

Youth justice: developing knowledge and practice

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



During this essay I am to discuss the developing knowledge and practice to do youth Justice. I will firstly look at the Principles of effective practice and then aim to explain how these principles are linked to my own work and experience. I will go on to discuss the use of principles of effective practice. I will then conclude with the outcome of my findings. The method of evidence based practice means forming and applying interventions based on previous research conducted whilst monitoring and evaluating the outcomes. As a Youth justice practitioner I am part of this ongoing process, my work is evidence based and I am required to record all outcomes. These outcomes feed into the holistic research and has been used to direct the Youth Justice Board on the principles of effective practice. Following this process as best-practice ensures that interventions are always based on practical evidence and practitioners alike are working towards ever-improving interventions. ' A number of principles have been distilled from effective practice research, summarizing the concepts involved' The principles of effective practice: 1. Risk, Risk classification is about the balance between the risk of re-offending and the intensity of the proposed intervention. 2. Criminogenic needs, Criminogenic needs relate to why a young person has committed an offence 3. Responsively, is all about you as a practitioner responding appropriately to the specific needs and circumstances of a young person 4. Community base, Research shows that interventions are most effective when they take place in an environment that is meaningful in terms of a young person's individual 'life context' or 'community base'. This is because the problems faced in that environment are the most pressing challenges a young person faces. 5. Programme integrity, As with intervention modality, 'program integrity' has

two themes. Firstly, it is about everyone understanding and being faithful to the aims and objectives of intervention programs 6. Dosage , Programs must be of sufficient intensity and duration to achieve their aims. As a Youth Justice officer I work with young people aged mainly between 10 and 18 years old, who are at various stages within the criminal justice system. Part of my role is to identify the needs of young offenders and investigate the specific problems that make them offend, in order to try and prevent them from re-offending. I am required to continuously reflect on my practice and evidence base my work. I work directly with young people some of which have very complex issues, needs and requirements. All young people require an Initial assessment it is essential for me as the youth justice officer to complete this holistic assessment and gather as much evidence and information regarding the young person as possible. Additional information may be requested from family, carer, CHAMS, children services, education, police and any relevant previous information from other services who have had contact with the young person and or family. This gives me a wider understanding of the young person and provides further insight to the Criminogenic factors surrounding the young person and family. This informs my assessment of Risk and vulnerability. An assessment is on-going and constantly changing as you work with a young person. After completion of the assessment I am equipped to devise an intervention plan best suited and tailored to the young person's needs, with the aim of reducing the likelihood of further offending. I do find that circumstances can change and new plans, tasks and goals may need to be added or changed to reflect the young person's new circumstances. The Youth Justice Board introduced the scald

approach in 2009, with the view that creating a plan best suitable to the young person's needs, offers the opportunity to reduce factors that are contributing to offending behavior, as well as serve as a consequence for their offending behavior. With regards to applying the 7 principles of effective practice, it seems simple, upon reflecting on my own experience these principles are the methods that I use in my practice daily. They have become second nature and almost a standardized way of working for all practitioners. However applying each principle to practice can sometimes be problematic. For example 'Criminogenic needs' are the factors that I tend to focus on whilst trying to plan a suitable intervention for a young person. Sometimes it is easy to identify the criminogenic factors that have influenced the young person's offending behavior. For example if the young person has a substance misuse issue, that such, as an addiction to crack cocaine and there is evidence of a re-occurring pattern of offending that is triggered due to the want or need to purchase the drug. Incorporating a substance misuse intervention would deem most beneficial and would be placed at the priority of any intervention plan. Working on the young person's substance misuse will aim to reduce the likelihood of further offending as well as ensure the welfare needs of the young person are met. However if this intervention is not statutory or compulsory, for example the young person in question has been placed on a referral order where engaging with substance misuse team is voluntary, or the substance misuse concerns are not identified until later on in the community order. In this situation it is unlikely to address the criminogenic factors that are of most concern. Although attempts are evidenced the expected positive outcomes are almost nonexistent. On the

contrary young people with an array of criminogenic factors such as substance misuse, education and accommodation happening at the same time automatically places them at high risk of re-offending. However as the case manager it is my responsibility to prioritize the most concerning issue and tackle this first. Nevertheless it is inevitable that other factors that may be just as important fail to be addressed. An Intervention can sometimes become unrealistic even when other agencies become involved. When working with partnership agencies that may limited resources available, breakdown in communication, between professionals the young person's needs are not always met. 'The establishment of multi-agency youth offending teams recognizes that the issues confronting young people, and practitioners who work with them, are complex and varied. Under one umbrella Youth Offending Teams bring together the conventional agencies of criminal justice. The police, prison and probation service, with those of the welfare, education and health services. YOTS straddle a difficult interface between systems of punishment and justice and those of social welfare. It makes working co-operatively towards common aims challenging because the tensions between the various instructions are substantial and deep rooted. ' p45. Some of the Principals of effective practice are also contradictory when applying each principle when directly working with young people. I have found that the ' Dosage' principle sometime affects the outcomes of the interventions. So often I have worked with young people past and present and programs were too short, or they lacked the intensity needed to make a difference. ' In this way, dosage can be seen as a counterpoint to the way in which another principle, that of 'minimum

intervention', was previously applied to youth justice and probation' There is an on-going interest in the Principles of effective practice and what really works the ' what works' concept plays an integral role. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) have identified effective practice as a key element in developing and improving youth justice services. ' The Youth Justice board is committed to identifying and promoting effective practice across the whole of the youth justice system to ensure that work with young people is as effective as possible and based on research evidence and promising practice'. However without clear criteria to shape and judge the impact of particular practices the question raised is how can replicable and justifiable programmes be identified? In conclusion, effective practice has been based on completing extensive research on evidence based practices for the young people that come through the youth offending system. This is done by analysing previous and current data from the Youth offending service. The YJB have created a common platform for best practice across England and Wales. However In my opinion the model of practice used ' principles of effective practice' sounds good in theory however applying each principle to practical work, when working directly with young people is somewhat challenging and restricting. Therefore the young people do not always benefit from the best possible outcome or meet the planned expected outcomes. While meeting the welfare needs of the young person is important in social work the main aim of all intervention in youth justice as laid down in the (Crime and disorder act 1998) is to prevent re-offending. In my opinion interventions that have shown to increase perception of self or others or victim awareness however failed to reduce offending behavior

should be seen as ineffective. Reference (Exploring the youth justice system: An introduction, labspace. open. ac. uk/mod/resource/review) (Effective practice in youth justice, Block 2, developing knowledge and practice to do youth justice) (Effective practice in youth justice by Martin Stephanson, Sally Brown and Henri Giller)