

# Reintegration With Resilience Youth Reentry Spotlight Series

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## Reintegration With Resilience Youth Reentry Spotlight Series

In support of Second Chance Month 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP’s) Youth Reentry Technical Assistance Center (YRTAC) presents the Reintegration With Resilience Youth Reentry Spotlight Series. The series explores a range of challenges faced by youth leaving secure care as they navigate reentry and reintegration, what reentry programs need to know about these challenges, and the critical role reentry programs can play in fostering positive outcomes for the young people whom they serve. The reentry spotlight briefs within the series include Supporting Mental and Behavioral Health for Youth Leaving Confinement, Understanding and Overcoming the Challenges of Juvenile Records, and Helping LGBTQ+ Youth Thrive After Confinement. Each spotlight brief provides practical tools and other resources to support reentry programs in their vital work.

# Reintegration With Resilience: Supporting Mental and Behavioral Health for Youth Leaving Confinement

For youth and young adults leaving juvenile detention centers and other secure settings, the journey toward reintegration is a complex one. Among the many steps, addressing mental and behavioral health needs is critical to their success. Studies show that 40–90% of youth who are incarcerated have at least one diagnosable mental health disorder, with conduct disorder, substance use disorders, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) being the most common.<sup>i</sup> Many of these young people have histories of trauma and adverse childhood experiences, social and economic disadvantages, and systemic failures that contribute to their mental health struggles.<sup>ii</sup> Moreover, secure care settings can worsen mental health conditions through isolation, trauma, and a lack of treatment access, further disrupting healthy development and increasing the risk of recidivism.<sup>iii, iv</sup>

Reentry programs play a vital role in supporting young people on their reintegration journey, and prioritizing mental and behavioral health is key. This resource discusses why addressing these needs is so critical and how reentry programs can best support young people in meeting their needs. The document also provides some practical tools to support this work.

## Building Comprehensive Knowledge

Reentry program staff should be equipped with a thorough understanding of the prevalence of mental and behavioral health concerns among youth in preparing comprehensive transition plans for young people returning from secure care. This knowledge should encompass the **specific conditions commonly faced**, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>v</sup> Additionally, familiarity with the **signs and symptoms** of these conditions allows for earlier identification and intervention. Recognizing the **potential impact of these conditions** on reintegration success, including increased risk of recidivism, allows programs to prioritize mental and behavioral health support. Additionally, fostering a **trauma-informed approach** through understanding the potential impact of past traumas on current behavior and well-being is essential for shaping program interactions and fostering a supportive environment.<sup>vi</sup>

## Taking Actionable Steps

To identify, understand, and help address young people's mental and behavioral health needs, reentry programs can implement various strategies. **Initial screenings and assessments** are crucial for identifying potential mental and behavioral health needs and tailoring support accordingly. Building or relying on existing partnerships with community mental and behavioral health providers can then facilitate **referral and connection** to ongoing treatment services, ensuring connected and comprehensive support. Ensuring **safe spaces** for young people as they navigate and receive support for mental and behavioral wellness is also vital. Reentry programs can facilitate such environments through

**peer support groups** or by offering access to **individual counseling sessions**. These spaces provide a platform for youth to share their experiences, receive support from their peers, and work through challenges. Additionally, integrating **life skills training** into the reentry program equips young people with essential tools to manage stress. These skills, including developing healthy coping mechanisms and making positive choices, contribute to their emotional well-being and long-term success.

It is important for reentry programs to remember that mental and behavioral health needs are intricately linked to other aspects of reentry and reintegration, such as pursuing education, securing and maintaining gainful employment, finding safe, stable housing, and maintaining supportive family relationships. By **adopting a holistic approach** that addresses these various needs in a **comprehensive and coordinated manner**, reentry programs can empower young people with the tools and support they need to overcome challenges, improve their overall well-being, and successfully reintegrate into society.

## Addressing Challenges and Overcoming Barriers

Despite the available resources and pre-release and post-release reentry program efforts, addressing mental and behavioral health needs for youth leaving secure care is not without its challenges. Several significant barriers hinder young people's access to appropriate care:

**Stigma:** The stigma associated with mental or behavioral health conditions can prevent individuals from seeking help due to fear of judgment or discrimination.

**Lack of access:** A shortage of mental and behavioral health professionals, especially in underserved communities, can limit access to treatment options.

