

Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 Training Event
Effective Case Management: A Core Competency for Juvenile Justice Professionals
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Juvenile court workers have the opportunity to change lives for the better every time they meet with a youth. The attention, compassion, commitment, and knowledge that juvenile workers bring to the table often provide the last good hope for a young person. The juvenile court is a mechanism that allows for creative thinking and problem solving that address risks to the community and the needs of juveniles and their families.

Key to helping juveniles is quality case management. Two basic types of case management are “strength-based” and “assertive”. Strength-based management identifies the youth’s strengths and talents and builds on them in treatment and service plans. Balanced with disapproval of anti-social behaviors and attitudes, this management type also emphasizes the case manager’s unconditional positive regard for the client.

Assertive case management involves aggressively delivering services to the client instead of passively offering services in a centralized office setting. This may require seeking out the client in home, school, job, or community-based office for meetings and counseling.

Today mixed models of case management have emerged. Mixed models are holistic in approach, with case managers serving in a therapeutic capacity and brokering services as appropriate, including substance abuse treatment, counseling, and mental health interventions. The juvenile probation officer or caseworker’s role is to provide consistency to the case plan and to engage the youth and the youth’s family in the process of change.

Primary case management tasks are:

- Intake—Intake tasks include crisis intervention, establishing rapport, orientation, and discussion of failure to comply options and sanctions. These activities are best conducted face to face using printed materials.
- Assessment—Assessment involves history-taking and generally involves interviews with the youth, parents, school, previous services providers, and other familial or non-familial stakeholders. Assessment might also include administration of a criminogenic risk assessment and/or a needs assessment, psychological evaluations, neuro-psyche evaluations, substance abuse evaluation, etc.
- Classification—Classification, or determining the level and type of services for the client, may be based on risk assessments or written assessments from mental health experts, social workers, or addiction specialists.
- Referral—Referral takes different forms depending on the status and needs of the youth. Based on the risks and needs, youth and parents are referred to services that will meet those needs. A cautionary note needs be stated here regarding the recent practice of “stacking services”, whereby the case manager refers youth and families for services but

does not further participate in the treatment processes. Effective case managers stay involved with clients throughout the treatment process.

- **Intervention**—The case manager, by staying involved with youth and families, influences events and situations, such as conflicts or crisis, providing appropriate responses to meet needs and problem solve.
- **Monitoring**—The case manager responds to lack of compliance and inappropriate youth behaviors with certainty, not severity. Examples of “response certainty” include graduated sanctions, drug testing, court orders, additional contacts and meetings, short-term detention, and electronic surveillance.
- **Evaluation**—Is what we are doing working? Evaluation is the process by which the team measures progress and more specifically identifies issues and needs. Recidivism is a frequent evaluative measure.
- **Advocacy**—Offer informed recommendations in court based on research; negotiate services for youth and families that will be of benefit to them; mediate difficult situations; and, assist in the navigation of systems.

Effective case management is the core to the juvenile justice profession and helps improve outcomes. Key principles of effective case management are:

- **Creativity and critical thinking:** Approach the work as though it were an art form, not just a job, think of all possible options and seek them out, set appropriate boundaries for self and others, and know your own limits.
- **Knowing clients:** Use effective interviewing techniques, be courteous, learn about their social mores and values, learn *from their perspective* what brought them to you, be open, honest, and responsive, and accommodate language barriers. Do not assume anything—determine the facts.
- **Building relationships:** Building relationships takes time but is critical to achieve positive outcomes. Practitioners won’t always agree with clients but can seek alternative solutions that work. Be consistent, constant, honest (it’s okay to say “I don’t know”), thoughtful, and respectful.
- **Communicating effectively and being responsive:** Answer e-mails, voice mail, and text messages, be empathetic to the needs and feelings of clients, use “anticipatory thought” techniques, and write accurate, professional, and thorough reports.
- **Understanding the law and understanding mental health disorders:** Learn about juvenile law. Resources include the Juvenile Benchbook, Michigan Compiled Laws, the Probation Certification curriculum, and online resources from organizations including the National Institute of Corrections, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, and the National Council on Juvenile / Family Court Judges. Become familiar with the causes, symptomology, and treatments of mental health disorders.
- **Know gender and brain development differences:** Take time to study this fascinating science—it is highly applicable to juvenile justice work. Learning resources abound for this, including Juvenile Justice Vision 20-20 President Sandi Metcalf, an expert in this field.
- **Practice active collaboration at local, state, and national levels:** Become a leader in building collaborative relationships with other service providers, jurisdictions, and teams. Pool resources. Eliminate turf wars and work together for the common good.

- Use promising or evidence-based practices: Considerable research has been conducted to determine which practices work—and which don't—in delinquency treatment. Be familiar with research findings and implement supported practices.
- Care about data: Don't fear data, learn from it. Data can indicate what is working and what is not, and justify practices and suggest ways to improve. It is essential as the basis for funding and policy decisions.
- Make safety a priority: Learn and practice personal safety techniques and employ them consistently in the field.

Working to improve the lives of juveniles and families is not easy work. To retain passion for the mission of helping others, improve skills, and meet the needs of youths, families, and communities, juvenile justice workers must constantly re-invent themselves. By doing the job well individuals will build respect and tolerance for diverse populations, and communities will be safer, be a more vibrant resource for new and existing employers, and be a destination in which *all* will thrive.