



Tips for Effective Training

The primary goal of training law enforcement about adolescent development should be to help officers understand the critical differences between adolescents and adults, and to equip them with skills needed to approach situations involving youth in a constructive and age-appropriate way. The officers must leave with a greater appreciation of how to apply developmentally-appropriate, trauma-informed, racially equitable practices. Additionally, a good training will help officers appreciate how they are perceived by youth, and how that perception affects interactions and outcomes.

What topics should be covered?



Training should focus on:

- **Adolescent brain development** and the gaps that remain in adolescents' capacity to control impulses, regulate emotions, resist peer pressure, and weigh risks and consequences.
- **Trauma's impacts on behaviors**, and how that compounds some youth's reactivity, and often leads to fight/flight/free and re-enactment behaviors;
- Awareness of the **most prevalent mental health issues youth are facing** and how to avoid exacerbating them during interactions with youth;
- The often **negative consequences of arrest and detention**, both for youth and for public safety.
- Honing **officers' skills in interacting effectively with youth**, especially in de-escalating conflicts that can lead to unnecessary arrests.
- The **operational details of detention reform**, and the rationale behind them.
- **Orientation to youth-serving organizations** in the community that can address youth needs in lieu of arrest or system involvement.

Who should deliver the training?

The training team should be led by:

- **Experts in adolescent behavior and brain development** who can convincingly communicate to officers the critical differences between adults and adolescents.

Trainers should be:

- **Personable**—able to establish rapport with officers and involve them in sharing stories from their own experiences.
- **Humble**—careful never to tell officers how to do their job, and willing to locate answers or resources when officers ask questions they are unable to answer on the spot.
- **Conversational**—using examples from their own experience, including mistakes they've made or problematic practices they've had to abandon as they have learned what works.
- To improve interagency collaboration, **the training team should also include representatives from all of the major stakeholder institutions in the JDAI collaborative.**
- Whenever possible, training sessions for law enforcement personnel should include **direct interactions with young people.**



How should it be delivered?

The training curriculum should focus on expanding officers' "tool belt" in ways that help them de-escalate interactions with young people, and provide young people with positive options. Effective teaching approaches include:

- **Focus on practical applications** of the information, and avoid getting stuck on abstract concepts or academic ideas.
- **Use visual aids** (photos, videos) and other media to convey information in an engaging way, rather than relying primarily on lecture format.



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- **Incorporate interactive exercises** that allow officers to interact and share experiences.
- **Avoid hyper-technical jargon** about the brain.
- **Use mnemonic devices** that can be remembered quickly and applied easily.
- **Distribute written materials** that succinctly reinforce and/or enhance the main point(s) of the presentation.

Timing and frequency

Officers should receive training both in academies before they earn their badges, and as part of their ongoing professional development.

- **Law enforcement training academies.**
 - Training academies should include **an intensive component on adolescent brain development, adolescent behavior, impact of trauma, and implicit bias**, as well as information on juvenile law, the juvenile justice system, and the federal requirement that state and local justice systems monitor and address racial and ethnic disparities.



- The training should include **role-playing and skill-building exercises** to help recruits learn skills in communicating effectively with youth and de-escalating tense situations in which youth are involved.
- **In-Service Training for Already-Sworn Officers.**
 - Law enforcement agencies should regularly provide in-service trainings to reinforce and update the academy training on adolescent development and juvenile justice, covering all of the key issues described above, and including opportunities for skill building (role playing) and for meaningful interactions with youth and with youth-serving community organizations.
 - In addition to formal in-service training, **JDAI stakeholders should seek to visit local police stations whenever possible to take part in roll call sessions.** These sessions provide an excellent opportunity to refresh officers' knowledge about JDAI, answer questions, expand officers' understanding of adolescent development, boost their skills in interacting with youth, and strengthen relationships.