

Measure for Measure:

Balancing the Assessment of Risk and Need in the Juvenile Justice System



March 22, 2011



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Roadmap for Today's Webinar

- Difference between risk and needs assessment
- Background and goals for the webinar
- The treatment provider perspective
- Risk assessment instruments: validation and implementation
- Why assessment instruments aren't enough: The role of *system* reform

What do we mean by “risk” vs. “needs” assessment?

- Risk assessment tools are designed primarily to help decision makers predict re-offending
- Needs and/or mental health assessment instruments are tools for treatment or service planning
- There is some overlap across these types of tools
 - Both may look at similar factors and behaviors
 - Both may be concerned with strengths and resiliencies
- General categories of instruments: blended tools, dedicated risk assessment tools, DSM-driven diagnostic tools, strength-based assessments

Background and Goals

The Challenge of Making Informed Decisions in the Juvenile Justice System

- JJ Stakeholders have always been challenged to make decisions which balance concern for public safety with meeting the needs of youth
- Without reliable and valid tools to differentiate these two, we run the risk of incarcerating kids who would do better in the community with treatment
- The distinction is not always black and white and is affected by prevailing cultural attitudes about youth
- The emergence of validated assessments, alternative sentencing options (including treatment courts) and new treatment approaches have an impact on decision-making

Why is the subject of risk vs. needs assessment receiving so much attention lately?

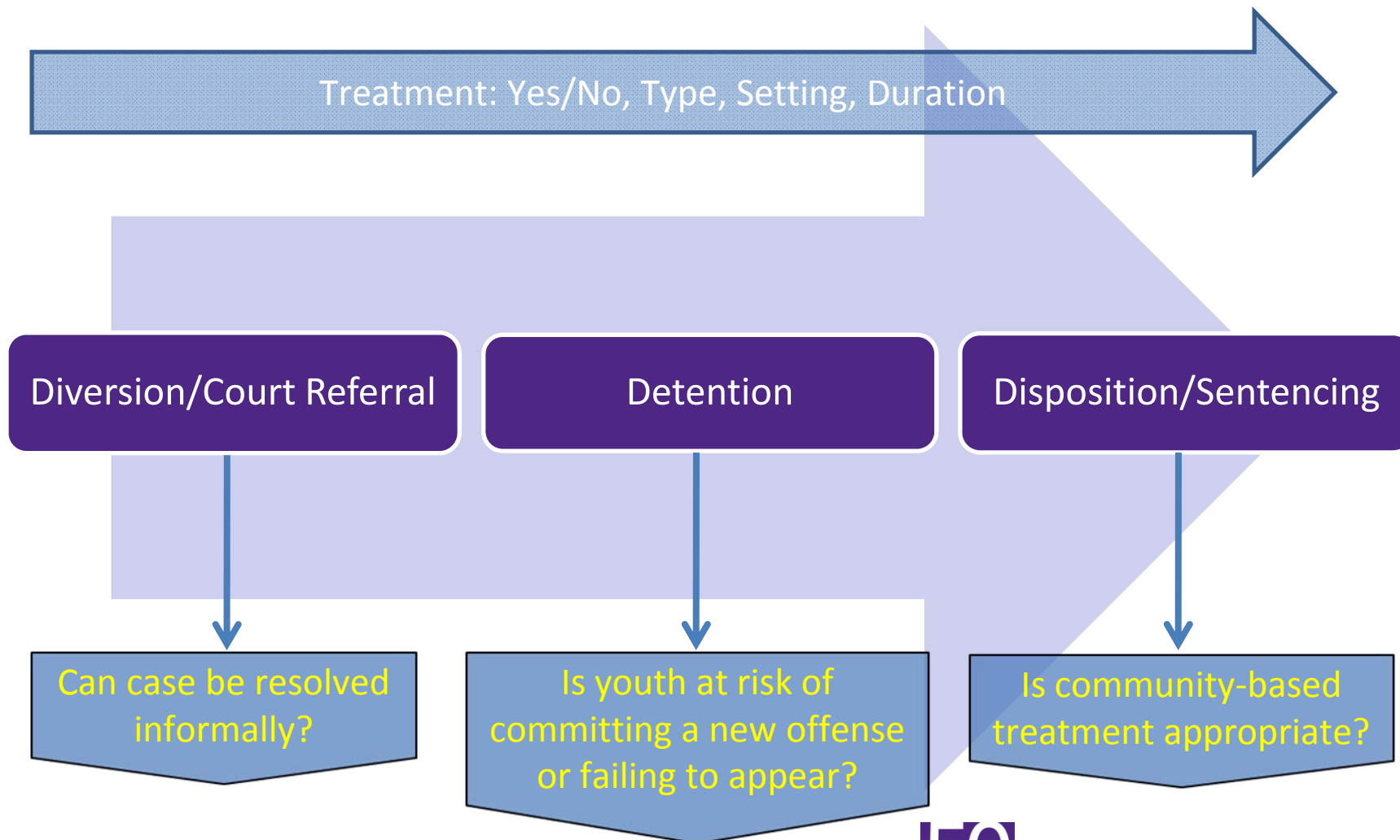
- Screening and assessment is critical to providing targeted services to system-involved youth
- Juvenile justice systems have increasingly become the treatment provider of last resort and the first place where problems are identified
- We have a dual decision-making mandate to assess risk and needs and not to confuse the two – Juvenile justice reform has put decision makers under a microscope

The Provider Perspective: The risks of being or not being at the decision making table

- The legacy of the boilerplate MH court report
- An assessment tool will not make decisions for you: MH/needs information must be presented in context
- Trust and concerns about unwitting participation in “net-widening”
- Consensus on risk means providers are not overly relied on to “monitor” kids in treatment
- In the trenches - how do we as clinicians manage the gray area between risk and needs
- How do we bring strengths to the table without appearing to miss the point on problem severity
- At what system point does it make sense to do what kinds of assessments?

Risk Assessment Instruments: Validation and Implementation

What are you trying to predict at which decision point?



Goals of Validation

- Identify assessment items that have the highest predictive power
- Minimize disparate outcomes for certain groups
- Assess the impact of implementation

Implementation

- Importance of fidelity
- Quality assurance, data collection, and analysis
- Listening to end users
- Revalidation and recalibration

Why Instruments Aren't Enough: The Role of *System* Reform

System Analyses and Reforms that Need to Accompany the Use of Instruments

- Development and implementation of alternative ***programs*** to respond to the various levels of risk/needs of youth
- Development and implementation of alternative ***practices and policies*** that address potential system inefficiencies and inequities
 - e.g., court processing and system (versus behavioral) factors that may impact recidivism

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