

Evidence-Based Policy and Practice: National Trends and Issues in Juvenile Justice

**Presentations to the Colorado
Commission on Criminal and
Juvenile Justice**

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Roger Przybylski
RKC Group
www.rkcgroup.org
rogerkp@comcast.net

What Works

Effective Recidivism Reduction and
Risk-Focused Prevention Programs

A Compendium of Evidence-Based
Options for Preventing New and
Persistent Criminal Behavior

Prepared for the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice

RKC Group
Roger Przybylski
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Evidence-Based

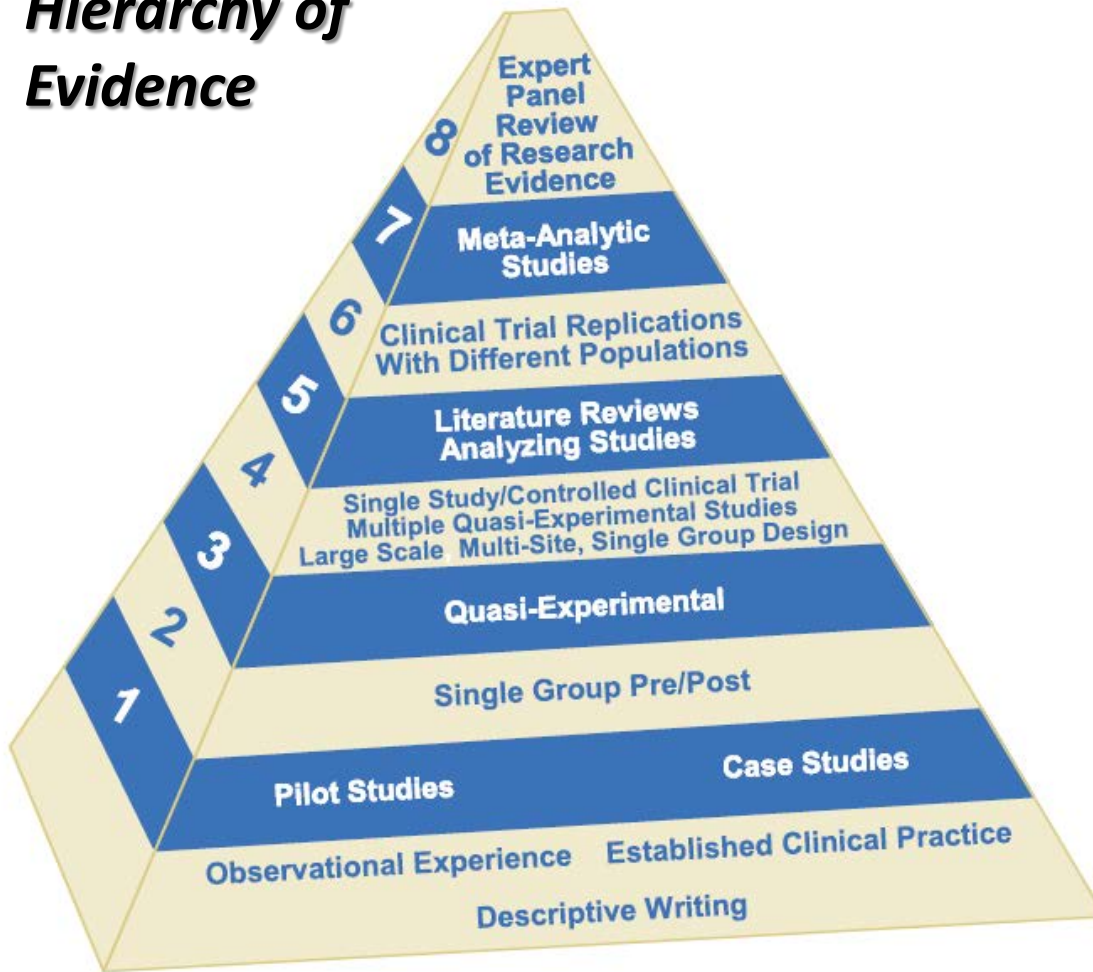
- Using programs and practices that are...
 - Based on sound theory
 - Deemed to be effective based on rigorous scientific evaluation
- Decision-making approach that relies on the best available data-driven evidence
- Important to consider return on taxpayer investment when weighing policy or programming options

Why Being Evidence-Based is Important

- Funding source requirements
- We can no longer afford to do business as we have in the past
 - Must focus on programs/practices that are proven to be effective and cost-beneficial
- Given *proper targeting and implementation*, EBPs are effective at preventing/reducing crime

What Constitutes Credible Evidence

Hierarchy of Evidence



- Some studies are more trustworthy than others
- No single study can provide definitive evidence about effectiveness
- Both the quality and consistency of the evidence must be taken into account

