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Juvenile Justice Bulletin

OJJDP Update on Programs

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has developed a guide for communities to use in dealing with the problem of growing juvenile violence. The *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* constitutes an indepth resource tool for carrying out this OJJDP strategy, which was first outlined in the 1993 *Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders: Program Summary* (Wilson and Howell).

OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy provides communities with a framework

for preventing delinquency, intervening in early delinquent behavior, and responding to serious, violent, and chronic offending. As set forth in the 1993 *Program Summary*, the Comprehensive Strategy is guided by five principles:

- Strengthen the family in its role to instill moral principles and provide guidance and support to children.
- Support core social institutions (schools, religious organizations, youth service agencies, community organizations) in their role to develop capable, mature, and responsible youth.

- Recognize that delinquency prevention is the most cost-effective approach in combating youth crime.
- Intervene immediately and effectively when delinquent behavior first occurs. Ensure that appropriate sanctions for misconduct are delivered in a timely fashion.
- Identify and control the small group of serious, violent, and chronic offenders through a range of graduated sanctions, including placement in secure facilities.

The Comprehensive Strategy is based on a "risk-focused" prevention

From the Administrator

Juvenile violence is increasing in America. The FBI's most recent data published in the *Uniform Crime Reports* show that from 1992 to 1993 juvenile (under age 18) arrests for violent crimes increased nearly 6 percent, while adult violent crime arrests decreased. Juvenile arrests for homicide increased 14 percent and juvenile arrests for weapons violations increased 12 percent during this 1-year period, while adult arrests increased 2 percent for homicides and 7 percent for weapons offenses. Alarmed by these increases, America is desperately demanding solutions to escalating violent juvenile crime.

OJJDP's *Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile*

Offenders provides a framework for strategic responses at the community, city, State, and national levels. OJJDP's *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* provides the necessary tools and program information to systematically and comprehensively address rising violent juvenile crime. Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy, however, will require a true national commitment to improving our juvenile justice system and providing appropriate prevention and programmatic interventions for our youth.

While this is being accomplished, and to the extent that the juvenile justice system is currently not able to handle some of the more violent or intractable juvenile

offenders, the criminal justice system must be relied upon to protect society from those individuals. We must begin immediately, however, to strengthen the juvenile justice system so that it will be in a better position to effectively address the needs of the juvenile offender population and take its proper role in working effectively with delinquent youth and securing public safety. The *Comprehensive Strategy* and the *Guide* are significant tools for communities to both begin and enhance this work.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

model, which makes it possible to examine communities for known risk factors associated with youth violence. These risk factors exist at the individual, family, school, peer, and community levels. Using community planning and mobilization methods, the Comprehensive Strategy helps community leaders identify activities that can reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for at-risk youth.

The Comprehensive Strategy includes an intervention component that incorporates a continuum of graduated sanctions and treatment options for juvenile offenders. The continuum includes immediate sanctions for first-time and minor offenders, intermediate sanctions for serious and repeat offenders, and secure care for violent and chronic offenders who present a danger to their communities. Aftercare must be a formal component of all residential placements, involving the family and the community in supporting and reintegrating the juvenile into the community.

Under an OJJDP grant, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and Developmental Research and Programs, Inc. (DRP) have identified effective and promising programs from across the Nation that are consistent with the framework of the Comprehensive Strategy. They organized these programs into three categories:

- Prevention programs from conception to age 6.
- Prevention programs from age 6 through adolescence.
- Graduated sanctions programs.

Key juvenile justice tools, called risk assessment and classification instruments, are included in the *Guide* to assist juvenile justice, health, and welfare agencies in providing treatment for their clients. NCCD and DRP have developed an operations plan in the *Guide*, which gives communities a blueprint for implementing the Comprehensive Strategy.

Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy

Communities across America can use the *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* as a tool for addressing the problem of juvenile delinquency. This update presents an overview of the *Guide*, which consists of four major parts.

A Blueprint for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (Part I)

The heart of the *Guide*, this part provides a step-by-step process by which a community can implement the Comprehensive Strategy. The Blueprint focuses primarily on system-level issues that should prompt communities to move away from traditional, single-factor programs toward a more comprehensive approach.

Part I incorporates the principles, rationale, and components of the Comprehensive Strategy, drawn from OJJDP's 1993 *Program Summary*. This part addresses prevention planning based on the Communities That Care approach, juvenile justice planning based on a risk-focused continuum of graduated sanctions, and implementation, management, and evaluation of Comprehensive Strategy programs.

The Communities That Care prevention process begins by acquainting key community leaders with risk-focused prevention strategies to assess their community's readiness for a comprehensive prevention effort. These leaders form a community prevention board or name an existing group to serve this function. Once established, the board is trained to collect data on risk indicators and assess existing programs.