**Affordability:** The cost of mental and behavioral health services can be a significant barrier, especially for individuals with limited financial resources.

**Logistical challenges:** Transportation difficulties, childcare concerns, and inconvenient appointment times can also make it difficult for individuals to consistently access treatment services and supports.

**Lack of continuity of care:** Transitioning between different facilities and programs can disrupt ongoing treatment and create gaps in care.

Recognizing these barriers is crucial in providing effective support. By implementing evidence-based practices, fostering collaboration between different systems, and advocating for policy changes that address systemic barriers, reentry programs can create more supportive environments for young people leaving secure care. In particular, **building and maintaining strong partnerships with community mental and behavioral health providers** is essential for successful reentry programs. These partnerships facilitate smooth transitions from incarceration-based services into ongoing care within a young person's community. This continuity of treatment increases the likelihood of positive long-term outcomes.

While reentry programs are vital for supporting youth as they leave detention or incarceration, it is equally important to **push for reform within the juvenile justice system itself**. By advocating for policies that prioritize trauma-informed therapeutic approaches, comprehensive mental and behavioral health screening and treatment, and community-based alternatives to detention, reentry programs can support efforts to avoid the trauma and other harmful impacts that

detention and incarceration can inflict on young people. This advocacy is a crucial element in preventing the very issues that reentry programs work so hard to address.

## Resources to Support This Work

### [Systems-Involved Youth: Rural Reentry With a Focus on Health and Well-Being](#)

Corrections and Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center (2002)

This brief focuses on access to services that can improve the health and well-being of youth who are or have been involved in the juvenile justice system, including those who are dually involved with the child welfare system. The brief provides an overview of what health and well-being entail, particularly for systems-involved youth, and discusses the challenges that youth living in rural areas face in accessing providers or specialized care; describes systems integration and a more streamlined, holistic view of health; and provides a broad definition of health and well-being that includes physically and intellectually stimulating activities.

### [Trauma-Informed Practices for Reentry Providers](#)

Corrections and Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center (2002)

This brief provides an overview of the prevalence and impact of trauma on individuals involved in the justice system prior to and because of their involvement in the justice system. The brief spotlights the high rates of exposure to trauma in the lives of most youth and young adults involved in the justice system, and the impact of traumatic experiences on well-being as these individuals attempt to cope and thrive. The brief also highlights strategies for implementing a trauma-informed approach across various justice entities, including community-based and secure care settings.

### [How to Use an Integrated Approach to Address the Mental Health Needs of Youth in the Justice System](#)

The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2022)

Over 65 percent of youth arrested every year have mental health conditions, which amounts to over two-thirds of boys and three-quarters of girls. Often, these needs have gone untreated or misdiagnosed, leading to engagement in the juvenile justice system. This brief identifies the collaborative role that juvenile justice stakeholders can play in helping to prevent and/or reduce involvement in the justice system by addressing youth's mental health needs.

## Endnotes

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<sup>vi</sup> Branson, C. E., Baetz, C. L., Horwitz, S. M., & Hoagwood, K. E. (2017). Trauma-informed juvenile justice systems: A systematic review of definitions and core components. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*, *9*(6), 635–646. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000255>



## Reintegration with Resilience: Understanding and Overcoming the Challenges of Juvenile Records

The journey toward successfully reintegrating into society after detention or incarceration presents numerous challenges for youth and young adults. One significant hurdle they face is the **lasting impact of their juvenile court records**. Each year, more than 700,000 young people, on average,<sup>[1]</sup> are processed through juvenile courts for delinquent offenses—with the majority arrested by law enforcement—resulting in millions of youth and young adults living with a juvenile record that follows them for years, regardless of the outcomes of their cases.<sup>[2], [3]</sup> Increasingly, these records are digital and are not confined to court proceedings and secure placements; juvenile records often include police reports with personal information, such as DNA, fingerprints, photographs, and more.<sup>[4]</sup> These records can have far-reaching consequences that significantly hinder a young person’s ability to move forward after secure placement. Understanding and addressing these impacts are crucial for reentry programs that aim to support young people in their successful reintegration.

