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# Promoting a Restraint - Free Environment

Strengthening the Hands-off  
Approach Through Training

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Florida Department  
of Juvenile Justice

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Office of Staff Development & Training

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Charlie Crist, Governor  
Frank Peterman, Jr., Secretary  
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## Mission

To increase public safety by reducing juvenile delinquency through effective prevention, intervention and treatment services that strengthen families and turn around the lives of troubled youth.

This booklet was developed by Michael McCaffrey, Director of the Office of Staff Development and Training. The purpose of this white paper is to discuss the importance of promoting a restraint-free environment throughout the continuum of juvenile justice services, as well as to describe the training provided to achieve that goal. While the use of mechanical restraints in the courtroom setting has recently emerged as a social and judicial issue within the domain of the State Courts System, it does not fall within the purview of DJJ agency personnel training. As such, it will not be addressed in this paper. Current Department endeavors to continue the documented reductions in incidents related to physical interventions are discussed, as well as future directions for further improving the system.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Overview</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Basic Certification Training</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Protective Action Response Training</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Current Focus</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Future Directions</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>12</b>

## Overview

Throughout the country the reduction of the use of physical restraints in juvenile justice facilities is being emphasized, and this is especially true in Florida. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the importance the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) places on the reduction of physical restraints in our facilities and programs. This emphasis is based upon the risk of serious injury to the youth or staff; possible emotional harm or trauma; and the disruption of the relationships between the youth, family members, peers, and staff. Given these risks, the Department promotes environments in our facilities and programs that enhance children's quality of life, and ensure the safety of the youth and staff.

While the Department, along with our private providers, developed Protective Action Response (PAR) - a verbal and physical intervention system designed to prevent conflicts - we also promote the restraint-free approach in certification training, specialized training, and practice and procedures.

Training is essential for all DJJ staff who have daily interactions with youth within the Department of Juvenile Justice. The Office of Staff Development & Training has developed curricula designed to promote a thorough understanding of today's youth and to instill a "hands-off" approach.



## Basic Certification Training

The Basic Certification curriculum emphasizes the importance of verbal communication, the role of non-verbal communication and positive behavioral change. This is seen in nearly every aspect of the curriculum. All too often people think of crisis intervention and only focus on the physical aspects. The goal of the Office of Staff Development & Training is to infuse the total curriculum with strategies for dealing with youth in our care, ensuring recognition and prevention of conflicts is the norm.

A thorough examination of course objectives illustrates the emphasis on communication at all levels. The **Cultural Diversity** module has objectives dealing with how stereotyping affects communication in culturally diverse situations and identifying the guidelines for bridging barriers of communication between different cultures. Techniques for building rapport and trust between officers and youth who are of different cultures are explored. Staff learn about cultural differences and how they may affect communication.

In **Adolescent Behavior**, staff learn how youth are not adults, and why they can be expected to behave differently, sometimes in unexpected ways. They learn that human behavior, including adolescent behavior, is all about fulfilling needs, and the importance of understanding developmental factors when working with adolescents. This module demonstrates how staff

should respond to uncooperative youth behaviors, what responses are appropriate and what stress factors might impact an adolescent's behavior.

This module goes further to examine gender differences in adolescent behavior and how staff can appropriately respond to these differences. In this module staff are taught the differences in communication styles between males and females and the differences between adolescent and adult thought and communication styles.

The **Mental Health & Substance Abuse** module teaches the officer the importance of recognizing trauma and how utilizing trauma informed practices could assist them in their job performance. Trauma is defined as “The personal experience of interpersonal violence including sexual abuse, physical abuse, severe neglect, loss and/or violence, terrorism and disaster” (National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, 2004).

Severe, chronic trauma during childhood and adolescence often leads to emotional, cognitive, and behavioral problems that may adversely affect a child's development. Therefore, some inappropriate behaviors may be adaptive responses to earlier experiences or trauma they have faced. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice has recognized the importance of training staff and others to assist these youth. For these reasons, trainees learn what might agitate a traumatized youth and early physical warning signs that a youth might be on the verge of losing control. They also work on behaviors staff should engage in to demonstrate competence in trauma informed practice.