After completing the assessment, the community prevention board identifies the most pressing risk factors and program gaps and reviews effective approaches for reducing risk factors. The board then develops a plan to

implement and evaluate a comprehensive risk reduction strategy tailored to the community's unique risk and resource profile.

The intervention section of the Blueprint lays out a sequential process for developing a model juvenile justice system, graduated sanctions approach, and risk-focused classification system. This section explains how to develop risk and needs assessment instruments and a program matrix. By applying the classification instruments and program matrix to selected offender populations, community leaders can determine the adequacy of existing programs and develop a plan to fill the gaps in sanctions.

The Blueprint concludes with a look at the implementation, management, and evaluation of programs based on the Comprehensive Strategy. This portion of the Blueprint examines coordination of the prevention and intervention components; the importance of securing broad support for a comprehensive community-based approach, including interagency cooperation; case management and management information systems; and staff selection. Suggestions are provided for evaluating a community's comprehensive strategy to design and implement a continuum of care for juveniles, including a recommendation that the community undertake process and outcome evaluations.

Preventing Serious, Violent, and Chronic Delinquency and Crime (Part II)

This part presents a risk-focused prevention strategy concentrating on two age spans: conception to age 6 and from age 6 through adolescence. Here the *Guide* describes promising and effective prevention programs for children and youth.

Prevention approaches seek to interrupt the processes that cause problem behavior. Research over the past 30 years has identified precursors to delinquency and violence, called risk factors, as well as protective factors that

suffer an individual against risk factors and inhibit the development of behavior problems. Approaches that reduce risk factors while enhancing protective factors are likely to provide the strongest form of prevention.

For greatest effectiveness, community prevention efforts should focus on interventions that:

- Address identified risk factors to which the most children in a particular community are exposed.
- Focus on populations exposed to multiple risk factors.
- Address risk and protective factors early and at the appropriate developmental stage in a child's life.
- Address multiple risk factors in multiple domains.
- Create a continuum of prevention services across developmental stages and throughout the community.
- Reach and communicate effectively with the target populations.
- Work over the long term.
- Involve a service delivery system that employs personnel well-trained for specific intervention tasks and is unified in its vision of risk-focused prevention.

To put such a comprehensive strategy in place, communities must assess their children's risk exposure and the current resources directed at the risks, prioritize risk factors and identify gaps in existing resources, and establish new programs to address service gaps.

The *Guide's* look at prevention begins with a review of programs for parents and their children from conception to age 6. The review found the following risk factors for violence and delinquency during this period:

- Perinatal difficulties.
- Minor physical abnormalities.
- Brain damage.
- Abuse and maltreatment.
- Family history of criminal behavior and substance abuse.

- Family management problems.
- Family conflict.
- Parental attitudes favorable toward, and parental involvement in, crime and substance abuse.
- Early antisocial behavior.
- Academic failure.

Protective factors that inhibit violence and delinquency include:

- Individual characteristics (such as female gender, intelligence, positive social orientation, and a resilient temperament).
- Social bonding to individuals (prosocial family members, teachers, coaches, youth leaders, and friends) and institutions (schools and youth organizations).
- Healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior, including those that promote nonviolence and abstinence from drugs.

Research suggests that effective early interventions, such as those listed below, help prevent violence and delinquency:

- Prenatal and perinatal medical care.
- Intensive health education for pregnant mothers and mothers with young children.
- Immunizations.
- Parent training.
- Enhancement of parent-child interaction.
- Cognitive development activities for the child.
- Promotion of social service use.
- Assistance to mothers in achieving educational and occupational goals.
- Social support for mothers.
- Toy and book lending libraries.
- Educational daycare and preschool.
- Social competence curriculums.

Prevention next focuses on selected interventions from age 6 through adolescence and on interventions for the community at large. Risk factors during these developmental periods are as follows:

- Extreme economic deprivation.
- Community disorganization and low neighborhood attachment.
- Transitions and mobility.
- Availability of firearms.
- Media portrayals of violence.
- Family management problems.
- Family conflict.
- Parental attitudes favorable toward, and parental involvement in, crime and violence.
- Early and persistent antisocial behavior.
- Academic failure.
- Lack of commitment to school.
- Alienation and rebelliousness.
- Association with peers who engage in delinquency and violence.
- Favorable attitudes toward delinquency.
- Early initiation of delinquent and violent behaviors.

- Constitutional factors (e.g., low intelligence, hyperactivity, and attention-deficit disorders).

Youth age 6 through adolescence are protected by the same three factors listed above for infants and younger children, that is, certain individual characteristics, social bonding to positive role models, and healthy beliefs and clear standards.

