

Effective Parenting Interventions when Working with Juvenile Offenders

Why are parent interventions for juvenile offenders important?

Effective interventions with youth offenders must include the family and other significant others. The key family variables related to delinquent outcomes are:

- 1) Setting clear and consistent limits regarding appropriate behavior (e.g. monitoring, supervision, disciplinary methods)
- 2) Increasing the level of warmth and nurturance in the parent-child relationship.

What should be the targets of change for a parenting intervention with delinquents?

Interventions should focus on:

- Increasing the number of close relationships which support the offender to decrease the his or her risk factors for delinquency
- Parental modeling and reinforcement of prosocial behavior
- Reducing inadequate monitoring
- Decreasing excessive time spent outside the family
- Increasing appropriate rewards for prosocial behavior
- Increasing appropriate consequences for antisocial behavior
- Decreasing poor or distant emotional attachments with family caregivers
- Increasing prosocial activities which the offender participate in with his or her family

Family interventions that are NOT effective at reducing criminal and delinquent behaviors include:

- Non-directive, insight-oriented and cathartic interventions are not successful
- Intrusive and insensitive interventions to behavioral skills are destructive and family collaboration and engagement is crucial to learning new behavioral skills.

The following example illustrates an appropriate approach to training a family member to provide support to an offender for prosocial behavior.

Presenting problem: Brian is a 16 year old who lives at home with his mother. Although he is on probation, he is still hanging out with friends who are engaging in antisocial behaviors and staying out after curfew. Brian’s mom vacillates between “giving up” on trying to enforce Brian’s curfew because he ignores her and enforcing curfew in extreme ways such as calling the police and locking Brian out of the house. Brian and his mother report they often “get along,” however, lately when Brian gets into trouble, his mom reports she has become so frustrated that she tells him “you should just go live with your dad because you are both no good losers.” His mother feels badly about these fights, but says she doesn’t know how to change the negative feelings that both she and Brian have afterward.

Problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) A lack of consistent limits and appropriate rewards and punishers. 2) Difficulty reestablishing prosocial involvement after conflicts.
Goal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Created behavior plan that has clear and consistent limits and appropriate rewards and punishers for prosocial behavior. 2) Increase the number of prosocial, bonding activities that Brian and his mother participate in with each other.
Intervention Examples	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Teaching Brian’s mother to follow through on monitoring Brian in all environments to ensure of his whereabouts. This will increase his mother’s sense of control and help avoid over reactions after periods of apathy. 2) Teaching Brian’s mother to implement a behavior plan with consistent rules and limits targeting Brian’s behavior. His mother should be taught how to negotiate rules while maintaining final authority and setting up a balanced reward and consequence system. 3) Increase the family’s positive regard for each other through increased prosocial activities such as family dinners, family events away from home, and shared tasks.

Examples of two family intervention programs that contain cognitive-behavioral, skills-oriented approaches:

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) This evidence-based program works primarily with highly delinquent youth to address serious behavioral issues. MST clinicians work with parents to set consistent limits and involve community systems to impact youth’s behavior. Focus is on helping caregivers address behavioral problems through teaching the parent skills in effectively handling adolescent problems, thereby improving family relationships, school performance, and peer/neighborhood/ community interactions.

Functional Family Therapy (FFT) This evidence-based program focuses on improving family relationships that can be the key to addressing behavioral problems in youth. This therapeutic model works with strong engagement of the entire family, uses reattribution techniques and then generalizes those techniques to all areas of the family’s life. FFT is provided in the office or in the home to fit the schedules and needs of all family members. FFT therapists help to identify and mobilize family strengths to turn around problems and improve communication and family relationships through less defensive communication and more reciprocal supportive communication.

Multi-Systemic Therapy	Functional Family Therapy
Includes: - Case management from therapist - Establishing parental control - Generalization to all settings	Engagement ↓ Reattribution ↓ Generalization to all settings

Multi Systemic Treatment	Functional Family Therapy
Pros: - Focus on child in all settings (home, school, activities) - Coach parent on new skills Cons: - Dependence on therapist can develop - Lack of focus on family interactions and dynamics	Pros: - Higher engagement for tough families - Focus family dynamic and interaction - Reframe intent of behaviors - Focus on all settings Cons: - Less case management for parents

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