

Treatment

Screening and assessing for mental health need among youth in the juvenile justice system does very little good unless there are effective services available to which youth, who need such services based on the results of these evaluations, can be referred. It is critical that youth with mental health disorders who are involved with the juvenile justice system receive appropriate treatment.

In his 1992 review of the treatment research literature for youth with mental health disorders involved with the juvenile justice system, Melton determined that there was very little in the way of effective mental health services available to youth in the juvenile justice system (Cocozza, 1992). Fortunately, a number of new advances have emerged over the last decade to assist the field in better responding to the mental health needs of these youth. One of the most important advances is the development of demonstrated, effective interventions for treating mental disorders among children and youth. These demonstrated interventions are commonly referred to as evidence-based practices: interventions that involve standardized treatment and that have been shown, through controlled research, to result in improved outcomes across multiple research groups.

Examples of evidence-based treatment advances in children's mental health include the development of community-based treatment models, psychosocial therapies, and improved medications. Specific examples include:

- Multi-Systemic Therapy
- Functional Family Therapy
- Oregon Treatment Foster Care Model
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Intensive Case Management
- Brief Strategic Therapy

Through rigorous evaluation and testing, these interventions have proven successful when provided to youth in the juvenile justice system, and have demonstrated positive outcomes such as reduced juvenile recidivism, decreased psychiatric symptomatology, and improved family functioning. Despite these significant advances, there is still much more that needs to be done to further develop and test new interventions, as well as promote their wider use with youth in contact within the juvenile justice system. There are remaining questions about how best to implement evidence-based practices: What cross-agency collaboration structures most effectively support the implementation of these interventions? What linkages are necessary between the juvenile justice, mental health and substance abuse systems to successfully provide these interventions at key points of contact within the justice system? How can these interventions be used within the context of diversion and reintegration programs for youth with mental health needs in the juvenile justice system?

The information included in this chapter of the Resource Kit begins to help us answer these questions. This chapter includes a review of the evidence-based practices that have

been developed to treat mental health disorders among children and adolescents, and more specifically, those interventions that have shown significant promise for youth in the juvenile justice system. Examples of specific evidence-based practices are provided, along with selected references and resources describing the evaluations that have been conducted to examine their effectiveness, and discussing the important implementation issues that need to be considered.

References

Cocozza, J. (1992) *Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*. Seattle, WA: National Coalition for the Mentally Ill in the Criminal Justice System.