



Seven Things Juvenile and Family Court Judges Can Do to Help Youth Exposed to Violence Heal and Thrive

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Seven Things Juvenile and Family Court Judges Can Do to Help Youth Exposed to Violence Heal and Thrive

Introduction

The Importance of Knowing about Youth Exposure to Violence

Youth exposure to violence is a pressing issue in all communities – whether large or small, urban, suburban, or rural, homogenous or diverse – across the country. Concern for youth exposure to violence, and the impacts of violence on their lives and futures, is part of a broader awareness of trauma in the lives of individuals, and among special populations such as youth, sexual minority youth, and youth of color. Research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),¹ and the cumulative effects of multiple adverse childhood experiences on life outcomes (physical, mental, and behavioral health) has led to a dynamic and growing field of knowledge about risk factors for mental and behavioral health problems in childhood and adolescence due to trauma. ACE factors include experiences with various forms of abuse – emotional, physical, and sexual - as well as witnessing abuse or harm to a caretaker/parent – and neglect. ACE factors, exposure to violence, and trauma have come to be included in the collection of data and the development of databases on the characteristics and experiences of victims of crime as well as offenders.² Such data and studies on trauma- and violence-exposure factors and experiences are helping youth-serving professionals and systems better understand and respond to the mental, behavioral health, and educational needs and problems of youth with exposure. A burgeoning field of practitioner-oriented resources³ on trauma (to which the National Child Trauma Stress Network has contributed greatly), including violence exposure and effective responses, now exists.

Youth exposed to violence come to the attention of courts in a variety of ways – through the child welfare system as victims of family abuse or neglect, through the juvenile justice system as perpetrators of crimes, victims of crimes or witnesses to crime in the community, and through the family law/domestic violence docket as victims of domestic/interpersonal violence, as witnesses to domestic/interpersonal violence, or as perpetrators. Judges, along with other community leaders, are becoming more aware

Seven Things Juvenile and Family Court Judges Can Do

1. Become Familiar with the Science and Research on Youth Exposed to Violence
2. Take Steps to Make the Court Environment and Processes Feel Safe, Predictable, and Respectful
3. Ask for an Assessment to Determine Violence Exposure, Impacts, and Youth Needs
4. Involve the Family in the Assessment Process
5. Order or Request Appropriate Youth-Serving Professionals to Connect Youth/Families to Evidence-Based Treatments
6. Monitor Case Plan, Behavioral Health Services, and Educational Services Provided
7. Involve the Larger Community in Supporting and Assisting Youth Exposed to Violence Heal and Thrive

of how widespread youth exposure to violence is, as well as how harmful such exposure is to youth.

Because of their role as respected authority figures with the power of the law behind them, as well as a duty to advocate for youth wellbeing, judges can bring heightened attention to youth exposure to violence and the need to take action to address it.⁴ Additionally, judges are in a position to convene and galvanize other community leaders, organizations, and systems to work together to help youth exposed to violence heal and thrive.

This technical assistance brief is intended to provide judges with the information, understanding, and resources they need in order to ensure that their court system serves youth who have been exposed to violence and promotes their positive development. The brief also provides judges with guidance on involving and engaging professionals as well as community system leaders and organizations to work together on behalf of youth. The brief is organized around seven key actions that juvenile court judges can take to increase their knowledge and involve those with relevant expertise and lived experience to recognize the needs of youth exposed to violence and to make services and supports available to address those needs.⁵

One: Become Familiar with the Science and Research on Youth Exposed to Violence

Violence Exposure and Adolescent Development

Youth exposure to violence includes “being the witness or direct victim of bullying, child abuse, sexual assault, community and school violence, dating violence, and exposure to adult or parental domestic violence.”⁶ Exposure to violence – in the community or in the home⁷ – is a precursor to mental health disorders and problems in school. Violence exposure can impact the developing child and adolescent brain by disrupting various cognitive functions such as the regulation of emotion, learning, and memory.⁸ Exposure to violence can affect the stress response system, the neuroendocrine system, and neuroanatomical structures in negative ways that lead to slower learning, neurocognitive deficits, and the impairment of the ability to self-regulate and control emotions and behavior.⁹ Youth exposed to violence, and especially youth who are exposed to multiple incidents of violence, are at a greater risk for developing physiological and behavioral coping mechanisms in response to stress that lead to mental and behavioral health problems (including substance use disorders) and being involved in the child welfare system and/or the juvenile justice system.¹⁰

