test” comprehension of requirements and goals, such as a quick quiz or assignment, in order to ensure that youth and caregivers understand what is expected of them (Goldstein et al. 2016; LaVigne and Van Rybroek 2011; NJDC 2016).
- Build in regular check-ins throughout the case plan to assess youth’s progress, check in about requirements, and discuss conditions of probation. Ensure that youth and caregivers are fully aware of the consequences of specific actions; explain at the outset what behaviors would trigger a probation violation that could result in increased supervision and sanctions including confinement.¹⁷ Avoid using acronyms and professional jargon that youth and caregivers may not understand.
- Discuss with youth the justification behind probation requirements to encourage buy-in and promote moral development (NJDC 2016). For example, ask youth about the pros and cons of specific behaviors rather than telling them what to believe (Winters and Schiller 2015).
- Engage youth and caregivers in conversations that seek mutual understanding, where youth and caregivers have equal opportunity to be heard, listened to, and understood, rather than being lectured or spoken to. Such interactive conversations can increase perceptions of fairness, increase understanding, and contribute to improved youth and caregiver outcomes.

Chapter 4. Matching Services and Promoting Positive Youth Development

Where to Apply This Lesson

This chapter provides guidance on case management strategies. The guidance is appropriate for youth on informal and formal supervision, including deferred prosecution, postdisposition, and aftercare.

Bridging Research and Practice to Match Youth to Services and Promote Positive Development

Research has found that juvenile justice interventions based in fear, deterrence, and control are often ineffective and actually *increase* recidivism for youth (Griffin and Torbet 2002; Howell and Lipsey 2012; Lipsey et al. 2010). Such approaches include military-style boot camps, shock probation, and “Scared Straight.” Instead of connecting youth with interventions based in punishment that have a correctional focus, programs focused on positive community support, strength-building, and cognitive-behavioral techniques reduce recidivism more effectively (Bonta and Andrews 2007; Howell and Lipsey 2012; NRC 2013).

Positive youth development is a framework that believes all youth, no matter how disadvantaged, can achieve positive developmental outcomes when connected to the appropriate opportunities, supports, and relationships (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010). It argues youth should have the opportunity to *learn* new skills, take on new roles, and exercise self-efficacy, and they should *belong (or be connected)* to active prosocial groups and positive adults in their communities. Research shows that such programs work best when they address key risk factors (e.g., family relations, association with negative peer groups), are rehabilitative (meaning they are aimed at promoting long-term behavior change), use cognitive-behavioral techniques that motivate youth toward self-directed change, and are located in the youth’s community (Henggeler and Schoenwald 2011; Howell and Lipsey 2012). Interventions that focus on attachment and family and community bonding have been found particularly effective in reducing recidivism (Griffin and Torbet 2002; Hawkins 1995). Programs based

in positive youth development have also been shown to improve other youth outcomes, including academic achievement, family communication, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life skills (Catalano et al. 2004; Development Services Group 2014c).

Research suggests that whenever possible, probation officers (1) connect youth to **culturally responsive** and gender-responsive programming, (2) connect youth with **evidence-based** programs (if available) that target identified criminogenic needs, (3) connect youth with positive adults and mentors in their community, and (4) promote skill building and provide opportunities for youth to apply these skills in their community (Benson et al. 2006; Lerner 2005). By doing so, probation officers can be a bridge between youth and their communities, connecting them to the supports and opportunities needed to further their positive development. Across all these recommendations, appropriate validated risk and needs assessments would be used to identify those in need of the most intensive interventions and to tailor interventions best suited to youth's individual risks and needs (Andrews and Bonta 2010b; Dowden and Andrews 1999).

Probation officers can face a range of barriers as they try to connect youth with services, including limited and disparate programming options across jurisdictions (Maschi et al. 2008). They may also have large caseloads and limited time with each youth under their supervision (American Probation and Parole Association 2006; Torbet 1996). To target resources most efficiently and meet the important goal of reducing future delinquent behavior, research suggests youth probation focus supervision and services primarily on addressing criminogenic needs and their underlying causes, such as trauma (Andrews and Bonta 2010a, 2010b; Bonta and Andrews 2007). Finally, careful documentation of service referrals, progress, and completion is critical to supporting ongoing planning and quality assurance processes at the agency level.

Connect Youth to Individualized Culturally Responsive and Gender-Responsive Programming

What: Aligning research and practice in youth probation would connect youth with culturally responsive services that understand and respect youths' and caregivers' diverse values, attitudes, and beliefs. Though the majority of juvenile delinquency cases involve youth of color, practitioners do not always come from similar backgrounds or know how to interact with youth in a way that respects their life experiences and culture. Further, probation officers often need resources and training to recognize

the unique needs of justice-involved girls and LGBTQ youth and to connect them with gender-responsive and affirming programming (NRC 2013).

Why: More research is needed on the effectiveness of programs developed specifically for various cultural groups, but the limited research available suggests that including cultural elements (values and norms, etc.) within a program can increase effectiveness (O’Conner, Small, and Cooney 2007). Research also suggests that to be culturally competent, services must meet a target population’s *specific* needs, which requires a clear and deep collaboration with target population communities to accurately and collaboratively identify those needs (Vergara et al 2016). From a developmental perspective, youth often crave respect and positive affirmation, thus programming would aim to respect and affirm youth’s cultures (NRC 2013).

It is also important to recognize how youth’s overlapping identities can influence their life outcomes. Different components of identity, such as race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and immigration status, can influence both youth’s access to resources *and* how youth are treated and perceived by system actors. Historically some communities, such as communities of color, experience discrimination, and this discrimination is heightened when members of these communities belong to more than one marginalized group (i.e., they also identify as LGBTQ or grew up in concentrated poverty).¹⁸ Unfortunately, there is a lack of rigorous evaluations for culturally competent programming targeted at youth of color, which leaves gaps in our understanding of the effectiveness of programs aimed at different overrepresented populations, such as Black and Latino boys (Vergera 2016).

A more established research base points to the unique needs and risks associated with justice-involved girls and LGBTQ youth. Compared with boys, girls are “high need” and “low risk,” meaning they are disproportionately confined for status and other low-level offenses (Development Services Group 2010a). Girls in confinement are also more likely than boys to report mental health concerns and to have experienced sexual violence (Development Services Group 2010a; Watson and Edelman 2012). More research is needed, but existing research on gender-responsive programs points to elements of effective programs, including the use of assessments, the incorporation of a therapeutic alliance, the use of gender-responsive cognitive-behavioral approaches, attention to healthy living (including physical, behavioral, and reproductive health), and the recognition of differences between girls (Development Services Group 2010a).

Less is known about effective interventions with LGBTQ youth, but research suggests they are more likely than their straight peers to experience bullying by their peers, victimization at the hands of their parents and other family members, and homelessness; LGBTQ youth also have more suicidal

ideation and are twice as likely to be arrested and detained for status offenses (Development Services Group 2014b). Girls and LGBTQ youth both have higher rates of prior victimization and are at greater risk for disparate health outcomes (resulting from symptoms related to trauma and mental health concerns), meaning they may require extra resources during adolescence—a period where youths' inclination for risk-taking is already heightened (Development Services Group 2014b).

How:

- Explore programming and resources in your community and build networks to ensure you learn of new programs and service opportunities as they become available.
- Provide an opportunity for youth to self-identify their ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Consider having them fill out self-administered forms to identify such information (Turpin, n.d.). Encourage them to disclose this information, but allow them to decline if they do not feel comfortable (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2015).
- Do not assume youth's sexual orientation; allow the youth to disclose this information (Majd, Marksamer, and Reyes 2009).
- Ask *all* youth their preferred name and gender pronoun and use that pronoun, rather than the one on the youth's official identity documents (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2015). Do not target only youth you believe may identify as LGBTQ, as this assumption could be incorrect.
- Identify trainers to teach about differences in communication styles, body language, demeanor, language use, belief about families or caregivers, perceptions of time, and attitudes toward authority figures that influence how you perceive youth and how their attributes affect how they are treated in the system (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014).
- Consider how your own values and unconscious biases (which can apply to race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation) may impact your perceptions of youth's needs. For more information on potential unconscious bias, see the American Psychological Association's "Retraining the Biased Brain" (Law 2011). Avoid using language that contributes to common misconceptions about sexual orientation, such as describing LGBTQ status as a "lifestyle" or "preference" (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2015).
- Connect youth with culturally competent supports (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014):
 - » Use in-person interpreters for non-English-speaking youth and caregivers (make sure these interpreters are not related to the youth or family). Provide youth and caregivers with outreach and informational materials in their native languages, even if they speak English.

