



TEEN BRAIN: PREPARING YOUR OFFICERS TO ENGAGE WITH YOUTH

Introduction

The Police Foundation, with funding from The California Endowment, has partnered with the California Police Chiefs Association and the California State Sheriffs' Association to provide information for Law Enforcement Executives focused on youth, schools, and police practices.

As police and sheriffs continue to reflect upon their roles in youth, school, and police partnerships, one critical issue to consider is how to best respond to youth. Looking at the principles of community policing, law enforcement leaders recognize that engaging youth is a key function of community policing, one which might require a tailored approach. Researchers have identified that teen brains differ from those of adults. Understanding these differences can help police engage more effectively with youth in schools and in neighborhoods. Community policing broadens the officer's role and provides them the opportunity to make a greater impact in the lives of juveniles, which also promises to make communities safer. Lieber, Nalla, and Farnsworth (1998) suggest that community policing practices and problem-oriented policing can have a positive influence on perceptions of police by juveniles.

How are "teen brains" different than adult brains?

Science has confirmed that teenage brains are different from the brains of adults. During puberty, parents often notice unpredictable moods and behaviors, which many blame on the hormones flooding their bodies. Scientists have started to discover explanations for this erratic behavior, linking it to the structure of the brain during adolescence. Neuroscientists have been extensively studying the structure and function of the brain from childhood to adulthood. Their discoveries have shed light on how and when the brain grows. At one point, scientists believed that the brain was fully formed and functional by the age of five or six, and that most of the brain's structural components have been formed by that age. However, since then, researchers have discovered that changes in the structure of the brain continue until the later stages of child development (Giedd et al., 1996, 1999a, 1999b). In many ways, the brain does not look like that of an adult until one's early twenties.

How have doctors and researchers been able to identify the differences in teen brains?

New and existing technologies have enabled scientists to track the growth of the brain and to investigate the connections between brain function, development, and behavior. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) has contributed to advancements in observing brain development and function without requiring harmful dyes or radiation, making the use of MRIs to study children virtually harmless. Dr. Jay Giedd conducted a study in which he examined the brains of 145 healthy children at two-year intervals from early childhood through age 20 using MRI scanning. The scans revealed late changes in the volume of gray matter, which forms the thin, folding, outer layer (or cortex) of the brain. The cortex is responsible for thought and memory. Over the course of childhood, the volume of gray matter in the cortex increases and then decreases. This decrease in volume is a normal and necessary part of maturation. The scans also suggest that different parts of the cortex mature at different rates. Areas involved in more basic functions mature first, such as in the processing of information from the senses and in controlling movement.

Interestingly, the parts of the brain responsible for impulse control, problem solving, and decision-making are among the last to mature (Giedd et al., 1999). The teen brain impacts the way youth engage with others, and especially with authority figures, such as police. Youth are more demonstrative, self-centered, and impulsive. They engage in risky or dangerous behavior, and are resistant to authority. This oftentimes leads to negative encounters with police that involve conflict and confrontational behavior, thus resulting in negative outcomes. When youth perceive the police as violent and unfair, they are unsure how to react and figure the best defense is to be on offense. Officers better understanding teens might help mitigate intense situations more effectively.

Why is it important for police to understand the unique characteristics of teen brains when responding to or engaging with youth?

Conversations about how law enforcement can best engage youth, both in schools and in communities, continue to evolve. In many instances, these relationships have been portrayed as adversarial, and interactions between the two described as volatile and cumbersome by youth. However, if police and sheriffs take into account child development and teen brain theories, and consider both in training and policies related to teens, local law enforcement can better respond to youth. The first contact that a juvenile has with the justice system begins with a police officer, and the nature of this interaction will likely shape and influence their behavior and expectations in future interactions.

Nationally, police and sheriffs are working to foster and enhance community partnerships that increase trust and respect between youth and police. Overall, enhancing law enforcement's approach to youth in conflict situations will increase community-youth partnerships. An example of a program that works to improve police relationships with youth is the California Police Activities League (PAL) 501(c)(3), a nonprofit organization founded in 1971 by a group of police officers. Their mission is to unify law enforcement and communities by providing youth programs that improve discipline, enable positive self-image, and build mutual trust and respect between officers and juveniles. In 1991, California PAL expanded its mission to engage youth by holding its first annual basketball tournament. Building from that successful event, California PAL now sponsors many different types of boys and girls' youth sporting events, and other enriching youth activities that are conducted in a safe, encouraging environment.

