



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

FIVE THINGS ABOUT

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY INTERVENTION AND TREATMENT



Juvenile delinquency intervention and treatment programs have the broad goals of preventing crime and reducing recidivism by providing treatment and services to youth who have committed crimes.

The five statements below are based on practices and programs rated by CrimeSolutions.¹

1. Juvenile awareness programs may be ineffective and potentially harmful.

Juvenile awareness programs — like Scared Straight — involve organized visits to adult prison facilities for adjudicated youth and youth at risk of adjudication. Based on the review and rating by CrimeSolutions of [two meta-analyses of existing research](#), youth participating in these types of programs were more likely to commit offenses in the future than adjudicated youth and youth at risk of adjudication who did not. Consequently, recidivism rates were, on average, higher for participants compared to juveniles who went through regular case processing.

The results suggest that not only are juvenile awareness programs ineffective at deterring youth from committing crimes, but youth exposed to them are more likely to commit offenses in the future.

Read the practice profile [Juvenile Awareness Programs \(Scared Straight\)](#) to learn more.

2. Cognitive behavioral therapy can effectively reduce aggression in children and adolescents.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a problem-focused, therapeutic approach that attempts to help people identify and change the dysfunctional

beliefs, thoughts, and patterns that contribute to their problem behaviors. CBT programs are delivered in various settings, including juvenile detention facilities. Based on the review and rating by CrimeSolutions of [two meta-analyses of existing research](#), a variant of CBT focused specifically on children and adolescents who have anger-related problems is effective for reducing aggression and anger expression, and for improving self-control, problem-solving, and social competencies.

Read the practice profile [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Anger-Related Problems in Children and Adolescents](#) to learn more.

3. Multisystemic therapy for juveniles reduces recidivism, rearrests, and the total number of days incarcerated.

Multisystemic therapy is a family- and community-based treatment program for adolescents with criminal offense histories and serious antisocial, delinquent, and other problem behaviors. Based on the review and rating by CrimeSolutions of [three randomized controlled trials](#) (each evaluating a program in a different state), the program effectively reduced rearrests and number of days incarcerated.

Read the program profile [Multisystemic Therapy](#) to learn more.

4. Intensive supervision of juvenile offenders — the conditions of which may vary — has not been found to reduce recidivism.

This practice consists of increased supervision and control of youth on probation in the community, compared with those on traditional community supervision. Intensive supervision programs have three primary features: 1) smaller caseloads for juvenile probation officers, 2) more frequent face-to-face contacts, and 3) strict conditions of compliance with stiffer penalties for violations. Other conditions may vary, but they can include electronic monitoring, drug/urinalysis testing, and participation in programming (such as tutoring, counseling, or job training). Based on the review and rating by CrimeSolutions of [three meta-analyses of existing research](#), the practice does not reduce recidivism.

Read the practice profile [Juvenile Intensive Supervision Programs](#) to learn more.

¹ As defined by CrimeSolutions, a practice is a general category of programs, strategies, or procedures that share similar characteristics with regard to the issues they address and how they address them. Practice profiles tell us about the average results from multiple evaluations of similar programs, strategies, or procedures. A program is a specific set of activities carried out according to guidelines to achieve a defined purpose. Program profiles on CrimeSolutions tell us whether a specific program was found to achieve its goals when it was carefully evaluated.

Practice ratings do not take into account variations in implementation or other program-specific factors which may impact the effectiveness of a specific program. Practices may be rated differently on outcomes not included here.

5. Incarceration-based therapeutic communities for juveniles with substance use disorders have not been found to reduce recidivism after release.

Incarceration-based therapeutic communities employ a comprehensive, residential drug-treatment program model for youth in a detention facility who have substance use disorders. Therapeutic communities are designed to foster changes in attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to substance use and to reduce subsequent criminal offending. Based on the review and rating by CrimeSolutions of [two meta-analyses of existing research](#), incarceration-based therapeutic communities have not been found to reduce recidivism after release for those who participate.

Read the practice profile [Incarceration-Based Therapeutic Communities for Juveniles](#) to learn more.

CrimeSolutions

CrimeSolutions helps practitioners and policymakers understand what works in justice-related programs and practices. CrimeSolutions is funded by the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Programs and practices related to juveniles also appear on OJJDP's Model Programs Guide.