- Ensure that all probation orders and court documents are accurately translated into youth and families' native language.
- » Encourage youth to attend speakers, events, and presentations that celebrate diversity (i.e., racial, ethnic, and gender-based).
- Connect girls with gender-responsive programming that does the following (Griffin and Torbet 2002):
 - » Provides a safe space for them away from boys.
 - » Emphasizes the importance of trusting relationships with staff members and other supportive adults.
 - » Emphasizes cultural strengths.
 - » Provides education about women's health issues.
 - » Does not assume all girls are the same (Development Services Group 2010a).
 - » Collaborates with girls during program design, throughout program implementation, and after they have completed the program.
 - For guidance on responsive treatment of system-involved LGBTQ youth, see [Coalition for Juvenile Justice, SOS Project \(Section 1.10: LGBTQ Youth\)](#).
 - For guidance on working with justice-involved Latina youth, see Southwest Key's [Mi Hermana's Keeper Toolkit: Promising Practices for Juvenile Justice Prevention Programs Supporting Latina Youth](#).

CASE STUDY 4

Multnomah County Communities of Color Initiative

To improve racial equity within its juvenile justice system, Multnomah County, Oregon, worked with community organizations with ties to African American and Latino communities to locate culturally competent case management, treatment, and mentoring for at-risk youth of color. The county also developed a culturally sensitive risk assessment instrument, implemented a hiring initiative to increase the diversity of juvenile justice staff, and provided training for staff on racial and ethnic disproportionality (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014).

CASE STUDY 5

Girls Circle

Girls Circle is a structured support group for girls ages 9–18. Combining motivational interviewing, cultural responsiveness, and trauma-informed care, it is designed to increase positive connections and strengths. An evaluation of girls on probation in Illinois found that girls in the program had lower recidivism rates and significant increases in condom use, educational aspirations, and education expectations (Treskon and Bright 2017).

Connect Youth with Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, if Available, That Target Identified Criminogenic Needs

What: Whenever possible, aligning research and practice in youth probation would connect youth with the small, but growing, number of evidence-based programs proven to reduce recidivism for system-involved youth (NRC 2013). If not possible, it would connect youth with programming that aligns with the principles of evidence-based practice (Lipsey et al. 2010).

Why: Many evidence-based programs are in line with research on what works with youth because they support rehabilitating youth within their own communities and recognize that families, caregivers, and adults provide critical supports for healthy development (NRC 2013). Programs do not necessarily have to be certified as “evidence based” to work if they adhere to principles of effectiveness, but it is imperative that programming be evaluated to ensure services address criminogenic needs of youth on probation (Lipsey et al. 2010).

How:

- Know which evidence-based programs are available in your community. A number of online clearinghouses provide information on proven models, including [OJJDP Model Programs Guide](#) and [Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#).
- Where appropriate and available, consider one of the evidence-based programs proven to be effective in multiple settings, including [Multisystemic Therapy](#), [Functional Family Therapy](#), and [Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care](#). Consider generic cognitive-behavioral approaches, which have been shown to reduce recidivism with youth. These approaches allow youth to identify their own problems and develop concrete critical thinking skills to solve them

(Landenberger and Lipsey 2005). For guidance on cognitive behavioral therapy in a probation context, see chapter 5, Structuring Supervision to Promote Long Term-Behavior Change. Another approach is motivational interviewing, which has been effective with youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system (Walters et al. 2007).

- For an example of statewide adoption and expansion of evidence-based practices, see the Justice Management Institute’s [“Translating Research to Practice: The Case of Louisiana and Evidence Based Practices in Juvenile Justice.”](#)

Connect Youth with Supportive Adults and Mentors in Their Community

What: Aligning research and practice in youth probation would connect youth with positive adults and mentors in their communities (Griffin and Torbet 2002; NRC 2013). To facilitate these connections, probation officers would cultivate positive relationships with organizations, groups, and key community members within youth’s neighborhoods.

Why: Probation officers have the unique opportunity to connect youth with positive supports within their communities. Research shows that youth who grew up experiencing racial segregation, concentrated poverty, and residential instability are at increased likelihood of becoming involved with the justice system. Black youth, in particular, are the largest ethnic group in the United States to grow up in residentially segregated neighborhoods due to a history of racially inequitable policy decisions, including the systematic discrimination of black and Latino families in labor and housing markets (Bell 2016; NRC 2001). Because of these structural, neighborhood-based factors, research-informed practice involves connecting youth with positive supports *within* their communities who understand the unique neighborhood-based hardships and experiences youth have faced. One of the most beneficial supports for healthy youth development is the presence of a supportive adult (Steinberg, Chung, and Little 2004), who can act as a protective factor for youth (Laird, Pettit, Bates, et al. 2003; Laird, Pettit, Dodge, et al. 2003). Connecting youth to caring adults is a core developmental asset shown to reduce risk-taking behavior (Development Services Group 2014c) and is particularly important for youth who have experienced prior trauma and/or may not have supportive families at home (DuBois and Silverthorn 2005; Schwalbe 2012; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Vidal et al. 2015). Research on positive development suggests the more assets youth are connected with, the less likely they will be to engage in misbehavior (Catalano et al. 2004; Development Services Group 2014c). While probation officers can serve as a positive adult supports themselves (DuBois and Silverthorn 2005; Schwalbe

2012; Vidal et al. 2015), research supports the need to connect youth with other positive, long-term adult relationships who will remain connected with youth after their juvenile justice involvement has ended (DuBois, Holloway, et al. 2002; Grossman and Rhodes 2002).

How:

- Let youth and caregivers identify existing positive supports in their lives and support these relationships. Do not assume these supports will be biological family members (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014).
- Consider the impact of prohibiting contact with other youth and adults on probation and ensure that it does not create unnecessary barriers for youth in connecting with supportive peers and adults in their communities.
- Cultivate relationships with community groups and supportive agencies in youth's communities (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2017b; Benson et al. 2006; Lundahl et al. 2010; Winters and Schiller 2015).
- As appropriate, create feedback systems and partnerships to check in with other adults in youth's lives, such as coaches and mentors, to discuss youth's development (Benson et al. 2006).
- Help youth identify community groups where they can foster a sense of belonging and/or develop critical decisionmaking skills, such as leadership councils (NRC 2002).
- Connect youth to mentorship programs that do the following (Grossman and Rhodes 2002):
 - » Rigorously screen and train mentors.
 - » Require mentors to remain in youth's lives for at least one year.
 - » Involve regular meetings.
- For more information on identifying effective mentorship programs, visit the [National Mentoring Resource Center](#).

CASE STUDY 6

Credible Messenger Mentoring

Credible Messenger Mentoring connects justice-involved youth with adults from similar backgrounds, often with prior system involvement, to form positive connections and act as relatable, positive role models. A crucial aspect of the programs is the relatability of the mentors, who often come from the same communities and are from the same racial and socioeconomic backgrounds as youth.^a Arches is a credible messenger mentoring program for young adults (ages 16–24) on probation in New York City.^b It connects youth with adult supports and uses an evidence-based curriculum to facilitate group mentoring sessions. A recent study found that participating in the program reduces one-year felony reconviction by over two-thirds, and reduces two-year felony reconviction by over half, with especially profound impacts for the youngest program participants (Lynch et al. 2018). Another credible messenger mentoring program, the South Bronx Community Connections program, has been found to reduce recidivism for system-involved youth.^c The South Bronx Community Connections program also promotes partnerships between juvenile justice stakeholders and local neighborhood organizations to connect youth with civic engagement projects and mentors.^d

^a See “Credible Messenger Mentoring FAQs,” Community Connections for Youth, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://cc-fy.org/credible-messenger-policy-forum/faqs/>.

^b See “Arches: A Transformative Mentoring Program,” <http://www.nyc.gov/html/prob/html/community/arches.shtml>.

^c See “New Study Shows Promising Results in Reducing Youth Re-offending,” press release, Community Connections for Youth, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://cc-fy.org/sbcc-report-release/sbcc-press-release/>.

