

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY

Subject

Gender-Responsive Services for Juvenile Justice-Involved
Females and At-Risk Young Women and Girls

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Introduction

Young women and girls in the juvenile justice system present unique challenges and risks that are frequently not present in young men and boys. The County of San Diego's policy is to provide these young women with supportive services through a collaborative approach that emphasizes a strength-based, positive youth development model that promotes the long-term interests of all youth in the juvenile justice system while maintaining community safety.

Purpose

To clarify, facilitate, and enhance the County of San Diego's commitment to preventing female juvenile delinquency and promoting positive development of at-risk girls. To improve the ability of the juvenile justice system and related County services to identify and address the specific and unique needs of at-risk girls and juvenile females in the justice system.

Definition of Gender-Responsive Services for Girls

Gender-responsive services for girls are those services whose content, delivery, and cultural orientation addresses the unique needs and characteristics of young women and girls. The goal of these services is to prevent or reduce female juvenile delinquency and promote positive development of at-risk girls. Services will encourage healthy attitudes, behaviors, and life styles, as well as promote responsible decision making and self-reliance.

Background

For young women and girls, the path to adulthood often features very different developmental experiences, challenges, and problems than those faced by young men and boys. Addressing and preventing female juvenile delinquency requires gender-responsive solutions.

In general, adolescent girls have a high incidence of physical, sexual, and emotional victimization, depression, and low self-esteem that are directly linked to at-risk behaviors. In San Diego County, female juveniles on probation are more likely than males to suffer from chronic substance abuse, have little or no parental control in

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their lives, and have poor school attendance and performance. Additionally, some juvenile justice-involved females are pregnant at the time of their incarceration, and many other at-risk girls become mothers at an early age.

Young women and girls with juvenile justice system involvement are more at-risk of being victimized through the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) while also breaking the law. Being both victims and perpetrators presents unique challenges to the rehabilitative process. The Board of Supervisors is committed to supporting programs and services that helps young women and girls, who are CSEC-involved, become successful in the community.

Guiding Principles:

The psychosocial perspective and developmental needs of young women and girls are very different from those of young men and boys. Effective programming for at-risk girls and juvenile justice-involved females must address the unique characteristics and needs of young women and girls.

Effective service delivery for young women and girls requires providers with a comprehensive understanding of their psychosocial perspective and developmental needs. Programming and training should be gender responsive and reflect knowledge of the diverse backgrounds and issues of the young women and girls served.

Programming adapted to young women and girls' developmental needs is more likely to result in positive outcomes, including healthy attitudes, behaviors and lifestyles, as well as responsible decision making and self-reliance.

Involvement with at least one significant positive adult, a positive peer group, core social institutions, and the community is critical in providing effective and lasting outcomes for

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young women and girls.

Wherever appropriate, families should continue to play the primary role in the development of young women and girls. Programs at all levels should provide services that include the family in addressing the problems that lead to delinquency.

Young women and girls who commit violent and serious offenses that present public safety risks should receive an appropriate length-of-stay commitment that addresses criminogenic behaviors and maintains community safety. While in custody, young women and girls should receive case management services that include treatment providers, families, and positive role models in the rehabilitative process.

Program and Policy Priorities

1. The Community Assessment Teams (CAT) are the foundation for addressing early identification of at-risk and delinquent behaviors. CAT works with youth and families to connect residents to services that promotes long-term success.
2. Aggressive and sustained efforts to seek state, federal, and private foundation funding sources to augment County commitments are integral to the development and implementation of these services.
3. For young women and girls, the CAT Program addresses family issues, and young women and girls' experiences of physical, emotional, and sexual victimization. These issues contribute significantly to at-risk and delinquent behavior.
4. Physical and mental health assessment, intervention, and treatment are essential components of the CAT program.
5. School difficulties and negative attitudes toward school, as evidenced by anti-social behavior, failing grades, truancy, and dropping out, both reflect and contribute to at-risk behavior. Services for young women and girls that support academic performance and

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remove barriers to girls' success in school are essential components of gender-responsive programming.

6. Services for young women and girls must include development of educational and career-oriented skills promoting the capacity of young women to sustain independence and self-reliance. Services will include academic assistance, professional behavior, and planning for the future.

7. An essential component of gender-responsive service delivery is ensuring that at-risk young women and girls and their families know what programs are available and how to utilize neighborhood and core social institutions for future problem solving. Gender-responsive programs must be part of an integrated and accessible service delivery network.

8. Programming must help at-risk young women and girls and juvenile justice-involved females develop and strengthen personal support networks, including positive peer group and mentors, in order to foster positive behaviors and effective decision making skills.

9. The ultimate goal of gender-responsive programs, such as CAT, must be to engender self-reliance. Services for young women and girls must include information and counseling on basic life skills, such as personal finances, career goals and parenting, in order to assist their development into responsible, successful, and self-sufficient adults.

Sunset Date

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-25.

CAO REFERENCE

1. Probation Department

Board Action

- 11-16-99 (1)
- 09-27-05 (1)
- 12-09-08 (33)
- 11-08-11 (2)
- 12-11-18 (6)