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*a family focused approach to
decision making and treatment
of status offenders and juvenile delinquents*

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ADDITIONS

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The Youth Assessment and Treatment System

*a family focused approach
to decision making and treatment
of status offenders and juvenile delinquents*

The Youth Assessment and Treatment System is a decision making system for Youth Services. It is designed to enhance decision making while promoting help and avoiding unnecessary intrusion into the family. It is a social work approach, which guides the professional through the development of strategies for changing unacceptable behavior and stabilizing families.

The model is designed to structure the process from intake through assessment, treatment and closure. It can be implemented in state, regional, county or local jurisdictions.

The Youth Assessment and Treatment System was designed by ACTION for Child Protection following the development and successful implementation of a similar system used in the field of child protection. As a private nonprofit organization dedicated to innovative and assertive strengthening and improvement of services to children and families, ACTION is enthusiastic about helping jurisdictions become more effective in working with troubled youth.



A Balanced Approach

Youth services professionals operate in an environment influenced by many systems such as the schools, law enforcement, victims rights groups, the judiciary and mental health. Each system has a different perspective on delinquent behavior and how to reduce it. In developing the Youth Assessment and Treatment System, ACTION adapted as a philosophical base the following principles to incorporate the concerns of the juvenile justice community, the juvenile offender and his family.

- **Community Protection:** The public has a right to a safe and secure community.
- **Accountability:** Whenever an offense occurs, an obligation by the juvenile offender occurs.
- **Competency:** Juvenile offenders who come within the jurisdiction of youth services and/or the court should leave the system more capable of living productively and responsibly in the community.
- **Individualization:** Each juvenile offender has a unique set of circumstances and factors which have contributed to his offense behavior. The response by the system to the juvenile should be individualized, and be based on an assessment of the unique contributing factors.
- **Balance:** Justice is best served when the community, the victim, and the youth receive balanced attention, and all gain tangible outcomes from their interaction with youth services.

These principles are adapted from *Juvenile Probation: The Balanced Approach* by Dennis Maloney, Dennis Romig and Troy Armstrong and are used as a general benchmark for measuring the success of the Youth Assessment and Treatment System.



Features of the Model

The most critical aspect of any behavior changing treatment system is the quality of the initial assessment and problem identification. The Youth Assessment and Treatment System incorporates a structured, comprehensive approach to assessing the circumstances that influence the youth's behavior.

The Youth Assessment and Treatment system employs an ecological perspective explaining delinquency. Delinquent or unacceptable behavior is a result of the total pattern of interaction between the youth and his environment. This system uses the youth's life space to consider family functioning.

Delinquency occurs in the context of a dynamic (interacting) environment or "field" of "forces." The term force is applied because, in effect, the aspects of the youth's environment in which the youth lives apply a force on the youth.

The field is comprised of three forces: youth, parent, and family. Each of these forces may be extremely complex and is composed of subparts called "elements." These elements are identified and analyzed on the basis of 13 open-ended questions.

The answers to the thirteen questions then constitute the *influences* which describe the youth and the family. There are an endless number of influences, positive and negative. Sample negative and positive influences are provided in the attached "Reference Sheet." These are only examples, and are not intended to be used as a checklist or to be considered an exhaustive list. The information on each specific family and youth will determine the influences described in the thirteen elements.

In order to determine unacceptable youth behavior and the level of family functioning, one must identify and understand the presence of the forces and elements in the Youth Assessment and Treatment System.



Through the identification and study of each force's elements, negative and often harmful influences are recognized. The system allows for consideration of negative influences from one force which may combine with or stimulate the development of negative influences in other forces, therefore increasing family dysfunction.

At the same time the Youth Assessment and Treatment System guides the professional through the assessment process, it forces a behavior control evaluation. This evaluation is concerned with those aspects of the youth's behavior which must be controlled immediately in order to protect the youth, his/her family, or the community. These are distinguished from those aspects of functioning which must be changed through treatment. If necessary, a behavior control plan can be developed and implemented before completing a more comprehensive treatment plan.

Other features of the Youth Assessment and Treatment System include a family assessment profile, a treatment planning system and an ongoing case evaluation system. The Youth Assessment and Treatment System also builds in a brief assessment of service needs versus resources available for each case. This feature is particularly helpful to administrators and supervisors in determining and documenting the service gaps in each community.



Benefits of the Model

The Youth Assessment and Treatment System keeps service providers on track and goal oriented in working with troubled youth. Specific benefits of the system are listed below.

- The model provides structure and continuity for the worker while allowing for the individualized nature of each case.
- It enhances the nature and quality of the interaction between the worker, the youth and the family.
- It is an excellent supervisory tool which highlights worker strengths and areas which could be improved.
- It promotes accountability and, in effect, reduces liability.
- It ensures that decisions are logical and based on significant and objective information.
- It increases the likelihood of cooperative involvement of parents or guardians in treatment.
- It increases planned case closures.
- It is an excellent system for use in training new workers.
- It has a built-in, ongoing needs assessment of community resources.
- It enhances information gathering for court reports and recommendations.
- It can reduce incarceration as judges become more confident that effective intervention is taking place.
- It can be modified for use in different settings.