^d See “South Bronx Community Connections,” Community Connections for Youth, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://cc-fy.org/project/south-bronx-community-connections/>.

Promote Skill Building and Provide Opportunities for Youth to Apply These Skills in Their Community

What: Youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system often lack the skill set to function as productive members of society and may have developed an alternative set of skills associated with delinquent behavior. One goal of the juvenile justice system is to build new skills to replace skills that previously contributed to criminogenic risk. Aligning research and practice in youth probation would connect youth with skill-building opportunities that promote prosocial development, such as educational programs, work experience, tutoring, leadership development programs, skills training, arts programming, and other programs focused on supporting youth’s strengths and skills (Griffin and Torbet 2002; NRC 2013). In this role, probation officers would be instrumental in linking youth with lasting community opportunities and supports that extend beyond the period of probation.

Why: Research shows most youth thrive in activities that are interesting to them and satisfy their craving to make independent decisions. They also are typically best served in their own community setting (NRC 2013). Research supports the use of skill development in curbing high-risk behavior (Catalano et al. 2004).

How:

- Ask youth to identify opportunities that are interesting to them *and* valuable to their community (Griffin and Torbet 2002; Hawkins 1995).
- Make sure opportunities do not conflict with normal development (e.g., do not interfere with school and home life).
- Be aware of transportation barriers and ensure opportunities take place in and involve the youth's community (Griffin and Torbet 2002; Hawkins 1995).
- Ensure youth have access to basic life skills training and have the documents necessary to seek employment or education (such as a state ID). This is especially relevant for reentry.
- Connect youth to programs that align with their career interests and passions. For more guidance on connecting youth with work experiences to support their goals, see this National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth [brief](#).
- Identify opportunities that do the following:
 - » Make youth feel physically and psychologically safe.
 - » Have a clear and consistent structure.
 - » Encourage supportive relationships and social bonding.
 - » Provide youth with an opportunity to belong to a community.
 - » Model positive social norms.
 - » Support efficacy, decisionmaking, and responsibility.
 - » Involve coordination among caregivers, school, and community (NRC 2002).
- Maximize youth's opportunities to develop and practice concrete interpersonal skills and critical life skills to promote healthy development.
- For more guidance on how programs can be based in principles of positive youth development, see the [Positive Youth Development Framework](#) at YouthPower.Org.
- Remember that program elements are more important than the program focus (NRC 2002). For instance, if a program promotes social norms and provides opportunities for youth to make

decisions, it doesn't matter if this program focuses on the arts or on leadership. Skills-building programs that have been found to reduce problem behavior with youth include civic engagement (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010; Uggen and Janikula 1999); cohort models and learning communities (Richardson and Feldman 2014); service learning, if focused on meaningfully engaging youth (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010; NRC 2002; Uggen and Janikula 1999); and sports that deemphasize winning and promote positive feedback and choice for participants (Andrews and Andrews 2003).

CASE STUDY 7

Youth Advocate Programs

Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) uses a strengths and empowerment-based approach to provide wraparound services for youth with a high risk of recidivating and for their families in the community. Services are designed to be intensive, short term, and individualized to accommodate for youth and family circumstances. Outcome results find that youth who participate in YAP have lower rearrest rates, greater residential stability, positive education results, and improved social behavior than youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Karcher and Johnson 2016, 2017).^a Additionally, youth who participated in YAP had improved connectedness with their teachers and schools, increased attendance, greater efforts to secure employment, and a large decrease in self-reported misconduct and their most serious disposition.^b

^a "Evidence of Our Success: Research," Youth Advocate Programs, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.yapinc.org/research>.

^b "OJJDP Study Finds YAP Involvement Positively Impacts Youth," Youth Advocate Programs, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.yapinc.org/Media/ArticleID/296/OJJDP-Study-Finds-YAP-Positively-Impacts-Youth>.

Chapter 5. Structuring Supervision to Promote Long-Term Behavior Change

Where to Apply This Lesson

The guidance included in this chapter is relevant during all interactions between probation officers and youth throughout the case including intake, pre-disposition investigation, informal and formal supervision, and aftercare.

Bridging Research and Practice to Promote Long-Term Behavior Change

Research shows that traditional probation models focused on surveillance and control have a limited impact on youth recidivism (Lipsey et al. 2010; WSIPP and University of Washington 2017). In fact, therapeutic programs focused on skill development and long-term behavior change outperform punitive or deterrence-based programs (Howell and Lipsey 2012; Lipsey et al. 2010). Further, core principles of the RNR model suggest that implementing cognitive social learning approaches targeted at youth's unique criminogenic needs is most effective in reducing recidivism (Bonta and Andrews 2007).

A growing body of research suggests that the probation officer-client relationship is important and can impact postsupervision outcomes. For example, research with adults on probation has shown that those who perceived their relationship with a supervision officer as supportive, fair, and caring were less likely to violate the terms of probation (Skeem et al. 2007, 2009) or be rearrested (Kennealy et al. 2012). Although little research has been conducted with youth, one study with girls found that those who viewed their probation officers as supportive were less likely to recidivate (Vidal et al. 2015). Qualitative research with youth probation officers also identified the strength of the officer-youth relationship to be instrumental to success on probation (Schwalbe 2012).

Taken together, these findings support client-centered approaches in youth probation that engage youth in a working alliance (Schwalbe and Maschi 2011). Though youth probation officers are, of course,

officers of the court and may have limited flexibility to respond to youth behavior (Griffin and Torbet 2002), most have multiple opportunities to implement proven and promising approaches in their interactions with youth (Miller 2015; Schwalbe and Maschi 2011; Skeem and Manchek 2008). Ultimately, youth probation officers have a unique opportunity to act as agents of long-term behavior change and get youth back on track to healthy adulthood. Research suggests that probation officers can be most effective when they (1) use structured meetings with youth to support long-term behavior change, (2) treat youth fairly and consistently while responding to their unique needs, and (3) foster a genuine, supportive, prosocial relationship with youth.

Use Structured Meetings with Youth to Support Long-Term Behavior Change

What: When aligning research and practice in youth probation, probation officers would use their meeting times with youth to promote long-term behavior change and support youth's self-defined goals (NRC 2013). They would use meeting time to establish positive relationships with youth and their caregivers, model positive behavior, and work towards shared goals.

Why: Research indicates that making mistakes is a normal part of adolescence and that most youth have a hard time understanding long-term consequences, making decisions that require future-orientation, and regulating their emotions and impulses (NRC 2013). During adolescence, most youth crave independence and respond poorly to authoritarian interventions (Howell and Lipsey 2012; Lipsey et al. 2010; NRC 2013). Research supports adopting cognitive-behavioral approaches that allow youth to self-identify their problems and steps to solve them rather than using punitive interventions (Landenberger and Lipsey 2005). Research also suggests that youth generally benefit from more therapeutic, motivational techniques that promote self-reflection about misbehaviors and self-efficacy for change (Lundahl et al. 2010).

How: Three strategies can support long-term behavior change in meetings with youth: helping identify and achieve attainable, short- and long-term goals; engaging in collective problem solving; and employing empathy and motivational interviewing techniques.

Help Youth Identify and Achieve Attainable Goals

- Ask youth about their interests, strengths, and short- and long-term goals (Butts, Mayer, and Ruth 2005). *Work with* youth to collaboratively identify short-term (e.g., studying for an exam

or joining an extracurricular activity) and long-term goals (e.g., graduating from high school), the steps needed to accomplish these goals, and a realistic timeline to accomplish them (Florsheim, Shotorbani, and Guest-Warnick 2000). Use incentives early on to reward short-term goals so youth are likely to experience success early in their probation term (Goldstein et al. 2016); for more resources on incentives, please see chapter 6, Incentivizing Success and Implementing Graduated Responses.

- Make sure goals are specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic to achieve in a timely manner (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2016). For guidance on identifying goals, see Pennsylvania's [SMART goals training](#).
- Use each meeting time to check in on progress and provide positive reinforcement for success. Carefully document youth progress and revise targets as appropriate. For more information on how to reinforce success, see chapter 6.