Exposure to violence during adolescence is especially harmful, with potentially long-lasting effects, because of the impact it can have on important normal developmental processes that occur at this time in an individual’s life.¹¹ Adolescence (associated with ages 10 to 25) is a distinct life phase for the transition between childhood and adulthood. It is when individuals develop their adult-like psychological and social behaviors, and their secondary sexual characteristics mature.¹² During this period of development and maturation, the brain undergoes major changes, which have cognitive, behavioral, physical, and attitudinal manifestations. The teen brain

undergoes major developments in connecting and strengthening the pre-frontal cortex (which exercises executive functioning over decision-making and emotions) with other parts of the brain associated with learning, feelings, and self-regulation, with the end result (by age 25 years or so) of having psycho-social-emotional and cognitive abilities and a personal and sexual/gender identity associated with adulthood.¹³

During adolescence, amidst this brain maturation process, young people have heightened sensitivities (especially to pleasure and excitement) and have limited ability to accurately anticipate consequences and interpret social cues. Their behaviors are often driven by emotion and peer influence, rather than cognitive assessments and the ability to exercise self-control.

In its maturation and developmental processes, the adolescent brain has extreme plasticity and is greatly affected by a variety of factors. It has been recognized that some mental illnesses or psychopathologies – anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, depressions, eating disorders, psychosis including schizophrenia, and substance use disorders – emerge during adolescence. They are thought to arise from anomalies or exaggerations of the maturational changes that normally occur in the adolescent brain and may be triggered by psychosocial (e.g., school, relationships) and/or biological environmental factors (e.g., pubertal hormonal changes).¹⁴

Violence Exposure and Adolescent Coping Behavior

Exposure to violence during adolescence is a factor associated with disruption of the healthy development of brain components and the neurological systems and chemicals to which they are associated, as well as sexual and gender identity formation. Specifically, as coping responses to violence and trauma, the parts and connections of the adolescent brain relating to emotions (amygdala where fear and anxiety stem and the sympathetic nervous system) grow,¹⁵ and become hyperactive, while the parts and connections of the brain controlling logic, rational decision-making, and self-control (pre-frontal cortex), learning, and memory shrink.¹⁶ Hormonal systems that play crucial roles in buffering the physical effects of stress become dysregulated. Repetitive activation of emotion and the fight-or-flight response caused by violence exposure limit the development of self-control responses and establish neural pathways for unexpected and uncontrollable anticipatory and reactive behavior.¹⁷ While mental health disorders affect adolescents who are not exposed to violence, there is a higher prevalence of disorders among youth who have been exposed to violence.¹⁸

Disruptions in adolescent brain and activation of flight and fear responses due to violence exposure (even when the individual is away from the source and active experience of violence) have repercussions for day-to-day functioning. These repercussions include a youth's ability to do well in school, to avoid risky situations, peers, or activities,¹⁹ to follow rules or laws, to relate to adults/or authority figures, and to seek help or feel safe. In the school setting, due to neurocognitive deficits and functional impairments that violence exposure causes, youth may perform poorly with academic learning and fall behind in grade level and age-appropriate learning. Their memory and ability to learn, process, and retain information can be impaired.²⁰ Youth exposed to violence have twice the rate of referrals for special education than youth without such exposure.²¹ Youth may have trouble self-regulating, which can manifest in

several ways: being quick to anger; fighting; having trouble calming down; showing rudeness to school officials and teachers; being disruptive and confrontational; and/or misreading or misinterpreting facial expressions and nonverbal communication that are neutral or benign to be menacing.²² Exposure to violence may affect adolescents' ability to assess danger in a situation or the character of an individual (what some researchers refer to as character judgment and moral impressions) and lead them to trust and spend time with individuals who are harmful or place them in harm.²³ Predictable youth behaviors as a consequence of exposure to violence include hypervigilance, being distrustful, being distracted, having trouble concentrating, or, conversely, perseverating and continuously focusing on one thing. These behaviors may lead youth to disengage from regular school attendance, be expelled or suspended by school officials, or be referred to law enforcement for misbehavior in school or in the community.²⁴ In short, mechanisms that the adolescent brain develops for coping with exposure to violence can lead to behaviors that adults – teachers, school officials, counselors, law enforcement officers, youth group leaders, caretakers, attorneys, and judges – see as irrational, potentially dangerous,²⁵ or disengaged rather than as symptoms of youth struggling with factors beyond their control or strengths in the face of adversity.