The Wisconsin Experience

A successful field test of the Youth Assessment and Treatment System has been concluded in the Manitowoc County Human Services Department in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. The system is being offered to other Wisconsin jurisdictions and throughout the country.

ACTION worked closely with Manitowoc staff for six months to implement the Youth Assessment and Treatment System. Modifications have been made based on the "real world" experiences of workers, supervisors, administrators and judges. ACTION is grateful to the dedicated staff in Wisconsin for their valuable contribution to the quality and reliability of the system. Here are some of their thoughts about the Youth Assessment and Treatment System.

Tom Stanton, Director, Manitowoc County Department of Human Services: *"The Youth Assessment and Treatment System ensures consistency of social work practice and provides for management accountability."*

Steve Graff, Social Work Supervisor, Manitowoc County, Wisconsin: *"The Youth Assessment and Treatment System model has improved services to clients in our community by providing my staff with a structured and consistent framework for Family Assessment and Treatment Planning. The model emphasizes family dynamics and social work principles which I believe to be essential ingredients in resolving juvenile crime."*

Paula Popovitch and Barb Benthien, Social Workers, Manitowoc: *"Using the Youth Assessment and Treatment System has helped us to organize and analyze the information gathered about the family so that we can effectively identify the family's core issues."*



ACTION'S Commitment

From its beginning in 1985, ACTION has been committed to developing tools and worker skills to improve public services for children and their families. ACTION provides a wide range of services related to child protection, foster care, adoptive and youth services. Our full-time staff activity is strengthened with a national network of professionals anchored by offices in Denver, Colorado and Charlotte, North Carolina. Our shared commitment is to provide support to organizations trying to improve their intervention techniques and effectiveness.

The services we offer specifically related to the Youth Assessment and Treatment System are listed below.

- Seminars to introduce the system and its concepts.
- Review and evaluation of current organization and practices.
- On-site training, length depending on current proficiency level of staff.
- Follow-up site reviews.
- Individual case consultation.
- Community coordination meetings.
- Handbooks, forms and forms manual for each worker.

For more information about ACTION and *The Youth Assessment and Treatment System*, please contact:

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YOUTH ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT SYSTEM

REFERENCE SHEET

YOUTH FORCE

(1) Youth Behavior Element: *How does the youth behave?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- non-communicative
- aggressive
- immature
- threatens suicide
- overly dependent
- impulsive
- self destructive
- coercive
- defiant
- lying
- lacks limit setting capacity
- break rules
- poor school attendance
- runaway
- hyperactive
- drug/alcohol use/misuse
- promiscuous
- commits criminal acts
- manipulative

Examples of Positive Influences:

- developmentally appropriate
- age appropriate maturity
- communicates effectively
- assertive
- reasonably dependent
- regular school attendance
- controls impulses
- effective problem solver

(2) Youth Relationships Element: *What is the quality of the youth's relationships with others?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- mistrust authority
- rejected by positive peers
- no sense of healthy relationships
- wants rescuer
- poor social skills
- associates with deviant peers

Examples of Positive Influences:

- accepted by positive peers
- healthy relationships
- good social skills
- associates with positive peers
- satisfying peer interactions

(3) Youth Self Perception Element: *What is the youth's perception of him or herself? Describe pervasive feelings and emotions.*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- victim
- don't care about self
- lack meaning
- low self esteem
- no good
- fearful/anxious
- self-blame
- flat affect
- insecure
- indifferent/apathetic
- self-critical
- helpless/powerless
- anger/misdirected anger
- self-pity
- cynicism
- isolated
- guilt/no sign of guilt
- being trapped
- depression
- stress from school

Examples of Positive Influences:

- capable
- cares about self
- good self esteem
- good
- confident
- appropriate emotional response
- relaxed/calm
- reasonable/acceptable emotion
- appropriate affect
- reasonable self-concept
- future-oriented
- open/flexible
- optimistic

(4) Youth Socialization Element: *What is the youth's history of socialization?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- emotional abuse
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- neglect
- abused by sibling
- abused by stranger
- lack nurturance
- no parent limit setting
- overindulged
- lacks positive role models
- lack direction
- multiple parental figures
- attitudes, values, beliefs at odds with norm

Examples of Positive Influences:

- positive early childhood
- history of positive, supportive relationships
- history of nurturing
- history of parent limit setting
- positive role models
- consistent parent figures
- acceptable attitudes, values and beliefs

(5) Youth's Capacity Element: *What is the youth's cognitive capacity?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- poor school performance
- attention deficit (ADD)
- learning disability
- low IQ
- high IQ

Examples of Positive Influences:

- acceptable school performance
- adequate attention span
- demonstrates ability to learn

