



# Overview: Keys To Effective Training For Law Enforcement

In developing and delivering training for law enforcement officers, juvenile detention reform stakeholders should heed the following lessons and guidelines:

## Making the Case for Training

Sustainable advances in law enforcement practice toward youth will only be possible if (1) commanders and patrol officers appreciate the developmental differences between youth and adults and the importance of de-escalating incidents involving youth, and (2) they recognize the harm and unnecessary cost of arresting and detaining young people who pose minimal risk to public safety.

## JDAI Examples of Successful Training

Fortunately, a substantial number of JDAI sites have made significant investments in training for local law enforcement personnel both on the details of and rationale for JDAI, and on the larger issues surrounding young people and the law.

## Tips for Effective Training

- **What topics should be covered?**

Training should focus on:

1. Adolescent brain development and behavior.
2. Understanding the role of trauma in youth's behavior.
3. Consequences of arrest and detention, for youth, their families, and for public safety.
4. Strategies for effectively interacting with youth and for de-escalating situations before they erupt
5. The rationale for, and operational details of, detention reform.

- **Who Should Deliver the Training?**

The training provider(s) should be knowledgeable, personable, humble, and conversational. In addition, the training team should include stakeholders from each of the major institutions involved in the JDAI collaborative.

- **How Should It Be Delivered?**

Training should be practical and rely on visual aids and interactive exercises that make the lessons understandable to participating officers.

- **Timing and Frequency**

Officers should receive this instruction as part of their initial training in academies before they earn their badges. This information should be reinforced and updated regularly as part of the professional development provided to officers in the field.



# Making The Case For Training

Why is it important to train law enforcement officers on adolescent brain development and detention reform? By removing detention as the “go-to” option for law enforcement, Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) inevitably changes the nature of the relationship between youth and law enforcement.

## Creating opportunities for more constructive interactions with youth

Though this shift, JDAI creates an opportunity for a more constructive and relationship-based dynamic between law enforcement officers and youth.

## Progress relies on training

But such progress is unlikely if—lacking training—officers remain:

- uninformed about adolescent development,
- unfamiliar with community services available to support youth with serious mental health or social service needs,
- unaware of the impact of trauma on adolescents and the harmful effects of justice system involvement, and
- untrained in techniques for de-escalating tense situations with youth.

## A more promising strategy

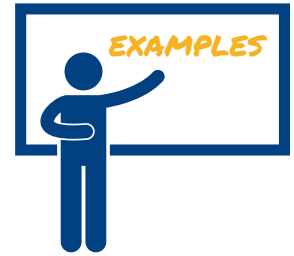
Training offers the most promising strategy available to promote long-term improvement in policing approaches toward youth.

“ 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

“ My officers receive so much firearms training, and yet they rarely fire a shot. Meanwhile they have multiple contacts each day with juveniles. ”

—CHIEF WILLIAM WEITZEL  
RIVERSIDE ( IL ) POLICE DEPARTMENT



# JDAI Examples Of Successful Training

## Indiana is leading JDAI training efforts



The most ambitious efforts currently underway in the JDAI network to train law enforcement officers are taking place in Indiana.

- Work began in 2012 when Strategies for Youth (SFY), a Massachusetts-based agency, received a grant to help the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) address a problem with racial and ethnic disparities in youth arrests.
- In 2013, leaders from nearby Tippecanoe County invited SFY to bring the *Policing the Teen Brain™* training to their county. Since then, more than 400 sworn law enforcement officers have received the training in Tippecanoe county.
- In 2014, the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute offered to underwrite the costs of SFY training in participating JDAI counties throughout the state.
- As of 2021, SFY is actively training or has trained law enforcement officers in more than 20 counties throughout Indiana, delivering its *Policing the Teen Brain™* curriculum.
- In the fall of 2016, trainees at the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy received in-depth training on adolescent development and behavior. Previously, just four hours (half of one%) of the curriculum at the state's law enforcement academy concerned youth, and most of that focused on juvenile law.

## Other JDAI site providing relevant training

Other JDAI sites are also providing relevant training for law enforcement officers.

### Philadelphia, PA

- The “Pennsylvania DMC Youth/Law Enforcement Curriculum” has been delivered to every class of the local police academy since 2009, a total of more than 3,500 recruits.



