

YLS/CMI™ 2.0: Peer Relations

This brief aims to provide information to all Youth Justice staff about what works for young people when addressing assessed need in the Peer Relations domain of the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI™) 2.0.

High need in Peer Relations: What does this mean?

Attitudes/Orientation, Personality/Behaviour, and Peer Relations are the strongest predictors of reoffending. Young people who have high need in the Peer Relations domain will often:

- Be drawn to other antisocial young people, including those known to Youth Justice.
- Feel proud or important when doing things that are harmful or against the law, for example, feeling good about notoriety.
- Not engage with prosocial groups/clubs, and therefore have a lot of unstructured time.

Recent studies of YLS/CMI™ validity with an Australian cohort indicated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, [Peer Relations and Family Circumstances/Parenting were the most important domains](#).

How to address high need in Peer Relations?

Young people need a service response that challenges and changes the way they think and behave (e.g. CHART, ERIC).

[Changing Habits and Reaching Targets \(CHART\)](#) is a great starting program for the Peer Relations risk and need, as it is [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#) based and specifically developed for young people who have offended. CBT is one of the [most effective service types](#) in reducing youth reoffending.

It is good practice to encourage a young person (e.g. through their Service Response Plan) to:

- **Complete core CHART modules** – In particular, the [Lifestyle Balance module](#).
- **Spend time with positive role models** – Whose opinion is valued by the young person (e.g. Elders, family, community).
- [Address criminogenic thinking patterns](#).
- **Engage in healthy and social activities** – As a means of developing more prosocial peers (e.g. sports, prosocial groups, clubs, hobbies).
- **Engage in structured and supervised activities** – To reduce unstructured time and increase positive mentors (e.g. education, employment, and vocational training).

The CHART Lifestyle Balance module focuses on helping young people look at how they spend their time and who they spend it with. [Worksheet 39 – People I Spend My Time With](#) specifically explores friendships and can help a young person identify the influence peers can have on their offending behaviour.

Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control (ERIC) is another CBT based service response suitable for addressing Peer Relations. ERIC is designed to be flexible and modular, with all staff being capable of delivery. The worksheets are standalone, allowing them to be delivered creatively and without order, making them ideal in situations when young people are difficult to engage.

How important are young people's relationships with their peers?

Very important. Good peer relationships can foster positive outcomes in social, emotional, and academic settings. Negative peer relations are a risk factor for antisocial behaviour.

Young people start spending more time with their peers during adolescence and can [value their peer relationships](#) and the opinions of their peers above those of parents or other adults in this stage. This means behaviours are strongly influenced by the opinions and attitudes of their friends. Young people are more daring and take more risks when they are with their friends, compared to when they are by themselves. Hanging out with peers who are participating in criminal behaviours can increase the chances of young people also participating in those behaviours.

What if the young person does not want to change their friends?

A young person might not see the relationship between their friends and their offending, change their behaviour or peer group, or engage in discussions.

Every interaction with a young person can bring about change. Starting with CHART module one ([Mapping My Offences](#)) can be a good strategy to subtly introduce the idea that peers play a role in offending behaviour. In the worksheets that focus on [before, during, and after the offence](#), it may be beneficial to have the young person make the link between those peers that were present when the offending occurred. If the young person is reluctant to discuss their peers, [motivational interviewing](#) can be helpful. Over time, this may provide them with small wins which leads to rapport building and the opportunity to challenge beliefs and attitudes to peer connections.

What core programs address high need in Peer Relations?

Core internal programs that address high Peer Relations needs include:

- Changing Habits and Reaching Targets (CHART)
- Emotional Recognition and Impulse Control (ERIC)
- Young, Black and Proud (YBP)
- Black Chicks Talking (BCT)
- Transition to Success (T2S)
- Re-thinking Our Attitude to Driving (ROAD)
- Girls... Moving On (GMO).