Engage in Collective Problem Solving with Youth and Caregivers

- Support youth in *self-identifying* problem behaviors and negative ways of thinking instead of *telling* youth what they did wrong or how to fix their mistakes (Landenberger and Lipsey 2005). For example, ask youth to make pros/cons lists about certain choices, rather than telling them why not to make these choices (Winters and Schiller 2015).
- Use information collected by screening and assessment tools to engage in conversations about youths' and caregivers' needs. Discuss the results of these tools and identify specific goals that will enable the youth to be successful in the short term and the long term. Engage caregivers and supportive adults in these conversations.
- Create opportunities for youth to practice and apply critical thinking skills in their everyday lives. Recognize and encourage positive actions by youth through frequent affirmations.
- Empower caregivers and other supportive adults to build critical thinking skills and encourage age-appropriate autonomous decisionmaking with youth.
- Work with youth to complete problem-solving activities, such as asking youth to identify three times when they made a decision that resulted in negative consequences or having them identify a problem and come up with five steps to solve it.¹⁹
- Using cognitive-behavioral technique, perform a behavior functional analysis that simplistically identifies thoughts and feelings before the event, develops alternative ways of handling the situation, and then encourages a discussion on the pros and cons of solutions. See the National

Institute of Justice web article, “Does Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Work in Criminal Justice? A New Analysis from CrimeSolutions.Gov.”

Use Empathy and Motivational Interviewing

- Support youth’s efforts to change themselves rather than using confrontation and sanctions to motivate youth to change.
- Use strategies to support self-directed change, which include the following (Winters and Schiller 2015):
 - » Being nonjudgmental.
 - » Avoiding arguments.
 - » Assessing youth’s motivation to change and moving them from pre-contemplation to action.
 - » Supporting self-efficacy by asking youth to come up with solutions. If there are none, ask if the youth would like suggestions. Ask youth to choose the best solution.
 - » Asking open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no” (e.g., “What would you like to accomplish within the next week?”).
 - » Promoting reflection (e.g., restating youth’s words to demonstrate your understanding of their situation and to prompt self-reflection).
 - » Making empathetic statements (e.g. “I understand what you are saying”).
 - » Reinforcing positive behaviors, statements, and actions by affirming good choices. For example, “You showed a lot of courage by speaking up when the judge asked you a question.”
- Use motivational interviewing (MI) techniques.

BOX 10

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a collaborative, person-centered method of eliciting and strengthening youth’s motivation for change. It involves (1) using empathy and making youth feel understood, (2) allowing youth to self-identify how they should change problematic behaviors, (3) respecting and understanding youth’s reluctance to change, and (4) supporting youth’s efforts to change themselves (Lundahl et al. 2010). Further, while there is misconception that motivational interviewing is, in itself, a therapeutic technique, the applicability of MI is much broader. Techniques of motivational interviewing can be applied universally in various settings from nursing to juvenile justice. These

techniques are not therapeutic interventions, but they aid in the introduction, provision, and conclusion of therapeutic services.

MI has been proven effective for youth with substance abuse treatment needs and holds promise for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Implementation is important when considering these outcomes, however; the effectiveness of MI can vary depending on delivery time, delivery mode, ethnicity, and moderated outcomes (Lundahl et al. 2010). Many juvenile justice agencies across the country have adopted MI practices (see, for example, [Pennsylvania’s “Motivational Interviewing Implementation and Practice Manual”](#)). For more information and guidance on how treatment practitioners can adopt MI, see “[Understanding and Using Brief Interventions in the Juvenile Justice System](#)” (Winters and Schiller 2015), published by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, “[Motivational Interviewing for Probation Officers: Tipping the Balance Toward Change](#)” (Clark et al. 2006), and *Motivating Offenders to Change: A Guide for Probation and Parole* (Walters et al. 2007).

Treat Youth Fairly and Consistently, While Responding to Their Unique Needs

What: To adopt a fair and consistent approach to probation, probation officers would clearly explain their role, use accessible language, and make conscious efforts to reduce disparities and unconscious bias in interactions with youth (NRC 2013).

Why: How youth perceive the justice system impacts their likelihood of misbehaving; if they think the system is unfair, most youth will be more likely to defy it (Schubert et al. 2012; Tyler and Huo 2002). If youth are not fully aware of their probation officers’ authority and the consequences of their probation conditions, they may perceive probation officers’ rules as unfair or targeted. Research suggests that clarifying probation officers’ roles improves youth-officer relationships, which has been shown to reduce recidivism with adults (Trotter and Evans 2012).²⁰ It is important to clarify these roles and expectations in clear, accessible, and age-appropriate language (LaVigne and Van Rybroek 2011; NJDC 2016; NRC 2013).

Research also suggests that youth of color have the lowest perceptions of fairness of the juvenile justice system (Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Tyler and Fagan 2008). This likely stems from the fact that they are more likely to be sanctioned for normal childhood misbehaviors (NRC 2013; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Tyler and Fagan 2008) and disproportionately represented at every stage of the juvenile justice system (Development Services Group 2014a; NRC 2013). Youths’ perceptions of fairness are influenced by prior experiences with disproportionately harsh disciplinary procedures,

which begins for many youth of color in school settings. Studies demonstrate that Black youth are disproportionately disciplined in school compared to their white peers, which in turn increases their likelihood to become involved with the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al. 2011).

This harsh treatment continues in juvenile justice settings, where research suggests that Black youth experience disparate treatment at multiple points of the system, including arrest, detention, referrals to treatment, court processing, adjudication, and waiver to adult court. Black youth are more likely to interact with police in the first place, as most existing research studies suggest that irrespective of crime rates, police officers are more likely to initiate contact with youth in primarily Black neighborhoods (Leiber and Peck 2013). Once contact is made, research finds that Black youth are more likely than similarly situated White youth to be taken to and held in detention and less likely than their White counterparts to be released from detention before case disposition (Leiber and Peck 2013; Richetelli, Hartstone, and Murphy 2009; Thomas, Moak, and Walker 2013). After controlling for legal and extralegal factors, studies have also found that Black youth are more likely than White youth to have their case petitioned to a juvenile court (Haight and Jarjoura 2016; Higgins et al. 2013; Leiber and Peck 2013).

In terms of court outcomes, research reveals that Black youth are more likely to receive formal adjudication than White youth—regardless of the severity of the offense (Evangelist et al. 2017; Fader, Kurlychek, and Morgan 2014; Leiber and Peck 2013; Poe-Yamagata et al. 2007). Furthermore, Black youth are more likely than similarly situated White youth to receive the most severe adjudication outcomes, with multiple studies showing that when other factors are controlled for, Black youth receive harsher juvenile court adjudication outcomes and are more likely to be committed to secure placement than White youth (Leiber and Peck 2015; Poe-Yamagata et al. 2007; Rodriguez 2010, 2013). Of youth who are committed, research suggests that after controlling for legal factors, Black and Latino youth are less likely to be referred to smaller, therapeutic facilities and more likely to be committed to physical regimen facilities compared to their White peers (Fader, Kurlychek, and Morgan 2014). While there is less research on Latino youth, studies also suggest that once formally processed into the system, Latino youth are more likely to receive the harshest adjudication outcomes, such as secure confinement and direct filings to adult court, than White youth (Freiburger and Burke 2010; Haight and Jarjoura 2016). Finally, Black youth are more likely than White youth to be waived to adult court, particularly for drug offenses (Leiber and Peck 2013; Poe-Yamagata et al. 2007).

Studies have also found that police officers may see Black youth as less “child-like” and less innocent than White youth and thus more “deserving” of punishment (Goff et al. 2014). Research has also shown that probation officers are more likely to see Black youth as culpable for their behavior, leading them to

endorse harsher punishments for Black youth (Graham and Lowery 2004). Taken together, youth's experiences of discrimination negatively impact development, including their mental and physical health,²¹ academic achievement,²² and behavior.²³ From a developmental perspective, youth's perceptions of the fairness of interactions impact their moral development, their overall views of the criminal justice system, and their behavior (NRC 2013).

How: Part of ensuring fairness involves being clear with youth about what is expected of them during their probation (for a detailed explanation of how to do this, see chapter 3, Case Planning). Other important ways probation officers can ensure fairness include clarifying roles, using accessible language, and addressing disparities and unconscious bias.

