

NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

SNAPSHOT*

USING RE-ENTRY THINKING TO GUIDE PLACEMENT DECISIONS

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What is re-entry thinking? This is when juvenile justice system professionals and stakeholders focus on the impact that decisions made in the juvenile justice system will have on a youth's ability to positively reengage with their family and community.

It's never too early to begin thinking about re-entry. Focusing on helping youth to successfully re-enter the community starting from the time they first become involved in the juvenile justice system, or a "think exit at entry" philosophy, can help to positively guide juvenile justice decisions every step of the way. Below are some examples of how re-entry thinking can benefit youth:

Confining Youth as a Last Resort

Due to the harmful impact of confinement on youth — including increased rates of recidivism, harm to healthy youth development, reinforcement of negative peer associations, and isolation of youth from their family and communities — a focus on re-entry at every stage of the system encourages juvenile justice stakeholders to strive to confine youth only as a last resort and to limit confinement to higher-risk offenders.¹

Considering Impacts on Youth Education When Making Placement Decisions

A focus on re-entry can encourage probation officers to consider the educational needs of youth as a significant factor in making placement recommendations.²

- Under the re-entry thinking model, juvenile probation officers would exercise great caution in recommending placements because the placement decision strongly impacts

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the youth's reintegration into school. For example, a short-term placement may not be appropriate for a youth who needs intensive academic instruction, particularly if they have a disability, because the staff at such facilities may not be qualified to teach important core academic subjects.³

- If a youth must be placed in residential care, the juvenile probation officer that is focused on re-entry would do the following: examine the type and amount of education that the youth would receive in different placements, identify the youth's educational needs and goals, and ensure that the facility they recommend can meet those needs and goals.⁴

Using Objective Risk Assessment Tools

Risk assessment tools are considered to be a critical element of re-entry because they can both reduce the number of youth in out-of-home placement and help to more appropriately tailor interventions to youth in placement and back in the community.

- The [National Council on Crime and Delinquency](#) recommends the use of “risk assessments, screening instruments, and other tools to help systems shift youth to the lowest form of supervision needed to meet their needs, and, in some cases, to divert youth from the system entirely.”⁵
- Experts recommend that youth be periodically assessed throughout their contact with the system “from intake through placement and community supervision and services.” This will help to identify changes in risk as youth move through the system and guide the services they need accordingly.⁶

Using Validated Behavioral Health Screenings and Assessments

Over half the youth in the justice system have been found to suffer from mental health or substance use disorders, with that number rising to 64 percent for youth committed to secure facilities.⁷ Using re-entry thinking would necessitate screening for and assessing disorders and then providing appropriate treatment in the least restrictive setting possible so that these youth can successfully re-enter their communities.

- By implementing standardized screening and assessment tools for mental health and substance use disorders at key points in the juvenile justice process, appropriate youth can be diverted to behavioral health programs for treatment.
- For those youth that must be confined, facilities should provide them with appropriate mental health and/or substance use treatment and youth should be able to continue this treatment without a gap once they re-enter their communities.

For More Information:

- See the [Re-entry section of the Juvenile Justice Resource Hub](#) for an overview of key issues and reform trends relating to re-entry and aftercare as well as further resources.
- This [“Educational Aftercare and Reintegration Toolkit”](#) by the Education Law Center-PA and the [Models for Change Initiative](#) provides information and tools for juvenile justice professionals working on educational issues with youth in the juvenile justice system.
- [“Juvenile Detention Risk Assessment”](#) by the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s [Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative \(JDAI\)](#) provides a thorough description of detention risk assessment instruments and how they can be used to achieve detention reform objectives.
- See [“Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Guidebook for Implementation”](#) for a detailed description of risk assessment and risk assessments instruments, how they are used, and how to most effectively implement them.
- Pennsylvania’s [“Probation Case Management Essentials for Youth in Placement”](#) details how the state has used its [“Joint Policy Statement on Aftercare for Delinquent Youth”](#) to drive aftercare reform efforts in the state.

¹ Scott MacDonald, Douglas E. Mitchell, and James Moeser, “Chapter 4: Defining Reentry for Short-Term Stays,” *Desktop Guide to Reentry for Juvenile Confinement Facilities*, edited by Gina Hendrix, James Moeser, and David W. Roush, 41-49, 44. East Lansing, MI: Center for Research and Professional Development, July 2004, <http://bit.ly/1MOBKeR>; Patricia M. Torbet, “Building Pennsylvania’s Comprehensive Aftercare Model: Probation Case Management Essentials for Youth in Placement,” (Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice, March 2008), 12, <http://bit.ly/1xGZNDO>.

² Jennifer Lowman and Shari A Mamas, “Educational Aftercare & Reintegration Toolkit for Juvenile Justice Professionals” (Education Law Center – PA and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Models for Change Initiative, June 2009): 11, <http://bit.ly/1xT5PjI>.

³ Lowman & Mamas, “Educational Aftercare & Reintegration Toolkit for Juvenile Justice Professionals,” 12.

⁴ Lowman & Mamas, “Educational Aftercare & Reintegration Toolkit for Juvenile Justice Professionals,” 13.

⁵ Antoinette Davis, Angela Irvine, and Jason Zeidenberg, “Supervision Strategies for Justice-Involved Youth” (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, May 2014): 2, <http://bit.ly/1AtJjRI>.

⁶ Edward P. Mulvey and Carol Schubert, “To Monitor Changing Risks and Needs, Repeat Assessments of Young Offenders Over Time,” (Chicago, IL: Catherine T. and John D. MacArthur Foundation, 2014): 1, <http://bit.ly/1ApsdCc>.

⁷ Gail A. Wasserman, Larkin S. McReynolds, Craig S. Schwalbe, Joseph M. Keating, and Shane A. Jones, “Psychiatric Disorder, Comorbidity, and Suicidal Behavior in Juvenile Justice Youth,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, Vol. 37, No. 12 (December 2010): 1361-1376, 1366, <http://bit.ly/1GQbGtH>.