

JCM Webinar
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At-Risk Youth: Services, Programs
and Protection from Harm

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Defining At Risk

- At-Risk Youth: Pre-teen and teenaged males and females who may be experiencing problems in one or more of the following areas: 1) school life, 2) family life, 3) legal, 4) lack of or dropping out of social activities, 5) unusual behavior changes, 6) risky sexual activity, 7) aggression towards peers and family members, 8) poor self-image and lack of self-worth, 9) depression and/or suicidal ideation.

How much risk?

- Level One-High risk
- In general, assessment reveals problems in multiple areas; problems are recent, frequent and intense (e.g. 15 yr. old who is experiencing physical abuse at home, is using alcohol on a daily basis, and is failing and skipping classes at school, all occurring in the last 3 months)
- Usually leads to three or more referrals for service intervention for child and/or family

Risk continued...

- Level Two-Medium risk-assessment reveals problems but less severe in recency, frequency and intensity (youth is skipping some classes at school over the last six months and parents report signs of depression and acting out; no abuse and youth shows interest in improving)
- leads to two or fewer referrals to services for child and/or family

Risk continued...

- Level Three-Low Risk
- Assessment indicates beginning level of concerns but no immediate risk for harm to or by the youth and episodes are less recent, less frequent and less intense (e.g. youth has one ticket for skipping class and is reportedly spending time with more troubled youth; parents are actively engaged in child's life and seeking services)
- Leads to referrals as a preventative measure or no referrals at this time

Tools for Assessing Risk

- Standardized assessments (Beck Depression Inventory, CBCL, parent and school surveys)
- Evaluations by other professionals (school psychologists, for example)
- Interviews by JCM of youth and family
- JCM guide to determining risk (tool or form developed at the local level)

Referrals to Services and Programs

- Why refer? S.B. 61, Section 264.302-state law allows for referrals to DPRS for youth and families as part of municipal court sentencing (must have contract in county via DPRS)
- Where to refer? Providers as offered by DPRS for services such as: crisis intervention for families, emergency short-term residential care for under 10 yr. olds, family counseling, parenting skills training, youth coping skills, advocacy training and mentoring

Additional Options

- Per Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Art. 45.057, court may order, when assessment suggests, any of the following: rehabilitation, counseling, self-esteem and leadership, work and job skills training, job interviewing, work preparation, self-improvement, parenting, manners, violence avoidance, tutoring, sensitivity training, parental responsibility, community service, restitution, advocacy, or mentoring.
- Parents may also be required to attend classes, attend school functions and change their own behavior in accordance with societal and legal standards

Abuse, Exploitation and Neglect

- All citizens in Texas are required to report suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of children; failure to do so can result in misdemeanor charges
- JCMs have a special duty due to their role in assisting children and youth via the municipal court system

Beyond just the law: Why Report?

- Many at risk-youth are the victims of child abuse and neglect
- These family problems lead to involvement in risky and/or anti social behaviors that will need to be addressed by the court and service providers
- Not recognizing the link between abuse and the subsequent issues for youth behavior can lead to ineffective court intervention and the potential for increased and more severe problems with youth

What is abuse in Texas and How do I report it?

- Definition from Texas Family Code:
- <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/FA/htm/FA.261.htm>
- Reporting of Abuse:
- 1-800-252-5400 or txabusehotline.org

Tying it all Together

- JCMs are the link for at-risk youth and their families to the court system
- JCMs need to have relationships with not only referral sources such as the school system and its staff but also the various agencies to which they will refer youth; critical piece of the job is networking with schools, school resource officers, and counselors to intervene as early as possible with at-risk youth
- JCMs must have a repertoire of assessment tools and techniques to include standardized methods and interviews in order to ascertain the appropriate level of risk and advise the court about necessary services; many tools can be found in the internet and are written at age-appropriate levels for youth and their families
- JCMs should know the definitions of abuse, neglect and exploitation under Texas law and recognize the implications for youth, behavioral, physically and emotionally; abused and neglected youth will come into contact with the court, and JCMs can insure they are provided appropriate services