

## **Screening and Assessment**

There are large numbers of youth involved with the juvenile justice system in this country. In 2002, law enforcement agencies in the United States made approximately 2.3 million arrests of juveniles (Snyder, 2004), and it is estimated that on any given day, over 100,000 youth are residing in juvenile detention or correctional facilities across the country.

The growing research base on mental health and juvenile justice suggests that many of these youth, anywhere from 70 to 100 percent, have a diagnosable mental health disorder (Teplin et al, 2002; Otto et al., 1992; Virginia Policy Design Team, 1994; Wierson, Forehand and Frame, 1992). This growing awareness of the mental health needs among youth in the juvenile justice system, along with the accompanying research advances that have occurred over the last ten years, has led to the recognition that these youth must be afforded appropriate treatment.

Arguably, the most important first step to better respond to mental health treatment needs among youth in the juvenile justice system is to systematically identify these needs as youth become involved with the system. The development of a screening and assessment capacity is now viewed as critical in order to effectively identify, and ultimately respond, to mental health treatment needs. Recently, there have been some significant advances made to develop effective mental health screening and assessment tools and instruments, many designed specifically for use with youth in contact with the juvenile justice system. For example, the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2), a mental health screening tool for use with youth in contact with the juvenile justice system, and the V-DISC, a voice activated, computerized version of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children, have greatly improved the ability of the field to identify mental disorder among the juvenile justice population. In addition, there are now standards to guide how screening and assessment should be performed at various points of contact within the juvenile justice system, as well as information on models and approaches that have been developed for conducting screening and assessment in juvenile justice settings.

This chapter of the Resource Kit provides a comprehensive overview of screening and assessment, and includes practical information about what it is, best practices for how and when screening and assessment should occur for youth at various points of contact within the system, existing standards for conducting screening and assessment, and examples of tools and instruments that have been developed for this purpose.

## **References**

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