### Understanding the Impacts of Juvenile Records

Juvenile court records can trigger a series of **collateral consequences**, impacting various aspects of life beyond detention or incarceration.<sup>[5]</sup> These consequences can significantly limit opportunities in several areas critical for successful reintegration, including the following:

- **Education.** Eligibility for certain educational opportunities, such as financial aid or specific certification programs, may be restricted due to juvenile records. Such consequences can limit young people’s abilities to pursue higher education and potentially affect their future career prospects.
- **Employment.** Many employers use background checks as part of the hiring process, and juvenile records can disqualify individuals from certain jobs or dissuade employers from hiring them, even for offenses unrelated to the position.
- **Housing.** Finding safe and stable housing can be difficult for individuals with a juvenile record because many landlords conduct background checks and may reject individuals with a juvenile record. This can lead to housing insecurity and instability.

Beyond these practical limitations, juvenile records can perpetuate negative labeling and **stigma**, affecting how individuals are perceived by society and impacting their self-esteem and motivation.<sup>[6], [7]</sup> This situation can create a sense of hopelessness in young people and hinder their efforts to move forward positively. Because many young people constantly face societal judgment or are denied opportunities due to a juvenile record, they may have feelings of isolation, shame, and a belief that they are forever defined by past mistakes. Such feelings can significantly hinder motivation to engage in positive change and can contribute to a cycle of negativity.



Furthermore, the difficulties in pursuing education and obtaining employment and housing due to the collateral consequences of juvenile records can increase the risk of **recidivism**.<sup>[8], [9]</sup> As individuals struggle to find a path to successful reintegration, they may resort to negative coping mechanisms or fall back into old patterns of behavior that may be delinquent or criminal, which highlights the crucial role of reentry programs in equipping youth and young adults with the tools and support they need to overcome these challenges and achieve positive reentry outcomes.

## What Reentry Programs Need to Know and Do

Given the challenges young people face in overcoming the barriers imposed by juvenile court records, it is imperative for reentry programs to equip themselves with a thorough understanding of the potential consequences of juvenile records and the available options for addressing them. This understanding allows reentry programs to effectively support the young people they serve in navigating these challenges and reentry programs can take several crucial steps to help youth address juvenile records and improve reintegration outcomes.

### *Education and Awareness*

It is important for young people to understand the potential consequences of juvenile records. To help them become aware of the severity of the situation, reentry programs can host or connect young people to **informational workshops or seminars**. These sessions should educate youth and young adults about (a) the different types of juvenile records and their varying impacts, (b) the eligibility criteria and legal processes involved in record sealing or expungement, and (c) the importance of maintaining a clean record moving forward. Beyond these informational sessions, reentry programs can connect young people to **one-on-one sessions with legal professionals or advocates** who can help young people assess their specific cases and explore their options for record sealing or expungement. This personalized approach ensures that young people receive accurate and relevant information tailored to their individual circumstances.

### *Supporting Record Sealing and Expungement*

Reentry programs can play a crucial role in supporting young people in seeking to seal or expunge their juvenile records. The process of record sealing or expungement can be intricate and bewildering, but, with the right guidance, the process becomes more manageable. Supportive reentry programs can assist with (a) helping young people **gather necessary documentation and complete required forms**; (b) connecting them with **legal aid services or pro bono attorneys** who can offer legal representation and guidance at an affordable cost; and (c) **advocating for them in court proceedings**, if necessary. Additionally, the **costs associated with record sealing and expungement can be a significant barrier** for many young people. In addition to working with and connecting young people with legal aid and pro bono services, reentry programs can explore other options to help young people overcome this hurdle, such as **fundraising initiatives or grants** specifically designated for this purpose and connecting young people with **scholarships or financial assistance programs**.

### *Building Life Skills and Resilience*

Beyond legal matters, reentry programs can focus on equipping the youth and young people they serve with essential life skills and other “soft skills” that can build resilience and help them navigate the challenges of a juvenile record. Some key supports that programs can provide include the following:

- **Job search skills training** to equip young people with the necessary skills to navigate the job market, including résumé writing, interview preparation, and networking techniques. This training can help young people overcome potential hiring biases related to their juvenile records and secure gainful employment.

- **Financial literacy workshops** that teach young people about responsible budgeting, managing finances, and building credit. Financial literacy can empower young people to overcome housing challenges and achieve financial stability, reducing the risk of recidivism.
- **Mentorship programs** that connect young people with peers and/or caring adults who can offer guidance, support, and encouragement as they navigate the reintegration process. Mentors can be positive role models and help young people build self-esteem and confidence despite the challenges associated with their juvenile records.