Clarify Roles

- Do not assume youth and caregivers understand the role and responsibilities of probation officers and other juvenile justice staff.
- Clearly explain the role of a probation officer, expectations for the youth-officer relationship, the limits of confidentiality, and the nature of probation officer authority (Trotter 2006; Trotter and Evans 2012). Avoid using acronyms and professional jargon that youth and caregivers may not understand.
- Remind youth and caregivers about the parameters of your role, when necessary.
- Clearly discuss with youth what they can, cannot, and must do as part of probation, the consequences for misbehavior, and rewards or incentives for positive behaviors.
- Always give youth the opportunity to ask questions and voice their opinions, and respectfully listen when they do so.

Use Accessible Language

- Avoid using unclear court terminology, acronyms, or legal jargon to explain probation requirements.
- Use language that youth and their caregivers understand and that resonates with them (such as “rules” instead of “conditions of probation,” “meeting” instead of “intake interview,” or “going to school” instead of “avoiding truancy”).
- Make sure in-person translation is provided for youth and caregivers who do not speak English as their native language. This translation would be provided by a professional, not by a relative or friend of the family.

- One way to use accessible language is to create a “Dos and Don’ts List” that clearly describes the actions youth must and must not do (for an example of such a list, see the [Washington Judicial Colloquies project](#)). These lists would be created in collaboration with youth.

Address Disparities and Unconscious Bias with Youth, Caregivers, and Supportive Adults

- Base the frequency of probation contacts on a youth’s *risk level* (as determined by a validated risk-assessment tool) rather than *perceptions* of their behavior.
- Ensure the quality of contacts are the same across all youth. Generally, “quality contacts” refers to the interactions described within this chapter, meaning they focus on supporting youth’s self-identified goals and motivating change.
- Give youth and their caregivers or supportive adults the opportunity to talk about race, racism, and discrimination (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2017b; Schwalbe 2012).
- Learn about racial disparities within the juvenile justice system and how these disparities impact the development of youth of color. For a quick resource on key things to know about racial disparities in juvenile justice, see [this factsheet](#) from the National Juvenile Justice Network.
- Consider how *unconscious bias* (attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect how people view and react to others) may impact your interactions with youth and their caregivers/supportive adults. The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center published [this training](#) to help counteract bias with probation officers. They suggest probation agencies use [graduated response tools](#) to eliminate disparities; communicate with youth, caregivers, and court stakeholders openly about race and racial disparities; and connect youth with culturally competent programming (RFK Probation Symposium 2016). (For more information on graduated response tools, see chapter 6.) It may be helpful for youth probation staff to take an Implicit Association Test, which can be found [here](#), to identify how unconscious biases may be impacting their work.
- Carefully document what was covered in meetings with youth, progress toward goals, and any sanctions imposed to support quality assurance processes at the agency level and assessment of systematic bias in the treatment of specific youth populations.

Foster a Genuine, Supportive, Prosocial Relationship with Youth

What: When aligning research and practice in youth probation, probation officers would build a strong working alliance with youth based in trust, mutual respect, and role-modeling (Schwalbe 2012; Trotter and Evans 2012). Maintaining this relationship is important throughout the probation period, even with enforcing conditions of probation.

Why: Research shows that justice-involved youth need positive relationships with supportive adults, especially when they have experienced prior trauma and/or may not have supportive families at home (DuBois and Silverthorn 2005; NRC 2013; Schwalbe 2012; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Vidal et al. 2015). A limited research base suggests that a positive relationship with a probation officer is associated with lower likelihood of recidivating (Kennealy et al. 2012; Skeem et al. 2007, 2009; Vidal et al. 2015).

How: Two strategies to foster a genuine, prosocial relationship with youth are modeling prosocial behavior and building trust.

Model Prosocial Behavior

- Model the behavior you want youth to adopt, such as the following (Taxman, Shepardson, and Byrne 2004):
 - » being prompt
 - » greeting others
 - » following up on tasks
 - » respecting other people's feelings
 - » treating people with respect, both verbally and nonverbally
- Demonstrate compassion, understanding, and respect, while keeping youth aware of nonnegotiable boundaries, if necessary.
- Praise prosocial comments and actions (e.g., accepting responsibility for one's actions, improving relationships with caregivers/supportive adults, and meeting educational or employment goals; Trotter 2009).
- Expect youth to live up to their full potential. If they encounter setbacks, help them learn from these mistakes in a positive, warm, and encouraging manner. Emphasize that mistakes are a necessary part of learning.²⁴

- Be aware of the message your body language sends and engage in active and attentive listening (Trotter 2009).

Build Trust with Youth and Their Caregivers or Supportive Adults

- Create a comfortable interview setting by meeting youth and caregivers where they feel safe (e.g., in their communities, homes, or other comfortable environments).
- If this is not possible, make your office feel safe and private (for example, do not hold meetings in a shared office, minimize phone calls and conversations with coworkers, and so on; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; Taxman, Shepardson, and Byrne 2004; Trotter 2009).
- Make time for light conversation and share in humor and fun amid practical tasks.²⁵
- Create a supportive interview structure by asking youth about their interests, progress towards goals, and strengths in every meeting. Respectfully involve caregivers and supportive adults in meetings, when appropriate.
- Employ nonjudgmental motivational interviewing techniques genuinely and empathically.
- Create healthy boundaries with youth, such as telling them when you can and cannot be available, and be consistent with these boundaries.
- Cultivate relationships with groups and supportive agencies in youth's communities (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2017b; Benson et al. 2006; Lundahl et al. 2010; Winters and Schiller 2015).
- To access a training curriculum on building trust and creating healthy relationships with youth on probation, see [Building Authentic Relationships \(BARS\)](#) online curriculum.

CASE STUDY 8

Rethinking Probation Using the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) Model

The *Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) Model* is a training model developed and administered by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute that reimagines community supervision to promote positive youth behavior. It coaches probation officers to develop rapport with youth; use principles of risk, need, and responsivity; and apply a consistent structure to youth interactions. It structures each meeting with youth to include (1) a check-in to ask youth about their needs and build rapport, (2) a review of youth's skills and progress on short-term and long-term goals, (3) an intervention to target problem thinking, and (4) homework that directs youth to apply a new skill (Latessa, n.d.). Training of probation officers using the EPICS model has been shown to increase the use of core correctional practices (Labrecque and Smith 2015) which is associated with reduced recidivism (Dowden and Andrews 2004).

Chapter 6. Incentivizing Success and Implementing Graduated Responses

Where to Apply This Lesson

This chapter provides guidance on case management strategies. The guidance is appropriate for youth on informal and formal supervision, including deferred prosecution, post-disposition, and aftercare.

Bridging Research and Practice through Incentives and Sanctions

Research suggests that a punitive approach to youth probation misses out on valuable opportunities to encourage accountability and promote positive development (Goldstein et al. 2016). Traditionally, probation practices have focused on ensuring compliance with conditions of probation and responding to noncompliance with punitive sanctions (Goldstein et al. 2016; NeMoyer et al. 2014). Yet, research suggests that perfect compliance is unlikely given that youth tend to have a lower capacity for self-regulation and are more susceptible to peer pressure and short-term incentives (NRC 2013). In some cases, youth may be placed out of their homes following probation or parole revocations, sometimes for minor technical violations of probation conditions (e.g., skipping school, missing a meeting with the probation officer, or staying out past curfew; NeMoyer et al. 2014, 2016). However, research finds that sending youth to a facility away from their community, family, and school disconnects them from crucial supports, interferes with prosocial development, and generally does a poor job of preventing recidivism (NRC 2013). Moreover, such placements have been shown to increase recidivism (Aizer and Doyle 2015) and exacerbate mental health symptoms (Barnert et al. 2017).

Building a well-developed system of rewards and incentives that acknowledges good decisionmaking may more effectively promote compliance on probation and improve outcomes for youth than traditional, sanction-based models (Goldstein et al. 2016; NRC 2013). Research in residential juvenile justice settings (Barkley et al. 1976; Bednar et al. 1970; Goldstein et al. 2016; Meichenbaum, Bowers, and Ross 1968) and schools (Simonsen et al. 2008; Simonsen and Sugai 2013), for example, has found reinforcing positive behavior through incentives and rewards an effective strategy in improving compliance with rules and performance in school. Youth have been shown to be

more responsive to positive feedback than negative criticism (Cauffman et al. 2010). Further, research with adults indicates that positive rewards are more predictive of success than sanctions and that the most effective combination of positive and negative responses is about four positive responses for every negative one (Wodahl et al. 2011).