Youth Affected by Exposure to Violence

Several data sources, studies, and task force reports create an overall picture of the number and percentage of youth exposed to violence, the nature of their exposure, and information about specific populations of youth that have especially high violence and trauma exposure. Among these important sources are the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, the Bureau of Justice Statistics Hate Crime Victimization, the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) Series/Crimes Against Children Research Center, the Vera Institute, Youth Risk Behavior Survey/Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Crime Victimization Survey, and the National Incident-Based Reporting System. What follow are some key statistics from these sources.

- 85% of youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems have been exposed to traumatic events including violence²⁶
- 70% of youth between 14 and 17 years of age have experienced a physical assault (lifetime)²⁷
- 61% of violent crimes against juveniles between 12 and 17 years occur at school or work²⁸
- 60% of children have experienced or witnessed direct violent victimization in the previous year²⁹
- More than half of African American, Hispanic, and Native American adolescents have witnessed violence in their lifetimes³⁰
- 54% of violent crime against juveniles involve a known offender³¹
- 43% of transgender youth have been bullied on school property³²

- 41% of youth between 14 and 17 years of age had multiple exposures to violence in the study years³³
- 40% of youth between 14 and 17 years of age have been exposed to at least one form of intimate partner violence (lifetime)³⁴
- 32% of youth between 14 and 17 years of age have experienced assault with injury (lifetime)³⁵
- 29% of transgender youth have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property³⁶
- 29% of gay or lesbian youth and 31% of bisexual youth have been bullied on school property³⁷
- 27% of youth between 14 and 17 years of age have experienced sexual victimization (lifetime)³⁸
- 18% of cisgender youth have been bullied on school property³⁹
- 16% of gay and lesbian youth and 11% of bisexual youth have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property⁴⁰
- 7% of cisgender youth have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property⁴¹

Studies and databases specifically focused on Adverse Childhood Experiences (Center for Disease Control, National Survey of Children's Health) also contribute to the picture of exposure of young people to trauma and violence:

- 61% of black non-Hispanic children and 51% of Hispanic children have experienced at least one ACE⁴²
- 45% of all children in the United States have experienced at least one ACE (and by definition, all children and youth in the child welfare system have at least one ACE)⁴³
- One-third of juveniles involved in the justice system have had exposure to multiple ACEs; some studies show that justice-involved youth have exposure to three times more ACEs⁴⁴
- One in 10 children have experienced three or more ACEs⁴⁵

The emergent picture of victimization, trauma, and violence exposure is concerning for all youth: almost two-thirds (60%) of youth have experienced or witnessed direct violent

victimization; and more than one-quarter (27%) have experienced sexual victimization. The picture of violence exposure is especially concerning for youth of color – more than half of whom have witnessed violence – and sexual minority youth – who experience assaults and bullying in larger percentages than cisgender youth. These youths have a higher exposure to violence in school, a place that should be safe for all young people. The picture for court system-involved youth (child welfare and/or juvenile justice) is most concerning of all, with far more than three-quarters of youth having experienced multiple instances of trauma and violence exposure. It is also the case that youths have a higher risk of victimization than any other age group⁴⁶ and that the demographics of the population of youth who are at great risk of being victims and at greatest risk of being perpetrators of crime are similar: young, male, and individuals of color.⁴⁷ Exposure to violence and crime victimization can precede a youth's involvement in delinquent acts, be part of their lives at the time they engage in delinquent acts, or occur after they have been involved in delinquent behavior. In short, there is substantial overlap between youth victims of crime and youth perpetrators of crime.⁴⁸

Given this picture, two things are especially important to note: 1) for youth, exposure to violence occurs in the home, in the community, and in school; and 2) youth who are exposed to violence are often victims, witnesses, as well as offenders, though they are treated as separate and distinct in court systems. Thus, regardless of their role in a specific instance of wrongdoing and harm or how they come into the court system, from the perspective of mental, physical and behavioral health impacts and outcomes all youth exposed to violence are victims of violence.

