



# A Crippling Lack Of Training And Policies

## Officers typically receive little or no training on critical youth issues

A survey of state law enforcement training academies published in 2013 found that:

- On average, state training academies devote just 1% of their curricula (six out of 600 hours) to youth issues, and most of that time is devoted to teaching the basics of the juvenile code and issues regarding processing youth after arrest.
- Only two states devoted any part of their curricula to adolescent development.
- Only 8 states included instruction about effective strategies for interacting with youth in their curriculum.
- Just 8 states provided any information on racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice.

A 2011 survey of law enforcement agencies nationwide found that training was also lacking for officers on the job:

- More than three fourths of states (76%) do not require any in-service training for officers on youth and juvenile justice issues.

“ Training for law enforcement on differences between youth and adults and appropriate strategies to respond to those differences is crucial to enable better understanding and more constructive interactions between police and youth... In some jurisdictions, officers still receive little or no training beyond juvenile code provisions and other legal considerations regarding the handling of youth. ”

— INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

## Without training, officers treat youth like adults

In the absence of any training about the developmental differences between youth and adults:

- Officers frequently escalate conflicts without realizing that youth respond differently to authority than adults
- Officers make too many arrests of youth for minor misbehaviors related to their developmental stage, leading to lasting negative consequences both for the young people and public safety.
- Officers remain unaware that racial and ethnic disparities are higher at the arrest stage than at any other stage of the justice system, and therefore have no impetus to work toward improving equity.

## Policies and standards typically don't offer much guidance either

The absence of training is often exacerbated by a lack of developmentally-appropriate, trauma-informed, racially equitable policies and standards for officers to follow in their interactions with youth.

- According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, “well-defined policies and procedures that outline the specific responses leadership expects when officers encounter young people” are key to improving law enforcement practices toward youth.
- Yet, few law enforcement agencies have comprehensive or updated policy statements on how officers should approach interactions with youth. And officers and their supervisors are frequently unaware of written policies for policing youth even when they do exist.
- Likewise, it is rare for law enforcement leaders or high-level commanders to articulate clear expectations for how officers should deal with youth.

**Sources:** Many of the observations in this handout are based on interviews with law enforcement leaders in JDAI jurisdictions; and the first-hand observations of co-author Lisa Thureau, who has conducted interviews and training sessions with hundreds of law enforcement personnel across the country over the past dozen years. Other sources include: *If Not Now, When? A Survey of Juvenile Justice Training in America's Police Academies*, Strategies for Youth, 2013, available at [http://strategiesforyouth.org/sfysite/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SFYReport\\_02-2013\\_rev.pdf](http://strategiesforyouth.org/sfysite/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SFYReport_02-2013_rev.pdf); *Juvenile Justice Training Needs Assessment: A Survey of Law Enforcement*, International Association of Chiefs of Police, July 2011, available at <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/2011JuvenileJusticeTrainingNeedsAssessmenttoLawEnforcement.pdf>; and *Law Enforcement's Leadership Role in the Advancement of Promising Practices in Juvenile Justice: Executive Officer Survey Findings*, International Association of Chiefs of Police, September 2013, available at [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/IACPJExecutiveOfficerSurveyFindings\\_0.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/IACPJExecutiveOfficerSurveyFindings_0.pdf).