By understanding the significant and multifaceted impact of juvenile records and offering comprehensive support, reentry programs can assist young people with addressing the lingering impacts of their juvenile records, which not only improves their chances of pursuing education, finding employment, and securing housing, but also fosters a sense of urgency and hope, ultimately leading to successful reintegration and a brighter future.

## Resources to Support This Work

### [Expunging Juvenile Records: Misconceptions, Collateral Consequences, and Emerging Practices](#)

Andrea R. Coleman, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2020

This Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention bulletin identifies and discusses common misconceptions about the expungement of juvenile delinquency records and provides information about the collateral consequences of having a juvenile record, as well as federal, state, and local emerging practices about this issue.

### [Reducing Structural Barriers to School and Work for People with Juvenile Records](#)

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2021

This [study](#) details an analysis of policies and practices in 12 states conducted to better understand the education and employment barriers that people with juvenile records face and to develop recommendations and resources that policymakers in all states can use to guide statutory reforms. The corresponding [policy solutions toolkit](#) was developed to support the adoption of these policy solutions and provides practical resources for policymakers, including sample legislative language and best practice examples from states across the country.

### [Automatic Expungement of Juvenile Records](#)

National Conference of State Legislatures, 2024

All states have procedures that allow juveniles to petition to either seal or expunge their records in certain cases. However, these procedures can be confusing and cumbersome. This resource provides an inventory of state legislation on automatic sealing or expungement of juvenile records, meaning the records are sealed or expunged without any action on the part of the youth.

### [Clean Slate Clearinghouse](#)

National Reentry Resource Center, 2023

The Clean Slate Clearinghouse offers a database of the state policies that provide for the sealing, expungement, or other clearance mechanisms for juvenile court records and resources focused on records clearance.

## Endnotes

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## Reintegration With Resilience: Helping LGBTQ+ Youth Thrive After Confinement

### Why the Unique Needs of LGBTQ+ Youth Matter

LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual) youth leaving detention centers and other secure care facilities face a unique set of challenges that reentry programs can help address to increase the likelihood of successful reentry and reintegration. Young people who are LGBTQ+ are disproportionately represented within the juvenile justice system, accounting for 20% of all youth in juvenile justice facilities compared with 7% to 9% of all youth nationwide.<sup>[i], [ii]</sup> Reasons may include higher rates of arrest due to discrimination, higher rates of substance use disorder, family rejection that can lead to homelessness, employment discrimination, and the criminalization of behaviors related to their sexual orientation or gender identity (e.g., survival sex work).<sup>[iii], [iv]</sup>

The experience of incarceration for LGBTQ+ youth is often exceptionally harmful. They are more likely to be inappropriately placed within facilities and targeted for abuse, harassment, and victimization by both peers and staff.<sup>[v]</sup> Many LGBTQ+ youth have already experienced significant trauma related to their identities before incarceration.<sup>[vi]</sup> Carceral settings further exacerbate the trauma, increasing the risk of PTSD, depression, and suicidal ideation that hinder recovery after release.

Following release, many LGBTQ+ youth cannot return to supportive families. Some youth become homeless, and other youth have to hide their true selves for their safety.<sup>[vii]</sup> LGBTQ+ individuals also frequently face discrimination when looking for jobs or housing,<sup>[viii]</sup> which is amplified by the stigma of incarceration, making stable living situations hard to obtain. Further, social isolation increases mental health struggles and LGBTQ+ youth may not know where to find affirming friends, mentors, or community resources, worsening depression, anxiety, and hopelessness.<sup>[ix], [x]</sup>

### What Reentry Programs Need to Know and How They Can Help

#### *Safe and Affirming Environments*

To genuinely support LGBTQ+ youth leaving secure care, reentry programs can take several significant steps. As a first step, reentry programs should be sure that all programming and supports are **explicitly safe and affirming for LGBTQ+ individuals**. Creating such **safe spaces** helps build trust and encourages young people to seek needed support. Creating visibly safe spaces goes beyond posters or inclusive language (though both are important). Reentry programs should consider intake forms with **inclusive gender and pronoun options**, **gender-neutral bathrooms** where feasible, and **staff who openly introduce themselves with pronouns**. Reentry programs should also ensure **robust privacy and confidentiality policies**, especially with potentially unsupportive families. Youth need to know their disclosures regarding sexual orientation and gender identity will not be shared without their explicit permission. Reentry programs may also consider ways to help youth build connections with supportive adults and peers within the LGBTQ+ community, which can create crucial lifelines as they navigate reentry.