Two: Take Steps to Make the Court Environment and Processes Feel Safe, Predictable, and Respectful⁴⁹

While not all youth exposed to violence will have symptoms or behavior that medical and behavioral health experts associate with traumatic stress-induced coping mechanisms and developmental disruptions, many may. In addition, different youth will have different protective factors⁵⁰ that will help buffer or mitigate the negative impacts of violence exposure. However, given the high prevalence of exposure to violence in the youth population, and the especially high prevalence for justice-involved youth, judges and court staff should assume that youth coming into the courthouse and that have some role in a juvenile or family case – victim, witness, or perpetrator - have been exposed to violence. What does this mean for judges, court staff, and justice system professionals? The behavior of many youth coming into the court setting may appear to adults as inappropriate, disrespectful, or even anti-social. Such behavior may best be understood as predictable adaptations to adversities beyond their control. Adult professionals that youth interact with should make the court setting as safe, predictable, and understandable as possible. Professionals are encouraged to view a youth's simple presence, regardless of their attentiveness or how they come across, as a strength worthy of respect and support.

Several resources exist to help judges and system-related professionals create environmental settings and interactions that lower stress for youth, increase their sense

of safety, and increase their ability to interact with the judge in meaningful ways.⁵¹ For youth to be able to provide information that judges need for decision-making and creating the best outcomes for them (and the other individuals that are affected by the case), youth survivors need to feel secure, respected, and heard. Resources to help court officials create such settings and processes include court assessment tools, training on trauma and adolescent development, benchcards, and recommended policies and practices specific to working with adolescents. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges,⁵² and the National Juvenile Defender Center are important sources for these various types of resources. An important practice is to have all judges and court staff as well as attorneys (prosecutors, defense attorney) and guardians ad litem (GALs) receive training on adolescent behavior and how trauma impacts adolescent development.⁵³

Below is general guidance for court professionals (judges, attorneys,⁵⁴ bailiffs, court staff, interpreters, GALs, CASAs, social workers, case managers, investigators, law enforcement officers,⁵⁵ juvenile facility staff, and probation officers) on preparing for and interacting with youth exposed to violence and trauma (but apply to interactions with any young person):

- have expectations about behavior that are appropriate for adolescents⁵⁶
- use language that is non-demeaning and person-centered⁵⁷
- show openness and interest in learning about the experiences of youth and differences across youth and families⁵⁸
- explain processes to youth in a language they will understand
- assume the young person before you has been exposed to violence and trauma⁵⁹ AND has strengths and resilience that can be nurtured

Practices in accord with the principles of procedural justice⁶⁰ are especially important for judges and attorneys to follow and will contribute to youth resilience, an ability to cope in the court setting, and a belief in the legitimacy of the court process.⁶¹

Three: Ask for an Assessment to Determine Violence Exposure, Impacts, and Youth Needs

Principles of Procedural Justice include:

- providing youth with a voice in the process
- showing respect to the youth and family members
- explaining the basis of decisions or actions
- making the court process understandable (and checking with the youth for understanding)
- demonstrating neutrality in decision-making

Several adolescent-specific tools have become available to provide trauma-informed assessments of youth mental health. These tools were designed for use with young people involved in child welfare or juvenile justice.⁶² The National Child Traumatic Stress network is a good resource for these tools and offers considerations for their use.⁶³ Judges should request that all youth, regardless of the nature of the case that

brings them to the attention to the court (child welfare, juvenile offending, domestic violence, or child sex trafficking) as victim or offender, be screened for violence exposure and trauma. Youth-serving professionals, without advanced degrees or training, can administer screening using validated tools like MAYSI.⁶⁴ When screening indicates violence and trauma exposure and the presence of behavioral health problems in a young person, judges should then request assessment by a clinician to determine the extent of exposure, the presence of mental or substance use disorders, the presence of protective factors, and the need for treatment and services.