Trauma informed practice is an emerging area of research and interest at the state and national levels focused on improving the safety and security for staff and youth, as well as a method of reducing violence within the programs



and among the youth. Trauma informed care is defined as (Jennings, 2004), “Practices that are directed by a thorough understanding of the profound neurological, biological, psychological, and social effects of trauma and violence on the individual.” It is of particular interest as it applies to training among departmental staff in understanding the impact that trauma histories have on the youth in our care and custody.

The **Mental Health & Substance Abuse** module also discusses appropriate interventions for youth with mental health issues, substance abuse issues, and youth who may have been victims of abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual). There are objectives dealing with juvenile sex offenders and the mentally challenged youth. Finally, the module deals with staff intervention to suicide attempts and stresses how to respond to suicidal youth using reflective listening skills and open communication.

In the **Communication** module the beginning lessons deal with the verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication. Lesson one defines verbal and non-verbal communication, the importance of active listening, and of sending and receiving the correct message. It also examines the role of courtesy and why it is an essential element in juvenile justice work.

Lesson two describes the behaviors necessary for building appropriate relationships with youth and co-workers. It goes into detail as to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors or the “Do’s and Don’ts” of relationship building between

officers and youth. This lesson also looks at communication styles and which may be most appropriate for certain youth or situations. The effective use of “I” messages and the ineffectiveness of “You” messages is discussed.

The third lesson deals with communication, respect, and trust among co-workers. Being courteous, what information should be shared, can be shared, and the advantages of working as a team are all topics for discussion. This lesson also deals with what an officer should do when confronted with inappropriate behavior of a fellow officer.

The **Professional Ethics** module includes objectives dealing with Standards of Conduct violations in the area of communication between staff and youth, and in the areas of teasing, gestures, and general language that may be unacceptable. The focus of the module is on accountability and acceptable parameters of behavior that govern interaction between staff and the youth in our care.

The module on **Stress Management** helps staff understand how stress affects them and how it impacts the youth in our care. If staff are able to mitigate stress or deal with it effectively they are better able to cope with difficult situations involving the youth. Therefore, they learn how to identify causes of stress, long-term stress reduction techniques, and workplace organization and time management skills to reduce stress.

The preceding is far from an exhaustive list of what is covered during certification training, but is more of an overview of the Department’s overriding philosophy of how to build appropriate relationships that both prevent conflicts and reduce the need for physical restraints.

## Protective Action Response (PAR) Training

PAR was created as a verbal and physical intervention system designed to reduce conflicts, allowing staff to intervene in a safe and controlled manner if necessary. In January 1999, a workgroup was established to review and revise the Use of Force curriculum. The workgroup consisted of 24 individuals representing the Department and private providers. The efforts of this initial workgroup resulted in several collaborative meetings, held for the purpose of demonstrating and discussing the pros and cons of physical techniques and other related topics.

The result of these meetings was the PAR training curriculum. The workgroup enhanced the verbal and physical intervention portions of the training, pulling the content and physical techniques from various curricula, programs developed for use with youth, and from law enforcement training.

PAR was designed to teach staff how to recognize and prevent potential conflicts to help maintain safety and order in our facilities and programs. When intervention is necessary, verbal is always the first option, and all attempts to de-escalate a situation verbally must be exhausted before physical intervention is considered. Then, if necessary, staff are authorized to physically intervene based upon the youth’s level of resistance using the minimum amount of force necessary to safeguard the youth and staff. A critical component of PAR is the use of the recovery discussion following an incident. This discussion helps the youth work through some of the associated feelings and figure out ways to prevent the incident from recurring.

In October 2006, PAR instructors around the state were surveyed as to their opinion of the effectiveness of PAR and how it might be improved. It was determined through field interviews and observations, as well as an analysis of incident reports that some direct care staff relied initially on physical intervention rather

than utilizing verbal de-escalation techniques. The survey indicated that the instructors believed training time should be lengthened and that more emphasis should be placed on the verbal de-escalation skills.

