

Resource Guide for Mental Health Professionals Working with Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System

MODULE 8

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Module 8

SCHOOLS AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

This module and its contents are intended for educational purposes.

“It's one of the other and mainly they don't like to listen because they're like, Oh, I'm big and bad, I stole a car and you're trying to tell me that I need to do my schoolwork. You're not my dad, you're not my mom. But in reality, we've been through the we understand how it is. And that's the thing.”

–Youth in Detention

The goal of this module is to provide an overview of the intersection between schools and the juvenile justice system.

The Role of Schools

“I went to school, but I wanted to be a teacher because the most impact of people in my life were teachers my teacher had.”

–Youth in Detention

Schools play a very important role in young people's lives and overall development. Within the context of the juvenile justice system, youth who feel a sense of belonging in their school environment are at lower risk of dropping out^{1,2,3}, which in turn reduces their risk for juvenile justice involvement⁴. Similarly, feeling bonded to school can moderate the risk for externalizing behaviors⁵ and school attachment has been highlighted as a protective factor against the risk for offending⁶. Academic achievement can also moderate risk for offending in adolescence, with lower academic achievement increasing the risk for youth offending overall⁷ and violent offending in particular⁸.

“Obviously, graduating high school, I need my diploma. I can't live with the GED, especially in my situation. Um, being able to live my life when I'm under like a microscope all the time, that's like my biggest goal just getting off of probation, parole, getting out.”

–Youth in Detention

School-to-Prison Pipeline

“School to Prison Pipeline” is a term that has been used to describe the path from more punitive, zero-tolerance school discipline practices to the funneling of youth into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems⁹. Discipline practices that negatively label youth, exclude them from mainstream school environments, and criminalize minor infractions often lead to an increased likelihood of juvenile justice involvement. Exclusionary practices have been linked to an increased risk for future incarceration¹⁰ as well as other risk factors for juvenile justice involvement such as lower rates of school attendance, academic achievement and educational attainment¹¹.

Youth with learning disabilities, and youth of color in particular, are at higher risk of encountering academic challenges and exclusionary discipline practices that lead subsequent juvenile justice involvement¹². This is evidenced by the high prevalence rates of learning disabilities found among youth in juvenile justice settings, which range from 65–70% versus 13% in public school settings^{13,14}.



“So it was very difficult for him to have days in days out. School missed. therapy sessions. Missed it? It's not fair. you know, again. He's not a bad kid. It was a moment of crisis.”

”

–Parent of a Youth in Detention

RESOURCES

[The School to Prison Pipeline Explained](#)¹⁵ defines the School to Prison Pipeline, outlines factors that contribute to the problem and provides possible solutions. This corresponding [video](#)¹⁶ provides further information.

[How Zero Tolerance Blurred the Lines Between Schools and Criminal Justice](#)¹⁷ examines the connection between zero tolerance and other strict discipline policies in schools and the juvenile justice system.

[School to Prison Pipeline: Decriminalizing Public Education](#)¹⁸ is a panel discussion that examines the school to prison pipeline and possible solutions.

[Bias Isn't Just A Police Problem, It's A Preschool Problem](#)¹⁹ presents research on factors in the education system as early as preschool that influence the school to prison pipeline.

Listen to this [CTRJJ Roadmap for Change](#) podcast episode to learn more about education within the juvenile justice system.

Lived Experience: School to Prison Pipeline



This video, [Gone Too Far: Our Kids in Handcuffs](#)²⁰, presents that story of Kyle Thompson, a student whose accidental infraction of a school rule placed him in jail and under house arrest.

Screenshot from [Gone Too Far: Our Kids in Handcuffs](#)

School Resource Officers

The term “school resource officer” (or “SRO”) is sometimes used to refer to anyone who works in a school, wears a law enforcement–like uniform, and is responsible for a school’s security. However, the term technically only applies to sworn law enforcement officers who are assigned to work at a school on a long-term basis. SROs might also be confused with school police officers, who are sworn law enforcement officers who work in schools. The difference between SROs and school police officers is that the latter are employed by a school police department²¹.



Research examining the impact of SROs in schools has found mixed results. In a systematic review on this topic²² found that some schools with SROs report higher crime rates and more exclusionary discipline practices as compared to those without this role, whereas other schools have found the presence of SROs has no impact on youth offending behavior. There were also mixed results with regard to daily interactions between students and SROs, with some schools reporting that more interactions have led to more positive perceptions of SROs and others finding that more interactions have led to decreased school connectedness. In several studies, SROs also reported feeling undervalued and inadequately trained. These concerns and a greater focus on the school-to-prison pipeline have prompted a number of recent initiatives aimed at reducing and reforming the role of SROs in schools.²³

RESOURCES

This [School Resource Officer Fact Sheet](#)²⁴ developed by the Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) provides information about the role of school resource officers and the importance of employing non-punitive tactics within schools.

[A Brief About School Resource Officers](#)²⁵ presents an overview of the role of a school resource officers and provide key information, links to resources, evaluative information about this law enforcement role.

Lived Experience: School Resource Officers

This video, [Beyond the Badge: A Profile of a School Resource Officer](#)²⁶, follows School Resource Officer Ronald Cockrell as he works to bridge the gap between students and police officers in the midst of turmoil and division between law enforcement and the community of Ferguson, MO, St. Louis County works to bridge the gap between students and police officers.

Juvenile Justice Specific Initiatives

Organization	Initiative	Website
National Center for Youth Law (NCYL)	Defending the Civil Rights of Students Initiative	https://youthlaw.org/policy/defending-civil-rights-students/
	Shutting Down the School to Prison Pipeline Initiative	https://youthlaw.org/policy/disrupting-school-prison-pipeline-2/
Juvenile Law Center (JLC)	Operation: Education	https://jlc.org/juveniles-justice/operation-education
	Access to Higher Education	https://jlc.org/juveniles-justice/access-higher-education

JLC Youth Advocacy
Program

Improving Access to College

<https://jlc.org/youth-fostering-change/improving-access-college>

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