The purposes of assessing violence exposure and trauma are to 1) identify resilience and protective factors in a young person's life, and 2) identify physiological and behavioral health adaptations and conditions for which services and treatment interventions are needed and which, if left undiagnosed and untreated, could lead to serious mental illness, medical conditions, and involvement as a victim or offender in criminal matters. It is important that judges are able to access providers in the community who are clinicians with training and expertise in administering assessments to conduct the assessments. Children's advocacy centers and assessment centers⁶⁵ exist in many communities across the country and can be a resource for a cadre of professionals trained to administer trauma and violence exposure assessments.

In addition to requesting assessment of mental and behavioral health for youth where screening indicates trauma and violence exposure, judges should also request educational assessments to determine the need for and provision of individualized education plans (IEPs). Trauma and violence exposure can impair healthy cognitive development and learning processes. Such impairments can have serious repercussions for youth performance in school and academic success. Courts should have access to educators and attorneys knowledgeable of the requirements of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regarding IEPs. They should ask for knowledgeable education professionals to work with a youth, the youth's family, and personnel at a youth's school to determine a youth's level of performance, the existence of a learning disability (indicated by problems with reading, writing, math, reasoning, listening, and speaking), and services or aids needed to address the disability. The U.S. Department of Education⁶⁶ offers a guide to the Individualized Education Program.

Violence exposure has been clearly shown to affect the size and development of the brain, a youth's capacity to acquire language skills, and the development of conditions such as attention deficit disorder that impair language skills, and the acquisition of other skills necessary for school success.⁶⁷ A youth's uncooperative or disruptive behavior in school may be symptoms of (and coping mechanisms for) learning disabilities and cognitive impairment due to trauma and violence exposure. Such youth especially need the active advocacy of professionals who are knowledgeable of educational rights and IEP-related services to help them and their families navigate educational systems.

Four: Involve the Family (to the greatest extent possible) in the Assessment Process

Judges should seek to involve family members to the greatest extent possible in the process of assessing a youth for violence and trauma exposure and determining helpful and appropriate interventions and supports to assist the youth to heal from such exposure. A growing field of research and recommended practice and resources now exists to promote family engagement in court-related matters and processes.⁶⁸ The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Casey Foundation, among others, stress the importance of family engagement. They offer guidance for family engagement as well as resources on specific practices, treatments, and/or interventions to promote family engagement that have been found to be effective. These resources encourage a broad approach to defining family and urge that youth be involved in identifying who they see to be caring adults that they wish to have participate in court-related matters or services.

Family members can provide crucial information about a youth's exposure to violence and the impacts of such exposure. They can tell the court or assessment professionals about supports in the youth's life as well as services needed to help the youth directly to heal or to help the family help the youth. In the context of exposure to community violence, parents and other family members can be sources of comfort, resilience, and support for youth.⁶⁹ The court will want to learn from these family members what they need in order to help them continue to offer healthy parenting to their youth. In the context of family violence, research has shown that parenting styles and communication associated with dominance and control affect healthy parent-child relationships.⁷⁰ This approach to parenting can hinder youth vocabulary development as well as analytical and critical thinking (and thus school performance and success). In the context of intimate partner or domestic violence, judges are encouraged to partner with protective parents in seeking security and safety for both parent and child, and to encourage connections to domestic violence-informed support services through court- or community based advocates.

Five: Order or Request Appropriate Youth-Serving Professionals to Connect Youth/Families to Evidence-Based Treatments (Based on Clinical Assessment and Clinician Recommendations)

Along with a growing body of tools and resources for assessing youth trauma and violence exposure, there is a growing field of evidence-based treatments and practices to promote healing and support a youth's healthy development.⁷¹ The Juvenile Justice Information Exchange offers a guide for understanding what evidence-based treatments are and what qualifies a treatment or intervention as being "evidenced-based."⁷² One type of evidence-based treatment that has been amply tested and demonstrated to be effective is Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT). There are various versions of TF-CBT, but they all include the following elements:

- psychoeducation on trauma prevalence, impacts, intervention, training in emotional regulation strategies (e.g., relaxation, identifying emotions, cognitive coping);
- imaginal exposure (e.g., using creative mechanisms like drawing or writing to recall details, feelings, etc., related to the traumatic experience);
- in vivo experience (confronting innocuous trauma reminders);
- cognitive processing; and
- problem solving (that may include safety skills training).⁷³

