

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT IN JUVENILE COURT: IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

There are a variety of validated risk screening and assessment tools that can be used by the court to determine a youth's risk of reoffending. Risk assessment instruments (often referred to as risk-needs assessments) also provide information that can be used to determine potential interventions that may prevent further delinquent behavior. These screening and assessment tools (also referred to as structured decision-making, or SDM) should guide juvenile system decisions. Probation officers should use screening and assessment tools to prepare disposition recommendations for the juvenile court judge and to design effective case plans for the youth they serve. In Nevada we use the YLS. This tool:

- Introduces greater consistency and equity to the decision-making process;
- Focuses limited system resources on the highest risk offenders, while reducing the unnecessary use of secure detention, residential treatment, and correctional placements;
- Ensures that decisions are based both on concerns for community safety and concerns about the youth's needs that relate to delinquent behavior and necessary treatment interventions;
- Provides a mechanism to facilitate linking youth with the types of programs that are most appropriate to their offense, level of risk to reoffend, needs, and strengths; and
- Provides a standardized method of important data collection that can provide the prevalence of some problem areas across youth so resources can be planned accordingly.

In general assessment allows us to:

- Identify additional related problems: medical, educational, family relations, educational performance
- Identify strengths of youth and family
- Determine resources needed to address youth and family needs
- Determine the order in which different agencies and entities will review and screen the referral;

In selecting an area of focus regarding screening and assessment, it will be helpful for you to create a stakeholder group that comes together for the express purpose of improving juvenile court operation. Your stakeholders should be made up of judges, representatives from the district attorney's office, representatives from the defense bar, chief probation, juvenile court management, court administrators, representatives from community service providers, representatives from youth oriented-prosocial activities (like youth sports leagues), youth and their families, and of course the community. Once you've gathered your stakeholders together, there are a number of things your team needs to know about screening and assessment including:

- The difference between legal and clinical screening and assessment
- How to determine youth's potential risk behaviors (to self and others)
- The indicators that allow you to identify need for and level of substance abuse, traumatic stress and mental health treatment;
- Learn more about connection between youth's traumatic stress, substance use, mental health issues and criminal behavior;

Recommended Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) #31: Screening and Assessing Adolescents
for Substance Use Disorders. Revised 2012.

The National Youth Screening & Assessment Partners (NYSAP) is a technical
assistance and research group, dedicated to helping juvenile justice programs
identify youths' needs for behavioral health intervention and risk management.
www.nysap.us.

Questions for Discussion

From whom do we accept referrals (law enforcement, schools, etc)?

Who receives the referrals made to juvenile court?

How will we educate referral sources about our screening and assessment
process?

Who administers the YLS and when?

Under what circumstances does a youth not receive a YLS and why?

What methods/tools do we use for screening juveniles for substance use? For traumatic stress? For mental health issues?

If more than one person is involved in conducting assessments, how is information be shared, and who will write the report?

At what point in the process do we engage the youth and family?