In 2007, approximately 40 Master PAR instructors were brought together three times to evaluate and comment on the physical and verbal de-escalation components of the curriculum. The entire curriculum was put up for review and the determination was that a new single underlying philosophy should be implemented. A philosophy that the new staff member could readily understand and that could be used as a guiding set of principles for the entire curriculum was the goal. This philosophy, which will be outlined below, provides a convenient framework for evaluating the attitudes and motivation of adolescents in all areas of the curriculum, and furthers the restraint free approach stressed by the Department.

PAR training starts with an emphasis on the importance of understanding adolescent behavior. Staff learn the relationship between unmet needs and behavior, the cognitive, social, and emotional development process in adolescents, and how to identify and manage stress in both youth and themselves. They also learn how stress and trauma affect behavior.

Verbal intervention or verbal de-escalation is the preferred and most common method in preventing a conflict or safely de-escalating a situation. Therefore, the next module presents staff with critical information on how and when to conduct verbal intervention. Integral to the use of verbal intervention, and discussed in this module, is proper use of non-verbal communication, as well. Staff learn different verbal intervention techniques such as using “I” messages and reflective listening. They also learn how body language affects communication, and the effective use of non-verbal



communication.

One of the components of the PAR curriculum is the STaR (See, Think, and Respond) Decision Tree, which provides 14 decision points. In all

14, verbal intervention techniques are employed and there is but a single point where physical intervention may be employed in conjunction with continued verbal intervention. Unless there is imminent danger of great bodily harm, physical intervention is not the first option for a PAR-trained staff member. Additionally, the increased emphasis on stress reduction for the staff member and the youth also provides an increased opportunity for a conflict to be resolved without physical intervention. Another section in this module teaches the trainees factors regarding the youth, environment, and self (the YES model) that must be considered to determine the stability and potential danger of a situation. Trainees also learn the conditions that must be present for physical intervention, and the applicable statute and administrative rules.

As mentioned earlier, the Recovery Discussion is a critical component of PAR. Here, staff learn how to conduct a Recovery Discussion with a youth after an incident has occurred. During this discussion, the staff and youth discuss alternative behaviors and how to prevent a recurrence of an incident. This also helps to improve youth-staff relationships.

Finally, the staff are trained on the authorized physical intervention techniques. During this training, they learn not only how to perform a technique, but also why and when they would need to perform it. Staff learn how to use appropriate verbal de-escalation before, during, and after a physical intervention, and how to communicate with co-workers during an intervention. They also learn during different scenarios how to recognize and

prevent potential conflicts, and how to intervene using the minimum amount of force necessary.

Again, this is not an comprehensive list of what is covered in PAR training, but is an overview to demonstrate the Department's efforts to promote a restraint free environment.

## Current Focus

To further emphasize this restraint free approach, the Department recently amended the administrative rule (63H-1, F.A.C.) governing the use of PAR. The changes included limiting the use of physical intervention as a response to passive resistance. In the past, when a youth refused to move after being asked, the youth was seen as displaying enough resistance for staff to use physical intervention to physically move the youth. With the recent amendment, staff will need to show that the youth's resistance was a clear and identifiable risk to safety or security, during which time the staff must have also used and exhausted all verbal interventions.

The Department is also conducting specialized trainings on motivational interviewing, trauma informed practices, and gender specific programming. While staff are taught the foundations of these topics in their certification training and PAR training, it is important to make sure that they further understand these concepts and how to apply them in their everyday interactions with the youth in our care. The Department has also begun to change the way staff are trained on behavior management systems. This includes not only understanding the system, but also the need for it, and how to use it properly.