Research can offer important insights on how to rethink youth probation. Holding youth accountable constructively and providing opportunities for them to accept responsibility for their actions promotes healthy moral development (NRC 2013). Limiting unnecessary sanctions, such as revocations and detention stays, prevents potentially harmful impacts and disconnection associated with out-of-home placement (NeMoyer et al 2016; NRC 2013). Given the negative impacts of incarceration on youth outcomes, bridging research and practice would require strictly limiting the use of confinement for technical violations (Aizer and Doyle 2015; NRC 2013; see also discussion in Weber, Umpierre, and Bilchik 2018). Using a structured guide to inform decisions can also help ensure consistent treatment of youth and promote fairness (NRC 2013). Young people are more likely to believe that the legal system is fair when they feel that they are treated with respect, have a say in the process, and view adult system actors as wanting to help rather than punish them (Fagan and Tyler 2005; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014; NRC 2013). Therefore, aligning probation practice with research means prioritizing fair and equal treatment of all youth, and ensuring that youth fully understand probation requirements and procedures. Finally, a research-informed approach includes engaging caregivers and supportive adults throughout the process whenever possible, and never leveraging time with caregivers or supportive adults as an incentive or punitive response (NRC 2013).

Probation officers can align practice with research by (1) incentivizing success through positive reinforcement, (2) encouraging youth accountability through graduated responses, and (3) ensuring procedural fairness and equal treatment.

Incentivize Success through Positive Reinforcement

What: Use incentives that youth work to earn, as well as positive feedback and rewards, to promote long-term behavior change (Goldstein et al. 2016; NRC 2013). Offer more positive consequences than negative ones to recognize accomplishments and encourage productive change (Wodahl et al. 2011) and provide opportunities to reward success early in the youth's supervision term (Goldstein et al. 2016; Schwartz 2017).

Why: A primary goal of probation is to promote long-term behavior change and help youth get back on track to successful adulthood. Research tells us that youth are often highly susceptible to external influences, particularly peer pressure and immediate rewards (NRC 2013). Incentive structures effectively motivate behavior change among young people in various contexts (Goldstein et al. 2016; Barkley et al. 1976; Bednar et al. 1970; Meichenbaum, Bowers, and Ross 1968; Simonsen et al. 2008; Simonsen and Sugai 2013).

How:

- Engage youth, caregivers, and supportive adults in determining which incentives would be most meaningful (especially when identifying rewards for long-term positive behavior that may have monetary value).
- Consider a range of incentives and rewards, including nonmonetary or low-cost incentives as well as incentives with monetary value (if feasible). Examples of low- or no-cost incentives include words of affirmation, certificates or letters highlighting accomplishments, and attendance at an important life event (Szanyi and Shoenberg 2016).²⁶ For additional examples of incentives, see [this list](#) from the Center for Children’s Law and Policy (CCLP)’s [Graduated Responses Toolkit](#).
- Be realistic about what incentives can be promised, and don’t introduce ones that have not been approved. Consider which incentives (such as classes, tickets, or other incentives with monetary value) may require approval from a supervisor, judge, or caregiver (Szanyi and Shoenberg 2016).
- Provide incentives that promote positive development, such as sports equipment, art classes, event tickets, and civic engagement opportunities (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010).
- Use incentives to reward short-term goals and accomplishments (such as consistent or improved attendance at required meetings or starting community service work) so youth can likely experience success early in their probation (Goldstein et al. 2016).
- Use a strengths-based perspective: focus on strengths of individual youth and encourage development of unique skills, interests, and goals (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010; Catalano et al. 2004; Szanyi and Shoenberg 2016). For examples of short- and long-term goals to encourage, see [Washington, DC, Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services Positive Behaviors Table](#).

- For further guidance on setting up a system of incentives, see the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' [Incentives and Sanctions Program Workbook](#). For examples of jurisdictions that have made incentives central to their probation practice, see [Opportunity-Based Probation in Pierce County, WA](#); [A Graduated System of Incentives, Interventions and Sanctions for Youth Offenders on Probation: A Case Management Approach](#) by the Central and Eastern Oregon Juvenile Justice Commission; and Maryland's [Accountability and Incentives Management](#) approach.

CASE STUDY 9

Opportunity-Based Probation in Pierce County, WA

In Pierce County, Washington, the Juvenile Probation Department has taken a research-informed approach in designing a model of opportunity-based probation (OBP) based on principles of adolescent development. The OBP approach takes advantage of the fact that youth are highly susceptible to incentives and rewards. Probation officers and youth work together to identify goals that will move youth closer to compliance with probation conditions. These goals focus on helping youth resist criminal behavior, building protective factors like school engagement and relationships, and encouraging positive development of youth interests and strengths. By achieving short-term weekly goals in support of these objectives, youth earn points that can be redeemed for rewards of their choice. Failing to meet weekly goals first triggers problem-solving conversations with the probation officer; a hearing with a judge is scheduled only if youth repeatedly fail to meet specific goals related to crime-free behavior. OBP prioritizes youth and caregiver engagement at each stage of the process, including clear communication of probation requirements and informing youth and caregivers of the consequences of different actions. For more information on opportunity-based probation, see [this document](#).

Encourage Accountability through Graduated Responses

What: Use a range of responses to noncompliance that hold youth accountable in developmentally appropriate ways and provide opportunities to take responsibility for their actions without criminalizing normal adolescent behavior (NRC 2013, 2014). View system proceedings as an opportunity to demonstrate the rights and obligations of individuals in a just society, while ensuring that system responses are consistent with developmentally appropriate treatment (NRC 2013). Given the negative impacts of incarceration on youth outcomes, eliminate or strictly limit the use of confinement for technical violations (Aizer and Doyle 2015; NRC 2013; see also discussion in Weber, Umpierre, and Bilchik 2018).

Why: A graduated response system would focus on accountability rather than punishment given that noncompliance with probation conditions is normal for young people, further system involvement can be harmful, and holding youth accountable in constructive ways promotes healthy moral development (Gatti, Tremblay, and Vitaro 2009; NRC 2013; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg 2010).

How:

Start with realistic expectations and limited case plan goals. For more guidance on setting expectations and goals, see chapter 3, Case Planning.

- Ensure that responses to noncompliance are certain, immediate, proportionate, and fair. When possible while maintaining fairness and proportionality, take individual circumstances into account and consider that not all responses will have the same effect on all youth (Griffin and Torbet 2002; NIJ 2011; Paternoster 2010; Taxman, Soule, and Gelb 1999; Szanyi and Shoenberg 2016).
- Use a structured decisionmaking process, such as a graduated response grid, to decide which responses are appropriate (Baglivio, Greenwald, and Russell 2015; De Como 2005). For examples of structured decisionmaking tools, see this [collection of graduated response grids](#) from Pinal County, AZ; Santa Clara County, CA; Washington, DC; and Baltimore City (from the Center for Children’s Law and Policy [Graduated Responses Toolkit](#)).
- Discuss the reasoning or justification behind a certain response to a violation with youth; explain a logical connection between what he or she has done and the consequence received. Have a discussion with youth and caregivers about actions that may avoid noncompliance in the future and how they plan to implement those actions.
- Avoid using removal of services or treatment opportunities as a punishment, and do not assign services or treatment as a consequence for noncompliance. It may be appropriate to introduce services to address the root causes of a violation that are linked to identified criminogenic needs, but it is important that youth, parents, and parole officers do not see services themselves as sanctions (Szanyi and Shoenberg 2016).
- Consider the context around a violation and recognize that not all violations reflect a youth’s negative intentions. Take this context into account when determining the appropriate response. For guidance on how to determine the severity of a violation, a first step in determining how to respond, see this [guide from the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services](#) (from the Center for Children’s Law and Policy [Graduated Responses Toolkit](#)).

