

Perspectives from the Field: Keeping kids in the classroom and out of corrections

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Pacer's Juvenile Justice Project

- Established in 1994
- Individual advocacy for youth at risk for entering the JJ system or already in the system and their families
- Assist parents, youth, educators, mental health and corrections professionals and all those interested in better outcomes for kids
- Develop trainings, curricula and resources for parents and professionals
- We are here as a resource for all professionals

Mental Health or other Disability: An Easy Excuse?

- A disability does not excuse responsibility for delinquent or criminal behavior in school or in the community
- Many youth do not understand their disability, how to deal with anger or frustration, or how to manage their impulses
- Interventions and supports that address de-escalation of behaviors and meet learning and behavior needs must be part of the IEP.

How do Youth Enter the JJ System

1. Vulnerability because of Specific Disabilities that impact behavior
2. Limited understanding of what behavior is appropriate
3. Poor Choices (Inability to prioritize)
4. Not Consequence Oriented (Impulsivity)
5. Greater need for Peer Approval
6. Few academic or employment skills
7. Poor Self-Worth or feelings of hope

Realities of Adolescent Behavior

- Notable for its emotional intensity and lack of reflection
- Peer driven risk taking behavior without considering the consequences
- Frontal and prefrontal lobe brain development that impacts judgment does not occur until late twenties
- As adolescence begins earlier and ends later the likelihood of faulty decision making increases
- Many high risk youth have no idea of what appropriate behavior is. We need to develop the scripts...

Attachment To School

- Challenges
- Many students don't see education as a step to success
- Many students cannot understand, read, focus, or relate to the material being taught in school
- Disabilities manifest themselves as bad behaviors..youth know how to get suspended rather than feel stupid
- Children arrive at school overwhelmed and unfocussed
- Their parents may have had their own challenges with school, and feel overwhelmed and fearful about their child's behavior

How To Address Disruptive Behaviors

- Avoid power struggles, arguments
- Look for the source of frustration, the “purpose” of behaviors
- Identify options for replacement behaviors to deal with anger and sadness
- Make sure youth is aware of choices and options and understands them
- Integrate restorative responses in the classroom for problem behaviors
- Make sure consequences make sense-they repair the damage in some way
- Work with peer mentors or counselors
- Use exercise and physical activities to deal with frustration

Learning Prosocial Behaviors

- If the behavior is a symptom of an emotional disorder or other disability, punishment will not stop the behavior.
- Without appropriate intervention, the youth will have difficulty modifying his behavior because they won't have the strategies for acting differently.
- Learning new behaviors is predicated on the ability to receive and retain the information
- Punishment might satisfy our sense of "justice" i.e. there are consequences but it will not change future behavior for this person or for others

Teaching Appropriate Behaviors

- Identify the purpose of the behavior
- Develop appropriate replacement behaviors that meet the need
- Provide training on conflict resolution, emotion management and social skills
- Practice skills frequently in mock situations and revise strategies as needed
- Teach the youth how to systematically process incidents and make amends
- Discuss how disability impacts their abilities and develop coping strategies

* If we do not teach children what to do instead of what they are doing, they will continue to do what they do –

Approaches Should:

- Model what is appropriate and what is not in language and in behavior
- Teach them a “script” of what is appropriate and role play (Repeat lessons frequently)
- Provide feedback, impact and response immediately
- Cognitive Behavioral (self-talk)Therapy-address negative thinking
- Give Positive behavioral supports when you see progress
- Help them to understand and monitor any side effects