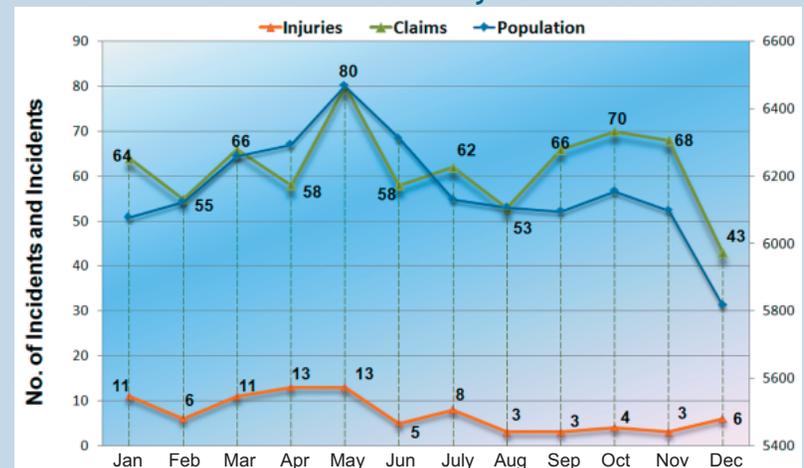
We know the restraint free approach sounds good, and anecdotally we hear about the changes that are occurring. More importantly, the real proof can be seen in the

reduction in the number of worker's compensation claims, and the number of youth injuries (injuries occurring during a physical intervention, where youth were taken off-site for medical attention) we have seen in the past couple of years. Since fiscal year 2001-2002, when PAR was first implemented, through fiscal year 2007-2008, the Department's Reports of First Injury (approximately 55% of these reports involve injuries occurring during a physical restraint) have dropped 22% (from 903 in FY01-02 to 704 in FY07-08).

The Department has recently changed the way youth injuries are reported, so to truly compare apples to apples only the last 1 1/2 years can be compared.

During fiscal year 2007-2008, 96 youth were taken off-site for medical attention, for injuries occurring during a physical intervention. This is a rate of approximately 1.6 youth per 1000 youth served. The first half of fiscal year 2008-2009, 27 youth were taken off-site for medical attention. If this trend continues, the rate will be less than 1 youth per 1000.

### Incidents and Claims January - December 2008



The red line indicates number of youth taken off-site for medical attention related to a PAR physical intervention. The green line represents the number of first reports of injury to staff related to a physical intervention by month. Finally, the blue line indicates the average monthly population in our residential and detention facilities. It should be noted that there appears to be a strong correlation between the number of youth in custody, and the number of injuries sustained by staff.

## Future Directions

While we have seen how well this approach can work, we are not yet satisfied. Worker's compensation claims and injuries to youth have been reduced, but we can still decrease the number of times we use physical intervention, which will lower those numbers even further. The Department must continue to promote a restraint free approach in all that we do. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, but each of these must have the commitment of everyone involved.

First, management and leadership within our programs and facilities must be responsible for the attitudes and culture that exists within their facilities. Recruitment plays a role here. Managers must take an active role in selecting the best suited and most appropriate candidate for the job of direct care staff. Managers must also clearly explain what will and will not be tolerated. Simply because an employee was authorized to use physical intervention, does not mean that it was the best way to handle the situation. This is where supervisors and administrators must step in and conduct reviews to make sure that all alternatives are explained and understood. These reviews will help ensure that when physical intervention is used, it is used properly, and ends as quickly as possible.

The lines of communication must be kept open. As mentioned in the Communication module, effective communication between managers and staff, among staff working on different shifts, and between youth and staff is key. The more informed we are about the children in our care, the better served they will be. Training is vital here, and the Office of Staff Development and Training will continue to work with all program areas to ensure that we are providing the best, most relevant training possible. An example of this would be the inclusion of trauma informed

practices and gender specific programming at the academy, as well as specialized training in these topics.

Another critical component, as mentioned before is the Recovery Discussion in PAR. Again, supervisors must ensure that these discussions take place, and even more so, that they have a positive impact. These discussions allow the youth and staff the opportunity to process the incident and explore options pertaining to what they could have done differently to possibly avoid future incidents. Preventing or avoiding a conflict is always easier than de-escalating one.

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice has made progress in reducing the number of injuries to staff and youth, and stands committed to continuing this trend. While a restraint free environment may be an unattainable ideal, it is a goal, and without that goal we cannot put measures in place to try to reach it. Juvenile justice agencies deal with unpredictable and sometimes volatile youth, and in Florida we believe the best way to handle this is through a thorough understanding of why children behave the way they do, and to use that understanding to build appropriate relationships with them. Promoting a restraint free approach will have far more impact on not only the youth we serve but also with our employees, our private providers, and all of the citizens of Florida.

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