



National Juvenile Justice Network

TALKING POINTS: TRYING KIDS AS ADULTS

According to recent research by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, presented at a summit meeting in September 2006, Network researchers find trying kids as adults is counterproductive:

- Youth tried as adults are more likely to be rearrested and more likely to commit more serious new offenses than their matched counterparts retained in juvenile court;
- Longer sentences do not reduce the risk for reoffending in the juvenile or the adult court;
- A study comparing the experiences of youth detained in juvenile and adult correctional facilities found that youth in adult corrections are less likely to be treated fairly, receive counseling and therapeutic services, and educational and job training;
- Youth in adult correctional facilities felt a greater sense of danger and reported a higher incidence of mental health problems and symptoms similar to soldiers and survivors of war and disaster, such as post-traumatic stress disorder compared to youth in juvenile facilities;
- The adult criminal court exposes youth to harsher incarceration settings and less effective probation supervision in the criminal justice system;
- Prosecution in an adult court communicates to the adolescent that he or she is unsalvageable, and hence repeat offenses become a self-fulfilling prophecy;
- Teens in adult corrections have limited exposure during this critical developmental stage to a broader set of social norms and a more diverse behavioral toolkit from the wider social networks of family, school or work, and community.
- Youth tried as adults will most likely receive an adult record; may never have access to student financial aid; and in many states, will lose their voting rights.

It's time to update the laws to reflect this research.

We recommend that state legislatures enact protections locally to restrict the circumstances under which children can be prosecuted as adults.

At minimum, state statutes should expressly allow the placement of children awaiting trial in juvenile facilities as an alternative to adult jail.

Children should be held accountable for their behavior, but the juvenile justice system can do a more effective job.

Jails are schools for crime, and that's not the education we want for children.

Prepared by the Campaign 4 Youth Justice
1012 14th Street NW Suite 610, Washington, DC 20005 • (202) 558-3580
www.campaign4youthjustice.org