

Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018 Implementation

Risk-and-Needs Assessments

Overview

Risk-and-needs assessments are tools consisting of a series of items used to collect data on a youth's behaviors and attitudes that are indicative of the youth's risk of recidivism and needs. Generally, an assessment will classify the youth as having a high, moderate, or low risk of recidivism.

Using risk-and-needs assessment tools to determine a youth's risk level and needs provides uniform, clear information for making decisions regarding the level and duration of supervision and services for the youth that are tailored to the youth's risk and needs.

This risk-and-needs information can then be used to generate an individualized case plan tailored to each individual youth, as well as inform the proper use of behavior response system sanctions and incentives to encourage compliance with supervision conditions, both of which are discussed in detail in accompanying documents.

Tennessee Legislation

37-1-164(a) - Requires that a validated risk-and-needs assessment be used in all delinquent cases post-disposition for making programming and treatment decisions and recommendations

37-1-129(a)(1) - Requires that judicial diversion and probation conditions be consistent with a validated risk-and-needs assessment in the case of delinquent offenses

37-1-164(c) - Requires periodic validation of risk-and-needs assessments

37-1-164(d) - Requires that a risk-and-needs assessment be conducted within 7 judicial days of ordering a delinquent child to probation or DCS custody

Available Risk-and-Needs Assessment Resources

Through the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), the JJ-CANS 2.0 is available to Tennessee juvenile courts at **no cost**. Implementing the JJ-CANS 2.0 meets the requirements of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018.

The AOC will provide training and implementation support to any juvenile court interested in implementing the JJ-CANS 2.0. The Vanderbilt Center of Excellence for Children in State Custody has assisted in the development of the JJ-CANS 2.0 by including criminogenic need items and is collecting information to complete a validation study on Tennessee's youth population.

For more information on implementing the JJ-CANS 2.0 in your court, please contact:

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Rationale

In recent years, a growing number of states have begun using validated risk-and-needs assessments to improve youth outcomes and enhance public safety, and Tennessee uses such assessments on its adult prison population.

Programming and treatment are most effective when appropriately **tailored to a youth's assessed risk-level and needs**. Use of objective decision-making tools, like risk-and-needs assessments, allows juvenile justice systems to effectively target programming and treatment toward the highest-risk youth and appropriately match supervision and treatment to a youth's risk level and needs, which results in a lower likelihood of future delinquent or criminal behavior. On the other hand, **failing to appropriately match services with a youth's needs, or not following the recommended dosage prescribed by the risk-and-needs assessment**, is associated with **increased recidivism**.

Additionally, as detailed in an accompanying document, a behavior response system consisting of graduated sanctions and incentives encourages youth compliance with supervision conditions. Research has shown that **utilizing risk-and-needs assessments in determining how to target the use of sanctions**—with higher levels of sanctions targeted to higher-risk offenders—most effectively utilizes limited resources.