- This youth/law enforcement curriculum is being replicated in five other Pennsylvania counties, and it will soon be adapted in three cities in Connecticut.
- In 2016, local leaders began developing a new in-service training curriculum for Philadelphia police officers to complement and advance the training provided to new police academy recruits.

### Multnomah County, OR (an original JDAI model site)



- The Portland Police Bureau has long included a multi-day unit on adolescent development and juvenile justice as part of its training academy for new law enforcement officers.
- The training topics include: adolescent development, operations of the juvenile justice system, and information about the location and programming of community-based services.
- The training offers recruits direct exposure to juvenile court and probation staff and to service providers working with youth in the community.

**“ We have to get past the belief that our sole responsibility is law enforcement when the vast majority of what we do is street-level social work. Good relationships, established individually, over time, garners the support you need at critical times. We have a complex role in this society. We need to recognize that we do many things. We have a responsibility to do them well. ”**

— WILLIAM DEAN, DEPUTY CHIEF  
VIRGINIA BEACH (VA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

# JDAI Examples Of Successful Training

## Clayton County, GA

As part of its efforts to reduce school arrests, Clayton County has fundamentally reoriented the role of its School Resource Officers. To support the new approach, Clayton County offers extensive and ongoing training to inform SROs about adolescent development and positive approaches for engaging youth and promoting school safety, rather than punishing misbehavior.



## Virginia Beach, VA

Strategies for Youth provided the local police department with a train-the-trainer training, inviting the local juvenile department to present on JDAI. This is now the two-day “Juvenile Perspectives” training emphasizing the message that, in the words of Deputy Chief William Dean, “Arrest is the beginning of a cycle that will limit opportunities in life.” This initiative led to the development of a detailed set of policies for officer and agency interactions with youth.



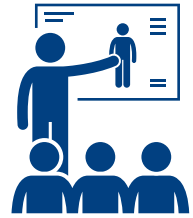
## Ramsey County, MN

JDAI stakeholders in Ramsey County, Minnesota have provided JDAI 101 training for St. Paul Police Department commanders, as well as attending roll calls in local police stations to discuss JDAI with patrol officers and local commanders.



**“ Expand officers’ capacity to effectively respond to youth by offering cohesive training programs that enable officers to understand adolescent development; cultural differences among youth; mental health and trauma issues; and effective strategies for youth engagement, intervention and crisis response. ”**

— RECOMMENDATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE SUMMIT ON LAW ENFORCEMENT’S LEADERSHIP ROLE IN JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM, SEPTEMBER 2013.



# 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.

# Tips for Effective Training

- **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.




# Where To Go For Assistance In Developing And Delivering Training

Law Enforcement leaders interested in creating new and improved training for officers on adolescent development and juvenile justice need not reinvent the wheel or go it alone. Rather, several organizations across the country provide training for law enforcement personnel in at least some aspects of adolescent development and/or juvenile justice. And four organizations offer training that include components addressing many or most of the critical training needs identified in the practice guide.

## ***Policing the Teen Brain™***

Led by a psychologist, this two-day training presents information on adolescent development and describes practical approaches for responding to youth with mental health issues and/or exposed to chronic trauma. Also, specially-trained local officers provide information on environmental and legal factors that affect youth. The training has been delivered in dozens of jurisdictions nationwide, including more than 20 JDAI sites.

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## ***Pennsylvania DMC Youth-Law Enforcement Curriculum***

This eight-hour curriculum for law enforcement academy cadets provides instruction on adolescent development and juvenile justice, implicit bias, and effective communications with youth—with a strong focus on combatting racial and ethnic disparities. The training includes extensive interaction between police academy cadets and area youth. It has been mandatory for Philadelphia police academy cadets since 2009, and it has recently been adopted in other jurisdictions.

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## **Crisis Intervention Teams for Youth (CIT-Y)**

This comprehensive eight-hour training curriculum developed by the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice teaches officers about adolescent development, adolescent mental health and substance abuse, crisis intervention techniques for youth, and community alternatives to arrest for youth. *Note: CIT-Y is only available to officers who have already completed a 40-hour curriculum on crisis intervention for adults.*

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