### Scientific Findings on Adolescence

#### Developmental Concerns
- Behavioral immaturity mirrors brain anatomical immaturity
- Frontal lobe – responsible for impulse control, judgment, decision-making – develops slowly until early 20s
- Rely on amygdala, primitive emotion center of brain whereas adults process similar information through frontal cortex
- Prone to risk-taking; it is statistically abnormal to refrain from risk-taking in adolescence
- More susceptible to stress, which further distorts already poor cost-benefit analysis
- Most adolescent delinquent behavior occurs on a social stage where immediate influence of peers is the real motive
- More vulnerable to peer influence. Impact of approval makes already risk-prone impulsive teen even more so
- Trauma makes youth hypervigilant in response to threat
- Character is not fully formed, and adolescents’ signature qualities – including their susceptibility to peer influence and weaknesses in self-regulation – reflect their incomplete identity
- Generally adolescents cannot be expected to operate with maturity, judgment, risk aversion, or impulse control of an adult
- Teen who has suffered brain trauma, family trauma, abuse, or violence cannot operate at standard levels for adolescents
- The vast majority of adolescents who engage in delinquent behavior distasteful from crime as they mature
- Even the highest risk youth can succeed with appropriate opportunities
- Youth crime participation may be necessary to avoid threat
- Adolescents need clear information to assist counsel and make important legal decisions

#### Understanding the Offense Developmentally
- Unable to anticipate
- Unable to see choices
- Minimizes risk
- Trauma makes youth
- Fragile moral reasoning
- Incomplete identity

#### Supports and Services that Promote Success
- Sensitivity to being picked on; vulnerable to bullying
- Does not ask for adult help
- Needs supervision
- Needs acceptance
- Needs appropriate support

#### Incarceration Can Exacerbate Problems and Inhibit Success
- Learning positive ways to deal with unfairness
- Practicing good moral reasoning under stress
- Developing job skills; support on the job for good decisions

#### Defense Considerations for Counseling Adolescent Clients
- Sees offense as unintended, accidental – insists on innocence
- No future-time perspective to understand years of probation or incarceration
- Doesn’t see future risk: “I’m sure I’ll never get arrested/be detained again”
- Just wants to go home; or says, “I’ll just do the time and get it over with.”
- Frightened: options are scary, shuts down so doesn’t have to think about them.
- Feels dumb; hides ignorance; embarrassed to ask for clarification
- Dependent — wants parent/defender to tell what to do
- Wants to be liked; wants to give “right” answer even if not true or thought out
- Embarrassed; can’t explain why acted that way
- Big identity issue: can’t face being type of person who did offense, especially if in media
- Wants more attention from defender; lonely; hard not to be able to talk to anyone
- Preoccupied by what friends/family think; distracted by friend/family problems
- Stuck on police/detention unfairness; can’t focus on legal issues
- Shocked by what happened and consequences; hard to conceptualize a person was harmed as a result of what they did
- Heartbroken by friend’s betrayal; can’t sniff; maybe never able to tell everything
- Feels court process is unfair, so has less faith in defender

### Immaturity

#### Immature Thinking
- Did not plan; “it happened.” Impulsive
- Had weapon with no plan to use
- Saw no danger in street activities, getting high
- “It’s just talk.” Setting/social media/harmless

#### Immature Identity
- Being successful at something and opportunities to show it
- Guided process for defining self; becoming a leader
- Instruction in how to think without being influenced
- Improved social skills to be accepted by positive peers
- Preparation for work, given talents and challenges
- Developing job skills; support on the job for good decisions

#### Moral Development
- May have been righting a wrong
- Did not realize someone might get hurt
- Under stress, can’t use usual moral beliefs
- Cant walk away, especially when high, even though knows right from wrong
- Learning to soothe self when agitated without substances
- Learning to anticipate loss of control and how to manage
- Practice comprehending instructions
- Improve organization; learn how to prioritize
- Learn how to concentrate and manage distraction

### Concerns
- Had weapon with no plan to use
- Controlling and reacts to change; unstable
- Poor planner; organizing difficulties
- “Things happened too fast”
- Can’t tolerate not being in control; uncertainty causes
- Preoccupied by what friends/family think; distracted by friend/family problems
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### Disabilities
- Facilities often ill-equipped to:
  - Implement IEPs or effective services to help youth learn to compensate for their disabilities
  - Provide instruction to ensure youth experience school success and increase their academic skills
  - Provide necessary speech/language and executive function interventions
  - Provide adequate or individualized adaptive or ameliorative therapies
  - Provide preparation for meaningful reentry jobs for youth with disabilities
  - Connect youth with appropriate special education services on reentry

### Trauma (causes delayed development)
- If victim aggressive, responds as if a repeat of past maltreatment (reperpetual reactions)
- Controlling and reacts to change; can’t soothe self
- Feels worthless; self-destructive
- Lowered inhibitions, poor judgment if high during offense
- Trauma treatment to:
  - Help in writing complete trauma history
  - See connections between triggers, feelings, and actions and learn to respond differently
  - Separate past maltreatment from present provocations
  - Learning not to blame self, stop self-destructive acts
  - Not assume others are hostile; not act like a victim
  - Learning to anticipate loss of control and how to manage
  - Learning to soothe self when agitated without substances
  - Positive view of self in future
  - Incorporate families into ongoing therapy; help with family where there is conflict or substance abuse
  - Yorkshire Hall: what happens to the defendant
  - Youth who are reactive to perceived threat or controlling because of anxiety, both due to past trauma, receive more discipline, are more often physically restrained, have more suicidal behavior and spend more time in isolation; all of these interfere with positive development and may lengthen incarceration
  - Skilled trauma treatment, involvement of family in the youth’s trauma recovery and combined trauma substance abuse treatment are seldom provided

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