PARENT FORCE

(1) Adult Functioning Element: *What are the pervasive behaviors, feelings and levels of adaptation in the adults?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- general anger
- fear/anxiety
- isolation/loneliness
- depression
- insecurity
- low empathy
- unloved
- feel trapped
- hopeless, despair
- indifference, apathy
- inability to handle stress
- poor self concept
- diagnosed mental illness
- aggressive
- impulsive
- self-centered, narcissistic
- self critical
- suspicious
- rigid
- unreasonable
- passive/dependent
- alcohol/drug use/misuse
- preoccupied
- response to separation and stress
- psychopathology
- sociopathology
- antisocial
- criminal behavior
- violence
- immaturity
- fail to problem solve
- unrealistic life expectations

Examples of Positive Influences:

- appropriate emotional control
- appropriate affect
- effectively communicates ideas, thoughts and emotions
- assertive
- calm/relaxed
- effective problem solver
- controls impulses
- open, flexible
- optimistic
- reasonable self concept
- future oriented
- sociable
- self revealing

(2) Parenting Element: *What are the parenting practices in this family?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- excessive discipline
- failure to provide basic care
- lack of bonding
- abandonment
- poor role model
- over protective
- lacks time/energy
- lacks love/affection
- lacks discipline skill
- doesn't discipline antisocial behavior
- doesn't monitor youth
- lack consistent punishment/reward
- unrealistic or rigid child rearing attitudes and expectations
- poor communication with youth
- insensitive to youth's needs
- aversion to parenting responsibilities
- individualistic/self-centered as parents
- project personal conflicts onto youth
- self-righteous in parenting
- unconcerned for youth
- uncreative in parenting

Examples of Positive Influences:

- informed/knowledgeable re: parenting
- aware of parenting style/approach
- varied skills and approaches
- good communication
- patient
- reasonable expectations
- child oriented
- sensitive to youth's needs
- evidence of positive parenting experiences
- consistent punishment/reward
- appropriate discipline
- adequately monitor youth
- love and affection demonstrated
- bonding evident
- appropriately protective
- fair/flexible
- respectful of youth

(3) History Element: *What is history of the adults (parents/caretakers)?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- traumatic, problem filled, victimized
- overall disappointment in life
- deprivation of nurturing
- history of addiction or substance abuse
- history of violent punishment
- criminal record
- history of unemployment or inability to keep jobs
- health problems (physical/emotional)
- destructive/conflicted relationships

Examples of Positive Influences:

- satisfying experiences
- established, supportive relationships
- conflicts/disappointments resolved
- good work history
- good health history
- positive childhood

(4) Parent Perception Element: *How do the adult caretakers view (label) the child?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- blames youth for behavior
- "screw up"
- "uncontrollable"
- "black sheep"
- troublesome
- children are property
- views as more capable than age

Examples of Positive Influences:

- individual/positive traits
- good
- appropriate
- accurately depicted

FAMILY FORCE

(1) Demographic Element: *What are the demographics of the family?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- highly mobile
- paramour present
- step family/blended family
- non-family members in household
- recent relocation
- young parents
- physical health problems of members
- lack transportation
- lack phone
- not part of community
- unemployment
- lack education/training
- general stress (divorce, separation)
- lower socioeconomic
- non support (\$)
- significant deaths
- large family
- single parent
- diverse culture/custom
- divorce
- poor neighborhood
- unsafe home (physically)
- inadequate living conditions
- stressful developmental stage of family

Examples of Positive Influences:

- adequate income
- stable employment
- satisfactory housing
- adequate education/training
- healthy family
- established in home/neighborhood
- access to community
- phone/transportation)
- adequate home

(2) Family Functioning Element: *How does the family function, interact and communicate?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- poor communication
- depressed
- youth is blamed for couple conflict
- family incohesion
- children are property
- deal poorly with stress
- do not seek help
- physical and social distancing from outsiders
- child rearing disagreements
- marital conflict/instability
- chaotic, disorganized, disordered
- lack of attachment between youth/parent
- lack of affection between parents
- role confusion
- spousal violence
- hatred toward family by youth
- closed system

Examples of Positive Influences:

- marital satisfaction
- congruent child rearing expectations
- clear/satisfying role definition
- effective communication
- established routines
- demonstration of member support, respect and affection
- full participation in family decision making/planning
- work and recreate as family
- stable, established
- family identity
- successful advancement through developmental stages
- definite boundaries

(3) Extended Family Element: *What is the nature of the extended family's relationships and support?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- psychological death of absent parent
- multigeneration problem family
- history of antisocial behavior in other family members (uncle, grandparents, etc.)
- extended family not supportive, may be interfering
- extended family reinforces unacceptable behavior
- lack of support
- no extended family

Examples of Positive Influences:

- involved/supportive extended family network
- positive extended family history

(4) Family Motivation Element: *What is the nature and level of specific motivation and commitment related to current problems as demonstrated by the parents and the youth?*

Examples of Negative Influences:

- history of lack of follow through
- motivation based on personal gain (easier to blame youth than take responsibility)
- parents unequally motivated
- motivation is impulsive
- youth unmotivated
- fake cooperation

Examples of Positive Influences:

- history of follow through
- parents equally motivated
- youth motivated
- motivation is thoughtful
- motivation is based on real desire for change
- cooperative