

## Adolescent Development and Youth Reentry

Presented by  
Dr. Susan Tremonti, Ph.D., ABPP  
Michelle Weemhoff, MSW

### Normative Development

- Much of the behavior exhibited by court-involved youth is behavior that is not abnormal for adolescents. Court involved youth exhibit unacceptable behavior, but it is typically the result of adolescent thinking, identity and moral struggles that are within the range of normal adolescent development.

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### Normative Development

- "For most teens, risky or antisocial behaviors are fleeting; they cease with maturity as individual identity becomes settled. Only a relatively small proportion of adolescents who experiment in risky or illegal activities develop entrenched patterns of problem behavior that persist into adulthood." Steinberg and Scott

### Development Differs

- Individual adolescents develop along different dimensions at different rates. They will mature in some ways before they mature in others, and maturity in one area of domain should not lead to the assumption of maturity in other domains.
- Development is non-linear.

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### Cognitive Development

- Adolescent's capacities for reasoning and understanding grow and approach adult levels by age sixteen; however, youthful decision making may still differ from that of adults due to psychological immaturity. Research shows that psychosocial maturation proceeds more slowly than cognitive development and that age differences in decision making may reflect social and emotional differences between adolescents and adults that continue well beyond mid-adolescence.

Scott and Steinberg, 2008

### Changes to Cognition

- Possibilities
- Abstraction
- Thinking about thinking
- Thinking in multiple dimensions
- Relativity

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### Additional Characteristics of Adolescent Cognition

- Risk-taking
- Sensation-Seeking
- Present-oriented thinking
- Egocentrism
- Perceived invulnerability
- Magical thinking

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### External Factors Interfere with Cognition

- Stress and Fear
- Learning Difficulties-about 17-53% of delinquent youth have learning disabilities compared to 2-10% in the overall child population.
- Trauma-Previous victimization

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### Additional Areas of Development

- Moral Development
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Physical and Sexual Development
- Brain Development

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### Adolescent Brain

- Biology of the brain
- Brain related changes occurring during adolescence
- How brain development may affect adolescent behavior

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### Frontal Lobe

- The lobes of the brain do not develop at the same time or at the same rate, both within the same adolescent's brain and across different people's brains.
- The frontal lobes are often called the "CEO" of the brain because they control higher-order functions such as planning, problem solving, reasoning, and mood regulation. Develop AFTER other parts of the brain.

Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Juvenile Court Curriculum

### Applications of Research to Legal System

- \*Thomas Grisso, Ph.D. and Miranda Rights
- \*Leo and Drizin, False Confessions
- \*The MacArthur Juvenile Adjudicative Competency Study
- \*Roper v. Simmons, 543 US 551 (2005)
- \*J.D.B. v. State of North Carolina

## Haley v. Ohio (1948)

- Relative to events that have occurred in a police interrogation which:

“Would leave a man cold and unimpressed can overawe and overwhelm a lad in his early teens.”

## Grisso- Miranda Warnings Waiver of Legal Rights

- Most juveniles who received the warnings did not understand them well enough to waive their constitutional rights “knowingly and intelligently.”
- Only 20% of the juveniles demonstrated adequate understanding of the four components of a *Miranda* four warnings.
- 55.3% of juveniles exhibited no comprehension of at least one of the four warnings.
- Most frequently misunderstood that they had the right to consult with an attorney and to have one present during interrogation.

## False Confessions

Drizin & Leo (2004)

- Adolescents were over-represented among those who falsely confessed in response to interrogation.
- Among 113 false confessors in criminal cases, 16% were between the ages of 16 and 17, representing the highest concentration among any averaged two year group.

## False confessions continued

- Among all cases studied, false confessions were concentrated in the most serious offenses, the overwhelming majority occurring in murder cases (81%), followed by rape (9%) and arson (3%).
- Relevant case was that of the Central Park Jogger victim in which four 14-16 year old defendants were convicted of rape on the basis of their confessions, but later exonerated by DNA evidence linking the crime to a notorious serial rapist.
- Youths' social status relative to adult authority figures renders them susceptible

## MacArthur Foundation Research on Adolescent Decision Making

- Through a large study specific to Juvenile Adjudicative Competence, on a measure of psychosocial influences on decision making (the MacJen), significant differences among age groups were found in choices on police interrogation and plea agreement vignettes.

## Decision making

- Interrogation vignette:

- 55% of 11-13 year olds
- 40% of 14-15 year olds
- 30% of 16-17 year olds
- 15% of young adults

Chose to “talk and admit” involvement in an alleged offense, rather than “remain silent.”  
80% of adults favored remaining silent.

## Decision making continued

### ■ Plea Agreement vignette:

- 75% of 11-13 year olds
- 65% of 14-15 year olds
- 60% of 16-17 year olds

Recommended accepting the plea offer.

## Connecting Research to Policy

- *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), Abolished the death penalty for offenses committed prior to age 18
- *Graham v. Florida* (2010), Unconstitutional to sentence a person under age 18 to life without parole in non-homicide cases.

## JDB v. North Carolina (2011)

- Establishes the presumption of a “reasonable child” standard in every area of law.
- “The law historically reflected the same assumption that children characteristically lack the capacity to exercise mature judgment and possess only an incomplete ability to understand the world around them.”

## Policy Implications in Michigan

- Juvenile competency
- Juvenile defense
- Community-based alternatives
- Juvenile records
- Transfer to adult court
- Juvenile life without parole
- Youth reentry

## Youth Reentry

- Goal: ***Foster positive transitions to adulthood by helping youth and families make responsible choices and achieve goals in education, employment, behavioral health, and personal relationships.***
- Skill-building and Cognitive Restructuring

## Collaborative Case Management

- Collaborative case management is a dynamic, seamless plan of services and supervision developed with each youth and family that starts the first day in residential placement and continues through transition, reintegration and aftercare in the community.

## Risk-Need-Responsivity

- *Risk principle* - understanding the likelihood of reoffending and how it can be reduced
- *Need principle* - in order for treatment to be effective in reducing recidivism, interventions should target criminogenic needs

## Responsivity Principle

- *Responsivity principle* - focuses on delivering services in a manner that is consistent with each youth's individual learning style, developmental stage, and abilities.

## Developmentally-Appropriate Practices

- ▶ Individualized, community-based, family-center, strength-based, culturally competent, gender-specific
- ▶ Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive behavioral approaches
- ▶ Best programs work intensively with parents and other family members in addition to the child
- ▶ Missouri Model of residential treatment
- ▶ Community-based graduated sanctions

## Inappropriate Treatment = Dangerous Consequences

- 50-80% of youth released from juvenile correctional facilities are rearrested within two to three years, even those who were not serious offenders prior to commitment.
- Prisons/facilities have high rates of documented abuse and maltreatment against youth.
- Youth tried in adult courts and punished in adult corrections are more likely to commit subsequent crimes – and more violent crime – than their counterparts in the juvenile justice system.

## For more information

Susan Tremonti, Ph.D., ABPP  
Diplomate in Forensic Psychology  
Board of Professional Psychology  
734-295-4346

Michelle Weemhoff, MSW  
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency  
517-482-4161  
[mweemhoff@miccd.org](mailto:mweemhoff@miccd.org)  
[www.miccd.org](http://www.miccd.org)