### *Staff Training and Accountability*

Additionally, reentry programs should **ensure all staff are trained** in cultural competency, implicit bias, and trauma-informed care, specifically surrounding LGBTQ+ issues, to help reduce the risk of further harm and ensure LGBTQ+ youth feel genuinely welcomed and understood. Training should have an **intersectionality focus** that includes how race, ethnicity, disability, and so forth interact with LGBTQ+ identities to create unique challenges. **Training should be ongoing**, particularly as terminology and understanding of gender and sexual orientation continue to evolve in the broader culture. Finally, reentry programs should **be accountable and hold staff accountable** by creating processes for addressing staff misgendering or discrimination, including how youth can report and have incidents addressed respectfully.

### *Connecting to Specialized Care*

Further, it is vital for reentry programs to **partner with community organizations** that have **expertise and specialize in serving LGBTQ+ individuals** to provide specialized mental health care, housing assistance tailored to LGBTQ+ safety, and essential social connections. For example, reentry programs may seek out providers comfortable with gender-affirming care, experienced in LGBTQ+ trauma, and adept at addressing issues such as substance use disorder within an affirming context. Ideally, reentry programs **proactively build relationships** with these organizations **before youth exit secure care**, making referrals to a network of providers smoother and reducing the burden on the youth during a critical transition time. Finally, reentry programs should **look beyond clinical resources** and also prioritize connecting young people with LGBTQ+ youth centers, sports leagues, arts groups, and other places where they can form genuine connections and build a sense of belonging.

### *Addressing Specific Challenges*

LGBTQ+ youth frequently face unique discrimination-based challenges with employment, housing, health care, and beyond. Reentry programs can further support LGBTQ+ youth by recognizing, understanding, and addressing these challenges and proactively ensuring LGBTQ+ youth are connected to relevant advocacy resources. Some examples may include the following:

- **Navigating Legal Issues.** Some youth might face legal barriers due to their gender identity, such as name and gender marker changes on identification documents. Reentry programs can help youth by connecting them with legal aid specializing in LGBTQ+ support.
- **Health Care Access.** Awareness of and access to quality mental, behavioral, and physical health care can be a daunting challenge for any young person during reentry, but particularly for many LGBTQ+ youth. Helping youth find inclusive health care providers and navigate the often complex world of insurance, especially if they need gender-affirming medical care, can be a vital component of reentry programming and support.
- **“Outing” Prevention.** Reentry programs can develop safety plans with youth regarding disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity in situations where disclosing might lead to harm (e.g., with unsupportive families, within potential jobs).

**Important Note:** It is also crucial for reentry programs working with LGBTQ+ youth to understand and mitigate the risks if a youth’s sexual orientation or gender identity becomes known in their home environment or the broader community. Safety planning and support in finding affirming places to live or connect with chosen family become essential parts of a successful reentry plan.

## Resources to Support This Work

[The Pride Justice Resource Center](#), funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, is a national resource center on justice-involved LGBTQ+ youth. The center provides training and technical assistance opportunities for juvenile justice practitioners and stakeholders to enhance their capacity, knowledge, and skills to improve and strengthen overall outcomes for youth who are LGBTQ+ and justice involved, including supporting system change and family engagement and acceptance and identifying gaps in knowledge related to LGBTQ+ and the intersections of multiple identities.

[The Trevor Project](#) offers direct crisis intervention services, mental health resources, and community support specifically for LGBTQ+ youth. Resources cover a range of topics, including sexual orientation, gender identity, mental health, talking about suicide, diversity among LGBTQ+ youth, and more.

[PFLAG](#) is the nation's largest organization dedicated to supporting, educating, and advocating for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them. PFLAG has hundreds of [local chapters all over the country](#) and their [PFLAG Connects: Communities](#) offers a safe, virtual, moderated space where people with shared experiences can connect each month.

[Lambda Legal](#) provides legal resources and advocacy to ensure all LGBTQ+ youth are safe and free from discrimination and harassment, whether in the hallways at school or in out-of-home care settings. Additionally, Lambda Legal assists LGBTQ+ individuals navigate potential discrimination issues after release.

## Endnotes

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Youth Reentry  
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