Sixteen prevention program areas are reviewed in this part of the *Guide*. While the quality of the evaluation research varies, a number of strategies appear effective in preventing delinquency. Effective strategies include the following:

- Reductions in class size for kindergarten and first grade classes.
- Continuous-progress instructional strategies.
- Cooperative learning.
- Tutoring.
- Computer-assisted instruction.

- Diagnostic/prescriptive pullout programs.
- Ability grouping within classes in elementary school.
- Nongraded elementary schools.
- Classroom behavior management techniques.
- Behavioral monitoring and reinforcement of attendance, academic progress, and appropriate school behavior.
- Parent training.
- Marital and family therapy.
- Youth employment and vocational training programs with an intensive educational component.

Graduated Sanctions for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (Part III)

The prevention component explored in Part II of the *Guide* is complemented by an intervention component based on a risk-focused continuum of graduated sanctions. Part III examines research literature, sets forth guidelines for a system of graduated sanctions, and describes effective and promising programs identified through an extensive national search.

The literature review found considerable research in some areas but little in others, including immediate sanctions, violent offender programs, and aftercare programs. The most solid research looked at highly structured alternative programs for youth who would otherwise be incarcerated, including intensive supervision programs (ISP's). Some conclusions can be drawn from this limited body of research. For example, it is clear that community-based programs can serve as safe, cost-effective alternatives to incarceration for many youth. Even studies with less favorable results show community-based programs to be as effective as traditional training schools in reducing recidivism. The more encouraging studies suggest that when alternative community-based programs are carefully conceived and well-implemented, they can be highly effective.

Recent meta-analyses by Lipsey (1992), Andrews et al. (1990), and Garrett (1985) have challenged the claim that "nothing works" with juvenile offenders and supported the notion that rehabilitation can be effective. Their findings suggest that the most effective interventions are behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, skill-oriented, multimodal, and family-oriented.

From the literature and program review, NCCD identified the crucial components of successful graduated sanctions programs. The most reliably effective programs address key areas of risk and build on youth's strengths, rather than focusing on their deficiencies. Such programs seek to strengthen the personal and institutional factors that foster healthy adolescent development, provide adequate support and supervision, and offer a long-term stake in the community. Effective programs are comprehensive and intensive, and they operate under a variety of auspices (public, nonprofit, or university).

On the process or implementation level, programs that work continue over a fairly long period of time and do what they set out to do—that is, they possess "therapeutic integrity." They are reasonably intensive and are delivered by energetic and committed staff. Successful programs also incorporate a case management approach that begins at intake and follows youth through the different program phases until discharge. As part of case management, individual treatment plans address the specific needs of each youth and are updated on a regular basis. Such programs give youth frequent, clear, and consistent feedback—both positive and negative—on their progress.

Effective education, vocational training, and counseling strategies are essential program components that must be tied to the individual needs of juveniles. The most effective counseling seems to be a cognitive-behavioral approach. In addition to individual and group counseling, family counseling must be included because many of the problems faced by youth are caused or exacerbated by family dysfunction.

Productive programs typically address issues related to community, peers, school, and work. Treatment involving these issues is far more productive when youth remain with their families or at least in their own communities while receiving treatment. The need for public safety sometimes precludes community-based treatment and, increasingly for some youth, families may be dysfunctional or—for all practical purposes—nonexistent. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that youth should always be treated in the least restrictive environment possible, while assuring public safety.

Other key program components address the level of service to youth who remain in the community. Effective community programs have low caseloads, ensuring that youth receive constant and individualized attention. Frequent face-to-face contacts, telephone contacts, and contacts with parents, teachers, and employers provide close monitoring and consistent support for youth. This approach is most successful if the intensity level is diminished by degrees over a long period.

Finally, the programs gradually reintegrate youth into their homes and communities. Intensive aftercare services are crucial to program success and should be a formal part of all programs.

These components of successful graduated sanctions programs were gleaned from 14 programs out of more than 200 identified nationwide. NCCD selected these programs because they had both positive evaluation data and detailed program descriptions. The *Guide* offers several program models for each level of the continuum of care.

Risk Assessment and Classification for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (Part IV)

This part of the *Guide* examines how juvenile justice practitioners can use assessment and classification tools in prevention and graduated sanctions programs. For the continuum of graduated sanctions to operate effectively, juvenile justice officials must

determine how many youth, and which ones, to place at each level of the continuum. Risk assessment and classification are used for this purpose in the Comprehensive Strategy. Broadly defined, risk assessment and classification in juvenile justice refer to the process of estimating an individual's likelihood of continued involvement in delinquent behavior and determining the most appropriate type of intervention, given the identified level of risk.