Source: SAMHA Co-Occurring Center for Excellence, Overview Paper No. 6

Approaches for Being Evidence-Based

- Rigorous evaluation of programs/policies in Colorado
- Use brand name programs certified as effective (i.e., MRT®, ART®)
 - Must implement with fidelity to program model
- Use effective generic interventions (i.e., drug court, mentoring)
 - Incorporate key program elements if known
- Follow practice principles/guidelines derived from rigorous research

Becoming More Evidence-Based: Issues to Keep in Mind

- Evidence base has limitations
 - Effective interventions have not been identified for every crime problem confronting our communities
 - Both the quantity and quality of the evidence that is available remains uneven
- Evidence that a particular actor or agency can draw on to address a particular crime problem will vary

Historical Perspective on Juvenile Court

- 1899, creation of first juvenile court
 - Philosophy of parens patriae
- Mid-1960s, due process rights for a juvenile accused of a crime
- 1990s, greater emphasis on confinement and control
- Currently in a transition/reform period
 - Emergence of the evidence-based movement
 - Emergence of brain research

National Academy of Sciences 2013 Report

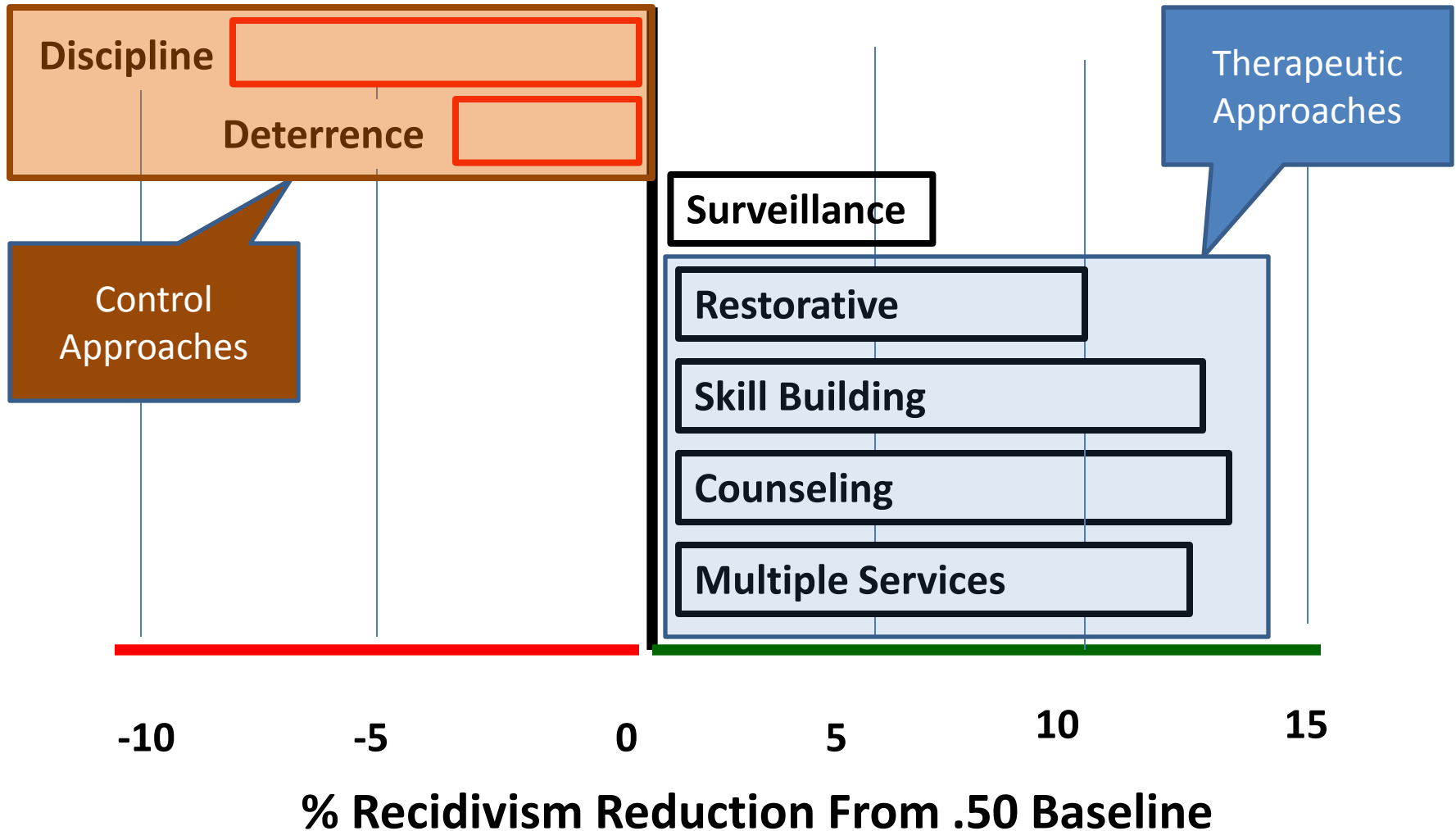
Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach

