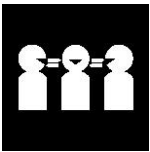# Behaviours and Responses

Supporting young people through early intervention

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Early intervention

This document aims to provide information about young people who may benefit from an early intervention response, the skills required to effectively work with these young people, as well as the requirements for service providers to deliver effective early intervention programs.

In a youth justice context, early intervention refers to the period before a young person starts to come into regular contact with police, courts and/or the Department of Youth Justice. These young people are not yet entrenched in the youth justice system but may be on that trajectory due to the factors outlined below. Alternative language for these young people is "at risk" of offending (i.e. they are at risk of contact with the youth justice system). Early intervention works for young people when it addresses the risk factors that result in offending and anti-social behaviour.

1. **Who are the young people most likely to need an early intervention response?**

   - Typically younger cohort (including those under the minimum age of criminal responsibility)
   - Mostly young men and boys with emerging proportion of young women and girls
   - Disproportionate representation of First Nations young people, some Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups emerging
   - Interacting with Police and Courts due to peer influences and/or behaviours, but may not have had any interaction with the statutory Youth Justice system (i.e. have not received a youth justice order)
   - Experience multiple unmet risk factors and needs.

2. **What are the behavioural indicators of young people who would benefit from an early intervention response?**

   - Disengaged, disconnected and/or lacking ability to engage in education settings

- Displaying risky, volatile, hyperactivity, disruptive and/or dissociated behaviours within education settings or community

- Display of anti-social behaviours and lack a sense of belonging within their community and home environments

- Frequenting "hot spots" where other young people congregate and surrounded by young people and/or older peers who are known to offend

- Unsupervised video gaming and social media use for an extended period of time, leading to increased exposure to violence, drug use and explicit content

- Cognitive deficits particularly in memory, problem-solving, sequencing of tasks and assessing future consequences

- Distrust, disrespect or poor attitude towards the system and authority figures, shaped by the influence of role models such as parents, older family members, and/or older peers

- Lack of connection to culture

- Experiencing feelings of not being "seen and heard"

- Unhealthy desire to fit in and be accepted within peer groups, which may be exploited through peer pressure

- Lack of self-regulation, understanding of self and ability to respond to others

- Lack of awareness around consequences and long-term impacts of poor decisions, leading to take the fall for others (especially family members) and engaging in risky behaviours out of fear of disappointing or letting others down

- Lack of positive role models, absence of trusting and safe relationships with family, peers, and community members

- Limited access to activities that promote purpose, expression of self, teamwork, connection and community

- Experience and/or exposure to bullying, exclusion, discrimination and racism.

3. **What are the situational factors that may lead to a young person offending?**

- Developmental factors
  - Physical, developmental and mental health issues that are undiagnosed/diagnosed and untreated or self-medicating
  - Substance use
  - Basic hierarchy of needs not being met – food insecurity, accommodation, clothing, education
- Family environment
  - Intergenerational offending and parental incarceration, family violence and disharmony
  - Family member (including older siblings) with active offending behaviour or have a history of offending

- o Long term parental unemployment and engagement with government services
- o Domestic and family violence
- o Poor supervision and monitoring, parentified role for young siblings
- o Parents unable to manage behavioural issues
- o Harsh or inconsistent discipline style
- o Lack of warmth and affection, low involvement in young person's life.
- Community and cultural
  - o Socio-economic disadvantage including homelessness, overcrowded housing or unstable and/or unsafe accommodation arrangements
  - o Neighbourhood violence and crime
  - o Normalisation of violence as an acceptable response to frustration or other anger
  - o Social and/or cultural discrimination
  - o Lack of access to/engagement with support services.
- Life events
  - o Divorce and/or family break up
  - o Grief or loss; death of a family member
  - o Trauma and harm including exposure to alcohol, other drugs, mental illness, domestic and family violence
  - o Natural disaster or war; refugee and/or displacement background
  - o Intergenerational trauma.

4. **What is expected of service providers working with at-risk young people?**

- **Overarching frameworks**
  - o Trauma-informed approaches – sensitive to historical impacts of adverse childhood experiences, emphasising physical, psychological and emotional safety (Kezelman & Stavropoulos, 2012)
  - o Culturally informed and culturally respectful responses
  - o Strengths-based approach
  - o Prioritising needs of young person's wellbeing and safety (food, clothing, accommodation)
  - o Family-inclusive practice and coordinated care between young people, families and other carers
  - o Partnership approach empowering young people and their families to make choices towards positive change
  - o Cultural responsiveness, awareness, and sensitivity

- o Integrating play and encouraging new environments in engagement and communication approaches
- o Collaborative and multi-agency approach with key stakeholders in with government and non-government agencies.
- o Developing positive mentoring relationships

- **Values and behaviours**
  - o Hold appropriate professional boundaries with young people
  - o Collaborative and integrated approach to proactively identify, assess and work with young people, families, communities and non-government agencies
  - o Be patient to allow rapport and trust to develop naturally with young people and their families
  - o Be agile to change and highly dynamic situations
  - o Be present and available
  - o Work with authenticity, truth and integrity
  - o Self-awareness of beliefs, values, judgements, and power
  - o Expect to be tested and foresee challenges throughout the process.

- **Communication skills**
  - o Youth-friendly language, consistent messaging and instructions/rules
  - o De-escalation skills
  - o Conflict resolution and conflict management
  - o Motivational interviewing skills
  - o Sound judgement.

- **Governance**
  - o Risk management and mitigation – documented and regularly revised
  - o Recording and monitoring of data to reflect service delivery and outcomes
  - o Reflective practice to continuously learn and improve processes
  - o Staff training, supervision and support.

Reference list

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