

CHAPTER 4: PREVENTION

Evaluating a youth's needs	4.2
Finding resources	4.2
Endnotes	4.4


PREVENTION

Evaluating a youth's needs

When a youth is having troubles, it is important to evaluate his needs. Even when risk factors are present, there are many steps that parents can take to help prevent their children from becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. When discussing these steps, it is helpful to evaluate a youth's needs in the following five areas:


- Educational (including special education) and economic opportunities;
- Safe places to live and play;
- Good mental and physical health care;
- Relationships with nurturing adults and peers;
- Opportunities for civic and/or spiritual engagement.¹

For example, if a youth is acting out in or not attending school, there is usually a reason. It is important to ask the youth to explain what is wrong. Once the problem is identified, the family can ask the school staff to help identify the need and provide appropriate services to address it. If your child receives special education services, see if the school is providing all the services listed on his IEP. If your child is not receiving special education services, consider whether he should be evaluated for special education eligibility.

 **Tip for families:** Rather than blame your child for his troubles, try to identify his needs, think about whether they are being met, and seek help.

Finding resources

Once a youth's unmet needs have been identified, one can seek resources to address them. The Resource Guide at the end of this book provides, among other information, selected resources in each of the above five areas of need. Exploring many of these resources requires a computer with internet access. In many cases, the internet address listed will provide links to a number of agencies and programs. The Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee does not endorse the agencies and programs listed on the cited web pages. Be sure to research agencies and programs thoroughly before accepting services. Finally, this list is not complete; the fact that a program is not listed below does not mean it is not a good program.

 **Tip for families:** Be proactive. You may be able to prevent your child from becoming involved with the juvenile justice system later on if you help your child to recognize and address behavior problems now.

Endnotes

- 1 These competencies are articulated in the Youth Development Approach taught by the Best Initiative at the Medical Foundation of Boston. For more information on the Youth Development Approach, see http://www.youthworkcentral.org/youth_development.html.