

# Position Paper



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## Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators

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### Mission

To connect, develop and strengthen youth corrections leaders to maximize their capacities to implement and sustain reforms in their systems that will improve outcomes for youth, families and communities.

### Vision

"We believe every youth should leave a correctional program in a better place than when he or she came in."

### Core Values

- Continuous Learning
- Collaboration
- Rehabilitation
- Parental Engagement
- Supportive Communities
- Diversity

### Executive Director

Michael P. Dempsey

### Elected Officers

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## Trauma Informed Care in Juvenile Justice

The American juvenile justice system has increasingly become aware of the prevalence of traumatic histories among justice involved youth. "More than two-thirds of children will experience one or more traumatic event by the time they reach age 16." (NCMHJJ, 2016) A national survey conducted in 2011 indicated that the incidence is much higher if one considers a child's overall exposure to all forms of violence, noting that 57.7 percent of children (approximately three in five) experienced at least one exposure to five aggregate types of violence in the past year. (OJJDP, 2015) Lifetime estimates from the same OJJDP study suggests that one in four (25.6 percent) were victims of maltreatment. Youth in the justice system present with disproportionately high rates of victimization, with approximately ninety percent reporting a history of traumatic experiences. (NCMHJJ, 2016)<sup>i</sup>

1. Further, childhood maltreatment, exposure to violence and other traumatic experiences are believed to adversely affect the maturation and development of the child and cause neurodevelopmental disruption. Children exposed to violent communities, crime, family violence and abuse are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder; abuse drugs and alcohol; have problems in school; and engage in delinquent acts. (OJJDP, 2015)<sup>ii</sup>

CJCA affirms the need for the nation's juvenile justice system to adopt trauma-informed strategies across all jurisdictions. These strategies will include the following essential elements (NCTSN, 2014)<sup>iii</sup>:

- Maximize the child's sense of safety; both physically and psychologically;
- Assist children in reducing overwhelming emotion;
- Help children find meaning and make connections with their trauma history and current behaviors and experiences;
- Address the impact of trauma in the child's behavior, development and relationships;
- Coordinate youth care, as traumatized youth are involved in multiple systems;
- Facilitate comprehensive assessment of the child's traumatic experiences and the impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services;

- Support and promote positive and stable relationships; and
- Provide support and guidance to the child's family and caregivers (staff).

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<sup>i</sup> National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. Understanding Trauma in the Context of Juvenile Justice Systems. Sep. 2016 webinar presented as part of the Defending Childhood State Policy Initiative and in partnership with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<http://www.ncmhjj.com/resources/understanding-trauma-context-juvenile-justice-systems>

<sup>ii</sup> OJJDP published findings from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence conducted in 2011. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/programs/traumas-impact-on-children-exposed-to-violence.html>

<sup>iii</sup> National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Think Trauma: Training for staff in Juvenile Justice Settings, adapted for the Texas Juvenile Justice Department by NCTSN, 2014.