In addition, there are evidence-based treatments that are designed for youth exposed to violence and trauma who are involved in delinquent behavior.⁷⁴ These interventions also use versions of TF-CBT;⁷⁵ some are also tailored for youth with substance use disorders.⁷⁶ Another type of intervention that has also been shown to be effective with youth exposed to violence who are involved in delinquent behavior is found in restorative justice programming,⁷⁷ which is often available through community-based organizations. Restorative justice programs include “victim-offender mediation/dialogue” and restorative circles. Other promising approaches to providing youth exposed to violence and trauma with interventions that support their healing and positive development include hope-informed interventions⁷⁸ and healing-centered engagement (HCE) practices.⁷⁹

Judges should consider being proactive in reaching out to various court-related professionals and youth-serving program administrators to ask for their advocacy to ensure that those who work directly with youth exposed to violence are trained on trauma and adolescent development, and that services and interventions specifically designed to help youth heal from violence and trauma exposure are available to different populations of youth that their agency or department is responsible for.

- For youth involved in child welfare and foster care, judges should encourage child protective service administrators to promote education of foster families on trauma and trauma-informed care and also ask that child welfare case workers connect youth to trauma-informed behavioral health services.
- For youth involved in domestic violence matters, whether as a victim of adult-perpetrated harm or of sibling-perpetrated harm, judges should be active in requesting trauma and violence assessment and services be offered to the youth and other family members.
- For youth who are crime victims, judges can ask that prosecutors⁸⁰ and victim advocacy program administrators urge their staff to connect youth to behavioral health services. When youth are victims of a crime committed by another juvenile, ask that restorative justice programming be offered to such youth.
- For youth involved in child sex trafficking, judges should be proactive in requesting that probation or diversion staff develop safety plans and living arrangements with youth to keep them out of detention while also connecting the youth to trauma-informed behavioral health services.

- For youth involved in delinquency and placed on probation, judges should encourage probation department administrators to commit to providing staff with training on trauma, trauma-informed care, and adolescent development.⁸¹ Judges should also ask for probation to develop individualized, goal-oriented case plans for the youth based on criminogenic risk and needs and mental health/trauma needs, request that youth receive trauma-informed services from behavioral health professionals, and request that youth be involved in restorative justice programs.⁸²
- And finally, for youth committed to a state department of juvenile justice for out-of-home placement, judges are encouraged to develop relationships with facility administrators and to ask that they provide staff with training on trauma and trauma-informed responses to youth. Judges should also include in commitment orders requests that youth be assessed for violence exposure and trauma and receive treatment while in out-of-home placement specifically designed to address their mental health needs.⁸³

Six: Monitor Case Plan, Behavioral Health Services, and Educational Services Provided

Judges have different opportunities and authority to monitor the various types of cases that come before them involving youth exposed to violence. For example, in child welfare cases, under federal law (e.g., Adoption and Safe Families Act), judges are required to hold status hearings and make decisions within very specific time frames.⁸⁴ In juvenile justice cases, state law governs the timing of various court hearings and decisions. Contact with the court and court processes can be difficult and further traumatizing to youth exposed to violence. Judges should be open to different ways for youth to communicate with the court in order for to learn about youth experiences with being connected to services and supports. With the advent of virtual methods for courts and staff to connect with youth, judges do have options that are less intrusive for interacting with youth.⁸⁵ At the same time, judges will want to monitor assessments and services to ensure that professionals who work directly with youth are providing the follow up and connections to services and supports that the court intends. Judges should:

- convey expectations of youth-serving professionals that they, rather than the youth or the family, will take the initiative to schedule appointments needed for assessments and services;
- assist youth and families in making their initial appointments and meeting providers for the first time;
- schedule status hearings for cases of youth involved in dependency matters, on probation, or involved in child sex trafficking;
- permit virtual appearances for youth, if youth are asked to attend, but expect in-person or virtual attendance by professionals; and

- use hearings for updates specifically on assessments and services (including educational services and IEPs) undertaken to address youth mental and behavioral health needs related to violence exposure and positive youth development.