- Use the least severe or restrictive appropriate option to avoid further system involvement for youth (Gatti, Tremblay, and Vitaro 2009; NRC 2013; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg 2010). Responses to violations do not always need to be progressively severe; sometimes repeating the same, consistent response can be equally or more effective (Goldstein et al. 2016). Confinement may be appropriate for serious transgressions but would be limited to the shortest period necessary for corrective action (NRC 2013).
- Use a restorative justice framework to engage youth in conversations about the consequences of their actions—for example, who may have been harmed or affected, and how (Bouffard, Cooper, and Bergseth 2017; NRC 2013; Sherman et al. 2015; Wilson, Olaghere, and Kimbrell 2017).
- For further guidance on setting up a system of graduated responses, see the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' [Incentives and Sanctions Program Workbook](#) and the Center for Children's Law and Policy [Graduated Responses Toolkit](#). For examples of jurisdictions that have encouraged accountability through a system of graduated responses, see [Opportunity-Based Probation in Pierce County, WA](#), and [A Graduated System of Incentives, Interventions and Sanctions for Youth Offenders on Probation: A Case Management Approach](#) by the Central and Eastern Oregon Juvenile Justice Commission.

BOX 11

Restorative Justice

A research-informed approach to youth probation aims to hold youth accountable for their actions, while promoting positive development, healthy growth, and long-term behavior change. Whenever possible, this approach limits deeper involvement within the juvenile justice system. Restorative justice programs are one way to promote positive accountability while keeping youth within their communities.

Restorative justice programs seek to repair relationships between youth and victims and emphasize mediation and respect between youth, communities, and victims as means of holding youth accountable (Wilson, Olaghere, and Kimbrell 2017). They are intentionally nonadversarial and are designed to encourage accountability, meet the needs of victims, and repair harms caused by crimes (Developmental Services Group 2010b). Some examples of these programs include: offender-victim conferencing, victim impact panels, arbitration/mediation programs, community reparative boards, and circle sentencing. Research has found that restorative justice programs and practices show moderate reductions in future youth misbehavior relative to traditional juvenile court processing, although the strength of these findings vary across studies (Wilson, Olaghere, and Kimbrell 2017). Most studies show strong evidence of improved victim satisfaction, however, demonstrating that people impacted by crime are more satisfied by restorative justice programs than traditional juvenile justice approaches.

Ensure Procedural Fairness

What: Ensure that sanctions and rewards are fairly and consistently applied, and take steps to address both disparate treatment and youth perceptions of unfairness (NRC 2013).

Why: Youth interactions with the justice system can have significant repercussions for legal, social, and moral development (Fagan and Tyler 2005; NRC 2013; Seigle, Walsh, and Weber 2014). Further, youth of color are disproportionately represented at every stage of the juvenile justice system (NRC 2013), and discrimination has been shown to have negative effects on mental and physical health (Mays, Cochran, and Barnes 2007; NRC 2013; Prelow et al. 2004; Simons et al. 2002), academic achievement (Berkel et al. 2010; DeGarmo and Martinez 2006; Neblett et al. 2006; NRC 2013), and behavior (Martin et al. 2011; NRC 2013; Prelow et al. 2004). Also, girls are more likely than boys to be placed out of home as a result of a technical violation of probation (e.g., skipping school, missing a meeting, or staying out past curfew; see Sickmund, Sladky, and Kang 2017).²⁷ Ensuring that sanctions and rewards are fairly applied is critical to promoting procedural fairness for all youth, facilitating positive [legal socialization](#), and decreasing the likelihood that youth will reoffend.

How:

- Make sure that responses and incentives are fairly applied regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and sexual identity.
- Use a structured process to guide decisions about responses to probation violations, but ensure that the process also incorporates flexibility to tailor a response to a youth's individual situation (Baglivio, Greenwald, and Russell 2015; De Como 2005). For examples of structured response grids, see this [collection](#) from Pinal County, AZ; Santa Clara County, CA; Washington, DC; and Baltimore City (from the Center for Children's Law and Policy [Graduated Responses Toolkit](#)).
- Regularly discuss probation requirements in age-appropriate language and clearly communicate the positive and negative consequences of specific actions.
- Ensure that youth understand system processes ahead of time, and check understanding with methods such as a brief questionnaire or independent assignment (Goldstein et al. 2016; LaVigne and Van Rybroek 2011; NJDC 2016).
- Ensure that youth receive due process in instances where sanctions for probation violations could include placement out of home or other severe consequences,²⁸ such as placement in detention, electronic monitoring, or fines.

- Carefully document incentives provided and sanctions imposed to support ongoing assessment and quality assurance measures at the agency level.
- School consequences (such as suspension or expulsion) would not automatically trigger justice system responses without a review of the incident in question within the context of the youth's probation goals and criminogenic needs. Research has found significant disproportionate effects of school discipline on students of color.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Over the past two decades, we have learned an immense amount about what works to improve public safety and promote positive developmental outcomes for youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. Many systems across the country have made great progress translating that research into practice and implementing changes in the way they view, process, and supervise system-involved youth. One of the clearest examples of this is the significant reduction in the use of incarceration as a response to delinquent behavior. Fewer youth are coming in the front door but those who do are more likely to be supervised in their communities. There is a pressing need to ensure that probation officers, responsible for processing and supervising most youth involved with juvenile justice, are equipped with the latest research and concrete strategies for putting what works into practice. This report helps to fill that gap.

The framework presented in this report bridges research and practice in juvenile probation and leverages what we know about youth to develop strategies that motivate long-term behavioral change, promote healthy development, and decrease the likelihood of future misbehavior. It reorients probation supervision strategies away from a traditional, “one size fits all” model toward a more responsive, more interactive, and ultimately more effective approach. This approach also re-envision the role of the probation officer, empowering him or her to act as an agent of change in each youth’s life. It holds significant potential to reduce recidivism, maximize the efficient use of limited resources, promote individual skill development, and improve **family functioning**, all of which build stronger families and safer communities.

Appendix A. Glossary

All terms are defined using the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency's Glossary of Terms unless otherwise noted.

Assessment: Evaluation or appraisal of a candidate's suitability for placement in a specific treatment modality/setting and the relationship to custody and supervision. In mental health, an assessment refers to comprehensive information required for the diagnosis of a mental health disorder. An assessment differs from a screening, which is used to determine if an assessment is needed. See *screening*.

Cultural competency: The ability of service agencies to understand the world view of clients of different cultures and adapt practices to ensure their effectiveness.

Culturally responsive: This term originates from educational interventions and refers to interventions that specifically acknowledge the presence of culturally and linguistically diverse youth and the need for them to find relevant connections among themselves and with the behavioral goals and objectives they are asked to perform (Banks and Obiakor 2015).

Evidence based program and/or practice: Programs and practices that have been shown, through rigorous evaluation and replication, to be effective at preventing or reducing juvenile delinquency or victimization, or related risk factors. Evidence based programs or practices can come from many valid sources (e.g., Blueprints for Violence Prevention, OJJDP's Model Programs Guide). Evidence based practices may also include practices adopted by agencies, organizations or staff which are generally recognized as "best practice" based on research literature and/or the degree to which the practice is based on a clear, well-articulated theory or conceptual framework for delinquency or victimization prevention and/or intervention.

Family functioning: Interactions with family members that involve physical, emotional, and psychological activities.

Gender responsivity: Creating an environment through site and staff selection and program development, content, and material that responds to the realities of girls' lives. Gender-responsive approaches are multidimensional, acknowledge girls' pathways into the juvenile justice system, address social and cultural factors (e.g., poverty, race, class, and gender), and provide therapeutic interventions involving issues such as abuse, violence, family relationships, substance abuse, and co-occurring disorders. These interventions provide a strength-based approach to treatment and skills building, with an emphasis on self-efficacy (Sydney 2005).

Graduated sanctions: A set of integrated intervention strategies designed to operate in unison to enhance accountability, ensure public safety, and reduce recidivism by preventing future delinquent behavior. The term graduated sanctions implies that the penalties for delinquent activity would move from limited interventions to more restrictive (i.e., graduated) penalties according to the severity and nature of the crime. In other words, youth who commit serious and violent offenses would receive more restrictive sentences than youth who commit less serious offenses.

Legal socialization: The process through which, individuals acquire attitudes and beliefs about the law, legal authorities, and legal institutions. This occurs through individuals' interactions, both personal and vicarious, with police, courts, and other legal actors (Fagan and Tyler 2005; Tyler and Huo 2002).