- Adolescence is a distinct developmental period characterized by risk-taking, short-sightedness, and heightened sensitivity to peers and other social influences
- Parent involvement, pro-social peer groups and activities that contribute to autonomous decision-making are important for healthy, pro-social development
- An overreliance on containment and control in the juvenile justice system can deprive youth of critical developmental opportunities
- Guiding principles for a developmentally informed approach
 - Accountability, fairness, assessment of risk and need, evidence-based interventions

Prevention and Intervention Programs Can and Do Work

- There are effective delinquency prevention programs for every stage of a child's development
 - Nurse visitation
 - Preschool enrichment
 - Parent management training
- Lipsey's analysis of 548 studies of juvenile offender interventions
 - Average reduction in recidivism of 6 percentage points
 - The most effective programs reduced recidivism 24-40 percentage points

Effectiveness of Juvenile Interventions by Program Type



Practice Guidelines for Juvenile Intervention

- Focus resources on high-risk cases
 - Juvenile offenders with low risk for reoffending should be diverted from the juvenile justice system
 - Offenders with moderate or high risk for reoffending should be subject to the minimal level of supervision and control consistent with public safety and be provided with appropriate services
- Use interventions with therapeutic orientation; avoid those with deterrence or discipline philosophy
- Provide adequate amount of service (dose/duration)
- Ensure quality implementation

Effective Interventions for Juvenile Offenders

- Family-based programs that focus on multiple causes of delinquency (i.e., MST, FFT, MDTFC)
- Quality mentoring, after-school and restorative justice programs
- School-based programs that focus on the school environment or self-control and social competency (i.e., Life Skills Training, Olweus Bullying Prevention)
- Truancy reduction programs with individualized service plans that keep youth in the educational mainstream

Ending the School to Prison Pipeline

- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges 2012 Resolution
 - Supports alternatives to zero-tolerance policies in schools
 - Supports keeping children in school rather than relying on policies that lead to suspension and expulsion and ultimately drive children into the juvenile justice system
 - Supports alternatives to arrest and referral to juvenile court for behaviors best handled by schools

The Juvenile Justice System Needs to be Trauma Informed

- Complex trauma is associated with school failure and risk of delinquency
- Trauma assessments can promote positive outcomes and help maximize resources
- A number of EBPs are available for treating youth impacted by trauma

Evidence on Juvenile Transfer to Criminal Court

- Transferred juveniles typically receive longer sentences than those sentenced in the juvenile court for similar crimes
- Research on general deterrent effect is inconclusive, but evidence suggests juveniles are unaware of transfer and do not consider potential long-term consequences of their actions
- Transfer to criminal court does not reduce recidivism, it substantially increases recidivism
 - Decreased focus on rehabilitation and family support
 - Criminogenic effects of being incarcerated with adults
 - Labeling effects

Criminal Records and Collateral Consequences

- Half of black males, 40% of white males are arrested by age 23
- Having a criminal record has many negative collateral consequences
 - Reduces both employment and earnings
- Yet young people who are arrested and remain crime-free for a period of time are no more likely to commit crimes than people of a similar age who have never been arrested
 - Arrest at age 16; 8.5 years later

Key Findings From Neuroscience

- Brain maturation continues until a much later age than previously believed
- Different brain systems mature at different points in time and at different rates
 - Cognitive abilities improve during pre- and early adolescence
 - Arousal of limbic system (where emotions are processed; rewards experienced) in early adolescence
 - Pre-frontal cortex (cognitive control center) matures more gradually; still maturing well into 20s
- Imbalance between systems creates unique characteristics of adolescence

Key Findings From Neuroscience

Characteristics of Adolescence

- Heightened vulnerability to sensation seeking/risk-taking
- Heightened sensitivity to/preference for immediate rewards
- Less able than adults to:
 - Control impulses
 - Consider rewards and risks simultaneously
 - Plan ahead and consider future consequences
- Heightened susceptibility to peer influences
 - Peer presence accentuates imbalance between brain systems

Neuroscience, Adolescent Development and Public Policy

- Developmental differences between adolescents and adults are extensive and profound
- Juveniles have less capacity than adults to regulate emotions, control behavior, plan ahead, and weigh the consequences of actions
- Policy implications
 - Developmental differences have been recognized in recent Supreme Court decisions
 - Need for a more developmentally informed approach in juvenile justice