When youth involved in juvenile justice cases as offenders are placed in secure facilities, judges are urged to request written reports from institutional staff and clinicians on services being provided and progress being made. For youth involved in juvenile justice cases and under probation supervision, community-based care, or out-of-home secure facility care, judges should use status hearings to ask the professionals involved in the case specifically how a youth is doing with the goals in the case plan and with accessing treatment, services, and/or supports to address impacts of violence exposure. The judge should also ask probation or secure facility staff about administering reassessments of youth risk and need and use assessment and re-assessment metrics as indicators of progress as well as of ongoing needs. When youth are receiving services through victim advocacy programs on a voluntary basis, judges can ask program staff for the best way to hear about services received.

Seven: Involve the Larger Community in Supporting and Assisting Youth Exposed to Violence Heal and Thrive

Judges have a unique authority and position in the community as leaders with the power of the courts behind them and the aspiration to serve justice motivating them.⁸⁶ They are strongly encouraged to use their role as a community leader to convene and galvanize other community leaders, organizations, and systems to work together to help youth exposed to violence heal and thrive. Judges should reach out to stakeholders with youth-serving and victim-serving systems to create a collaborative focused on practices, interventions, and services for youth.⁸⁷ The collaborative should be composed of individuals/decision-makers from the court, juvenile probation administration, juvenile detention facility administration, the prosecutor's office, victim advocacy programs, law enforcement departments (city and county), the juvenile defense bar, county behavioral health departments, treatment provider agencies, middle and high school administration, domestic violence resource centers and shelters, community cultural centers, credible messenger programs, youth mentor programs, parent liaison/navigator services, pediatricians, and city or county hospital emergency room personnel. Judges should also ask for assistance from community- and faith-based organizations that serve and work with community members and families for the best ways to involve youth and families affected by violence in the work, activities, and results of the collaborative.

As conveners, judges can play a key role in helping stakeholders define the mission and activities of the collaborative. Specifically, judges should ask that the collaborative focus on ensuring there is community education and awareness of violence exposure, including of the developmental, cognitive, and behavioral impacts of exposure. Judges should also ask the collaborative to make a commitment to understanding and

addressing the needs of youth exposed to violence. For effective understanding and action to address violence, judges should encourage stakeholders to secure the professionals and expertise needed in the community to assess and treat youth exposure to violence and trauma, and that personnel with all youth-serving systems - school, courts, legal service, law enforcement, community-based organizations, medical, and behavioral health - have training on trauma and adolescent development. Judges should encourage the collaborative to assess the training needs of practitioners in these systems and to undertake planning on how the needs will be met. Additionally, judges should encourage the collaborative to assess services and resources currently available in the community (or in out-of-home placements for those youths engaged in serious delinquency) for addressing the impacts of violence and trauma on youth, to identify gaps in resources and services, and to develop plans and strategies to address gaps and create new resources and services. The Linking Systems of Care project provides a toolkit⁸⁸ to help judges involve the larger community in supporting and assisting youth exposed to violence heal and thrive. The toolkit offers guidance and resources on creating a collaborative, developing its mission, undertaking resource mapping and gap analyses, coalition building, and creating and using screening tools and protocols for determining youth exposure to violence, and services for healing from violence exposure.

Galvanizing and sustaining stakeholders of youth-serving systems to undertake collaborative efforts to address youth exposure to violence is one of the most important things that judges can do for the communities in which they live and serve. Such efforts do require commitment and time but they will lead to tremendous short- and long-term benefits for the wellbeing of all youth and families, for the legitimacy and efficacy of the justice system, and for the general health of the entire community.

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¹ Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) refer to 10 specific childhood experiences that researchers have identified as risk factors for chronic disease in adulthood: emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, violent treatment toward mother, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and having an incarcerated household member. Since the original ACEs research, the list of factors has been expanded to include exposure to violence outside of the home, living in unsafe neighborhoods, bullying, and discrimination based on race or ethnicity. ACEs researchers count the number of different types of experiences to create an ACEs score and associate scores with different levels of risk for developing long-term mental, physical, and behavioral health conditions (morbidity) and death. While not all ACEs factors constitute violence exposure factors, the two have several experiences in common: witnessing or being directly subjected to different forms of abuse, neglect, and interpersonal violence in the home or the community. Baglivio, M., Epps, N., Swartz, K., Huq, M., Sheer, A. & Hardt, N. (2014) [The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences \(AEC\) in the lives of juvenile offenders](#). *Journal of Juvenile Justice* 3 (2)

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