Long-term outcomes: The ultimate outcomes desired for participants, recipients, the juvenile justice system, or the community. For direct service programs, they generally include changes in recipients' behavior, attitudes, skills, and knowledge. They also include changes in practice, policy, or decisionmaking in the juvenile justice system. They are measured within 6–12 months after a youth leaves or completes the program and relate back to the program's goals (e.g., reducing delinquency).

Needs assessment: Systematic process to acquire an accurate, thorough picture of a youth's strengths and areas of vulnerability. The process is utilized to identify and prioritize treatment goals, develop a treatment plan, determine the appropriate level of supervision, and allocate funds and resources for services.

Polyvictimization: Having experienced multiple victimizations such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, bullying, and exposure to family violence. The definition emphasizes experiencing different kinds of victimization, rather than multiple episodes of the same kind of victimization.²⁹

Positive Youth Development: A comprehensive way of thinking about the development of adolescents and the factors that facilitate their successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is a strengths-based and resilience approach that contends even the most disadvantaged young person can develop positively when connected to the right mix of opportunities, supports, positive roles, and relationships (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010).

Protective factors: They include those aspects of the individual and his or her environment that buffer or moderate the effect of risk of a developing problem. They are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, schools, or the larger society that, when present, promote well-being and reduce the risk for negative outcomes.

Screening: A process designed to determine if informal or formal processing is warranted. In the mental health setting, screening refers to an initial look at a juvenile's mental health needs. This is contrasted with an assessment to diagnose a mental health disorder, which would occur after screening. See *assessment*.

Short-term outcomes: For direct service programs, short-term outcomes are the benefits or changes that participants experience by the time they leave or complete the program. These generally include changes in behavior, attitudes, skills, and/or knowledge. For programs designed to change the juvenile justice system, short-term outcomes include changes to the juvenile justice system that occur by the funding's end.

Notes

- ¹ In this document, we use “youth” to refer to people roughly ages 10 to 18. Although research on adolescence suggests that the period extends into the early twenties, and “youth” often incorporates individuals up to age 24, most people under the purview of the juvenile justice system—and those who are the focus of the Bridge Project—are younger than 19.
- ² “Easy access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (EZACJRP),” National Center for Juvenile Justice, last updated June 1, 2017, <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>.
- ³ In this document, we use the term consistent with the NRC 2013 report, which uses *confinement* “to refer to detention before adjudication or to placement in a custodial setting as a disposition after a finding of delinquency. In the dispositional context, it encompasses what are typically called institutional placements or out-of-home residential placements. It is not meant to encompass day treatment or nonresidential, community-based therapeutic programs” (NRC 2013, p.19).
- ⁴ See “Seeking transformation in juvenile probation: A request for ideas and interest from the Annie E. Casey Foundation,” released July 1, 2014, <http://www.aecf.org/m/privy/Deep-End-Resource-Guide-8a-Seeking-Transformation-in-Juvenile-Probation.pdf>.
- ⁵ See “Probation system review,” RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, <https://rfknrcjj.org/our-work/probation-system-review/>.
- ⁶ For more information on the research review and translation process used to develop the recommendations in this report, see Harvell et al., forthcoming.
- ⁷ Criminogenic needs—also often referred to as dynamic risk factors—are things that increase the likelihood of future delinquent behavior and include antisocial attitudes, substance abuse, antisocial peer group, family dysfunction, and poor school achievement (Vincent, Guy, and Grisso 2012).
- ⁸ See the discussion on page 150 of NRC (2013) and the cited studies: Huizinga et al. (2003); and Gatti, Tremblay and Vitaro.
- ⁹ See the discussion on page 150 of NRC (2013) and the cited studies: Huizinga et al. (2003); Gatti, Tremblay, and Vitaro (2009); and Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg (2010).
- ¹⁰ See also “Community PACT Statewide Business Rules: Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT),” Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, last updated June 6, 2014, http://www.djj.state.fl.us/docs/probation-policy-memos/community-pact-statewide-business-rules_6_25_2012.pdf?sfvrsn=2; and “Policy for Indiana Youth Assessment System,” Board of Directors of the Judicial Conference of Indiana, last updated March 7, 2014, <https://www.in.gov/judiciary/pscourts/files/prob-risk-iyas-2011.pdf>.
- ¹¹ The assessment and incorporation of needs and strengths information into case planning is important for all youth, including youth in confinement. Because of the audience and scope of this work, this paper focuses on case planning for youth supervised in the community.
- ¹² This research includes Luong and Wormith (2011); NRC (2013); Peterson-Badali, Skilling, and Haqanee (2015); Singh et al. (2014); Vieira, Skilling, and Peterson-Badali (2009); Viljoen et al. (2012); and Vitopolous, Peterson-Badali, and Skilling (2012).
- ¹³ “The Developmental Assets Framework,” Search Institute, <https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/developmental-assets-framework/>.

- ¹⁴ See “Recommendations for treatment of families along the case continuum,” Justice for Families, undated, available at <http://www.aecf.org/m/privy/Deep-End-Resource-Guide-5b-Recommendations-for-Treatment-of-Families.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ *Case Management for Juvenile Offenders and Status Offenders Guidebook*, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, accessed September 30, 2018, http://dhhs.ne.gov/children_family_services/Guidebooks/Case%20Management%20for%20Juvenile%20Offenders%20and%20Status%20Offense%20Guidebook.pdf.
- ¹⁶ *Case Management for Juvenile Offenders and Status Offenders Guidebook*.
- ¹⁷ Thomas E. Perez (Assistant Attorney General, US Department of Justice), letter to Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant and others regarding the investigation of Lauderdale County Youth Court, Meridian Police Department, and Mississippi Division of Youth Services, August 10, 2012, <http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/2642012810121733674791.pdf>.
- ¹⁸ “Understanding Intersectionality,” National Association of School Psychologists, accessed September 30, 2018, <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/diversity/social-justice/intersectionality-and-school-psychology-implications-for-practice>.
- ¹⁹ Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, and the Carey Group, *Case Planning Handbook—YLS/CMI Version*, accessed September 30, 2018, http://www.pachiefprobationofficers.org/docs/Case_Planning_Handbook.pdf.
- ²⁰ Role clarification reduces recidivism best when used in conjunction with problem-solving and role modeling.
- ²¹ See Mays, Cochran, and Barnes (2007); Prelow et al. (2004); and Simons et al. (2002); as cited in NRC (2013).
- ²² See Berkel et al. (2010); DeGarmo and Martinez (2006); and Neblett et al. (2006); as cited in NRC (2013).
- ²³ See DuBois, Burk-Braxton, et al. (2002); Martin et al. (2011); and Prelow et al. (2004); as cited in NRC (2013).
- ²⁴ “The Developmental Assets Framework.”
- ²⁵ “The Developmental Assets Framework.”
- ²⁶ This information also came from an Urban Institute focus group.
- ²⁷ “Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985–2014,” National Center for Juvenile Justice, last updated October 22, 2018, <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezajcs>.
- ²⁸ Perez, letter to Bryant and others, <http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/2642012810121733674791.pdf>.
- ²⁹ “Tips for Staff and Advocates Working with Children: Polyvictimization,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, accessed September 30, 2018, https://www.ojjdp.gov/programs/safestart/TipSheetFor_Polyvictimization.pdf.

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About the Authors



Samantha Harvell is a senior research associate in the Justice Policy Center. Her work focuses on bringing research to bear on criminal and juvenile justice system reform efforts. Among other projects, she codirects the OJJDP-funded Bridging Research and Practice Project to Advance Juvenile Justice and Safety and oversees assessment of local and state sites involved in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative. Harvell holds a PhD in psychology and MPP from Georgetown University.



Hanna Love is a former research analyst in the Justice Policy Center. Her research focused on juvenile and adult criminal justice reform and improving criminal justice system responses to survivors of violence. Love graduated from Pomona College with a BA in sociology.



Elizabeth Pelletier is a research analyst in the Justice Policy Center, where she primarily works on projects related to criminal justice reform. Before joining Urban, she researched education policy as a Fulbright grantee at the University of Toronto. Pelletier graduated from the College of William and Mary in 2014 with a BA in public policy and film studies.



Chloe Warnberg is a policy assistant in the Justice Policy Center, where she works on projects related to criminal justice policy, prosecutorial decisionmaking, justice reinvestment, and juvenile justice. She graduated from Duke University with a BA in public policy.

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