Historically, risk assessment and classification have been informal, highly discretionary procedures carried out by individuals with varying philosophies, different levels of experience and knowledge, and different assessment criteria. Recently, juvenile justice officials have shown an increasing interest in more formalized procedures to assist them in their decisionmaking.

Part IV discusses risk assessment at the prevention stage, including community risk assessment and risk assessment in child welfare agencies. It also addresses risk assessment at different decision points in the juvenile justice system, including detention, placement, probation or parole supervision, and institutional custody.

As used here, risk assessment instruments refer to those that are designed to estimate the likelihood that a juvenile offender will subsequently commit another offense within a specified followup period and are based on the statistical relationship between youth characteristics and recidivism. These instruments are used to determine the level of supervision required for probationers and parolees, although they have also been integrated into classification systems used to decide sentencing or placement.

The literature repeatedly has identified a core set of variables as a recidivism predictor for juvenile offenders, and these are the most likely factors to appear on risk assessment instruments. The variables include the following:

- Age at first referral or adjudication.
- Number of prior referrals or arrests.

- Number of out-of-home placements or institutional commitments.
- Academic achievement.
- School behavior and attendance.
- Substance abuse.
- Family stability.
- Parental control.
- Peer relationships.

Another widely used assessment tool is the placement assessment or custody assessment instrument. This instrument differs from risk assessment instruments because it does more than simply assess the likelihood that an offender will commit a new offense. These instruments are generally driven by policy considerations rather than research results, even though they frequently include some predictive items. Placement or custody assessments may be used in three ways: as a guide for judges or State corrections officials in determining the appropriate placement or level of security; as a screening tool to determine whether a youth should be placed into detention pending an adjudicatory hearing; or as a method for determining the custody needs of incarcerated youth.

The factors used to decide placement or custody are different from those used in risk assessment because the goals are different. For example, in making placement decisions, judges and corrections officials must assess the juvenile's likelihood of reoffending, but they also need to consider "just desserts" and public sensitivity issues. If a "pure" risk instrument were used to guide placement decisions, it would fail to capture several relevant factors.

Detention screening instruments are another set of tools with a unique purpose. They focus on the short-term threat to public safety and the likelihood that the juvenile will abscond prior to an adjudicatory hearing. These tools typically contain measures of the severity of current and prior offenses, the frequency and recency of past offenses, and stability measures such as a history of escapes or runaways.

Correctional facilities also use custody assessments, primarily to gauge the risk that juveniles pose to themselves or others while in the institution. This assessment helps determine whether a youth needs a maximum, moderate, or minimum security living environment.

The methods used to develop placement and custody instruments are often based on consensus rather than empirical evidence. This is particularly true for placement assessment instruments, where policy concerns are predominant. Developing the instruments involves a cross-section of juvenile justice decisionmakers who determine what items will be included in the scale and how they will be weighted, how the seriousness of offenses will be ranked, and what types of placements will be associated with various assessment scores.

This part concludes with a discussion of needs assessment instruments, which are frequently completed along with the risk or placement/custody scales. Needs assessments are used to systematically identify critical offender problems, and they typically measure these factors:

- Substance abuse.
- Family functioning or relationships.
- Emotional stability.
- School attendance and behavior.
- Peer relationships.

Many needs assessment instruments also include measures of health and hygiene, intellectual ability or achievement, and learning disability. Needs assessments inform treatment planning decisions and serve as a foundation for development of individual treatment plans.

Given the recent increased emphasis on public protection and offender accountability, needs assessment results are often not given high enough priority in classification decisions. Instead, risk or custody assessments are used to decide the level of supervision or type of placement, while needs assessments are used to determine the specific program

interventions to be delivered within the designated custody or supervision level.

Next Steps

In addition to publishing the *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*, OJJDP is furthering the Comprehensive Strategy through a series of dissemination efforts and through intensive technical assistance in communities that are implementing the Comprehensive Strategy. This continuation effort has the following goals:

- Disseminate OJJDP Comprehensive Strategy resources to elected officials, foundation executives, the media, and juvenile justice professionals.
- Provide indepth training in the Comprehensive Strategy for United States Attorneys, Federal regional representatives from the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Energy, and Labor, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy, as well as selected legislators and governors' staff members across the Nation.
- Provide limited technical assistance to participants in regional training sessions to develop their own

approaches for implementing the OJJDP Comprehensive Strategy.

- Provide extensive technical support to at least nine communities that will be funded by OJJDP to implement the Comprehensive Strategy.
- Refine the resource materials and create an evaluation design for testing the Comprehensive Strategy.

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To obtain a free copy of OJJDP's *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*, or for information about online access to the *Guide*, write or call:

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