

Involving Parents in Assessments

Certain disorders (e.g., ADHD) are harder to identify without parental input. We acknowledge that, in practice, it is difficult to involve parents in youth assessments for a variety of reasons. We believe, however, that parental input is important, and we can help sites tailor the assessment process to their settings and get beyond the practical barriers that often make it difficult to include parental input.

What Are Potential Sites?

Sites interested in systematic or statewide implementation of the Voice DISC in juvenile detention, corrections, and/or after-care facilities are optimal sites because changes will affect large numbers of youth. We will work with sites with more-limited applications to expand in this direction. Other potential sites include schools, mental health clinics, shelters, and recreational programs.

Steering Committee

We are guided in our process by our steering committee, composed of representatives of major stakeholder groups in the field, including members from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, the Carter Center, the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA), the Policy Research Association, the National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA), and the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ).

The Voice DISC

The Voice DISC is a comprehensive, structured interview that uses DSM-IV criteria to screen for more than thirty mental health disorders found in children and adolescents. The most widely used and studied psychiatric interview of its kind, the Voice DISC is administered via computer. The computer software enables youth to hear questions through headphones while reading them on screen. This method allows them to complete the DISC interview independently, regardless of their reading skill level.

Benefits of the Voice DISC

- Greater anonymity: Youth report feeling more comfortable disclosing information such as suicidality or substance use to a computer.
- Little or no reading skill is required.
- Minimal staff support is required.
- A scored report that includes information about provisional psychiatric diagnoses and suicide risk is available immediately.

For More Information

If you would like more information about the Center for the Promotion of Mental Health in Juvenile Justice, please call (212) 543-5298.



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Center for the Promotion of Mental Health in Juvenile Justice

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OUR GOAL IS TO PROVIDE
EXPERT GUIDANCE TO THE
FIELD REGARDING BEST
PRACTICES FOR PSYCHIATRIC
ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH IN
JUVENILE JUSTICE SETTINGS.
WE ARE WORKING TO AID
JUVENILE JUSTICE SETTINGS
IN DETERMINING HOW TO
INCORPORATE SCIENTIFICALLY
SOUND MENTAL HEALTH
ASSESSMENTS INTO PRACTICE
AND HOW TO MAP MENTAL
HEALTH SERVICES ONTO
THOSE ASSESSMENTS.

Why Conduct Psychiatric Assessments on Youth in Juvenile Justice Settings?

Youth within the juvenile justice system are at high risk for psychiatric conditions that could have contributed to the risk of offending and might interfere with rehabilitation. Our recent work indicates that these youth report high levels of psychiatric disorder (especially depression and anxiety) beyond the expected high rates of conduct disorder and substance abuse. Use of reliable psychiatric assessments will greatly enhance case-finding and decision-making regarding dispositions. Information regarding psychiatric status of juvenile offenders is important in insuring that appropriate services are provided, diverting youth inappropriately placed in justice programs, and monitoring ongoing mental health during contact with the justice system.

The Value of Research

Practical research is an essential component of dissemination and advocacy: documenting the “best practices” for accurate case identification and appropriate service provision promotes a higher standard of care. The center’s research agenda investigates the utility of incorporating scientifically sound psychiatric assessments, such as the DISC, into ongoing practice for justice-system youth. Each setting has unique concerns and characteristics. Together with collaborating agencies, we work to identify practical research questions unique to a site’s geographic, population, or setting characteristics. The very real questions that interest justice sites also interest the center. Forming partnerships to explore these questions allows us to help sites by creating reports that answer programmatic questions. The data and recommendations generated from such research collaborations move the field forward.

Advocacy

In keeping with our goal of providing guidance to the field in the area of mental health assessment in juvenile justice, we organize conferences and formal presentations to scientists, practitioners, and juvenile justice staff on topics such as best practices for psychiatric assessment for juvenile justice populations and linking psychiatric assessment to evidence-based mental health services. We are committed to creating products (e.g., journal publications and mental health referral guidelines) that can inform scientists, policy makers, and practitioners about appropriate mental health assessment and service models for youth in the justice system.

Training and Technical Assistance

We provide a range of training and technical assistance to justice sites implementing the DISC. We offer on-site training in Voice DISC administration and interpretation. We help with the preparation of reports on psychiatric-prevalence findings for participating sites, as aids for planning staffing and program needs. We offer regular supervision to aid in problem-solving to identify barriers to implementation. Technical-assistance support also includes regular supervisory sessions (e.g., conference calls) to assist in interpreting the DISC and understanding its clinical implications for disposition. In some instances, the services of the center are available free of charge.