What Can Law Enforcement Leaders Do to Prepare Officers to Best Engage Youth?

It is important to provide police officers best practices for working with youth. Knowing how teens think can go a long way toward de-escalating minor incidents, and can even reduce arrests (Thurau & Bostic, 2012). Training police officers to focus on relationship-building and constructive ways to assert authority, rather than simply arresting, can promote juvenile justice reform. Training should be focused on alternatives to arrest for situations that could easily be resolved without going through the juvenile justice system.

In a scan of the literature, the Police Foundation has identified key points for law enforcement leaders to consider as they develop or revise youth policing engagement strategies. Key points include:

- Teach officers to respond appropriately to youth with mental health and substance abuse history; through proper training, utilizing crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques to increase the safety of those involved.
- Develop roles for officers to engage youth and families in a positive manner and promote opportunities to engage in community-based activities.
- Promote alternatives to arrest, court referral or detention by developing protocols in partnership with schools, counselors, treatment providers, and families for diversion options for law enforcement when possible to avoid directing youth to the juvenile justice system.
- Educate juveniles about the justice system and the consequences relating to their actions to aid in developing healthy relationships with police who can serve as role models, guides and resources; can promote law enforcement careers with youth and can increase safety in schools and neighborhoods.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/documents/pdfs/JuvenileJusticeSummitReport.pdf>

http://strategiesforyouth.org/sfysite/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SFYReport_02-2013_rev.pdf

Additional Resources

PROGRAMS

Cambridge Police Department Cambridge, MA

<http://www.cambridgema.gov/cpd/communityresources/safetynetcollaborative.aspx>

Cambridge Police Department Youth & Family Services Unit, Cambridge Health Alliance, Department of Human Services, and Cambridge Public Schools have formed the Safety Net Collaborative. Their mission is to promote positive youth development and mental health; support safe school and community environments; and limit the number of youth placed in the juvenile justice system by encouraging prevention, intervention, and diversion.

The Safety Net collaborative encourages youth to succeed in school and become productive, law-abiding citizens by intervening early the moment youth show signs of trouble. This can reduce the chance of juveniles committing criminal offenses in the future, and help them to maintain a path to success in the future. Non-serious juvenile offenders are placed in diversion and/or treatment programs in the community, which has been proved to be more effective and less detrimental than arrest.

Examples of services and programs the Safety Net initiative offers include:

- Connecting youth to mental health services, youth development activities, and mentoring;
- Promoting school safety through Youth Resource Officers;
- Home visits with families;
- Juvenile diversion program;
- Restorative justice and mediation;
- Helping families and schools navigate the legal system; and
- Cross-training among partner agencies.



International Association of Chiefs of Police- Youth Focused Policing

<http://www.iacpyouth.org/AboutYFP.aspx>

Youth Focused Policing (YFP) is a preemptive strategy to allows police to mediate interactions with youth through the intent to reduce delinquency, crime, victimization, and continued connection with the justice systems.

The YFP provides officers with:

- Information and resources relating to youth crime, delinquency and victimization;
- A directory of law enforcement programs and services for youth from across the nation including sample documents from those programs, such as brochures, applications, and program flyers, as well as juvenile justice and child protection policies, procedures, and reports;
- Training and technical assistance in the areas of juvenile justice, children exposed to violence, and child sex trafficking;
- A discussion forum for law enforcement officials to share information, obtain resources, and exchange ideas; and
- An online guide to evaluating law enforcement youth program(s).

TRAININGS

Strategies for Youth (SFY) has developed *Policing the Teen Brain*, a training for police in interacting effectively with youth based on cutting-edge psychiatric practice and neurological research.

SFY believes that for officers to have more successful interactions with adolescents, they must in turn be “developmentally competent,” meaning they recognize that children and adolescents perceive, process, and respond to situations based on their developmental stage, culture, and life experiences. Developmentally competent adults correspond their interactions to the developmental stage of the children with whom they are interacting.

SFY provides police officer training that integrates scientific and evidence-based information with practical strategies that can enable officers to effectively de-escalate interactions with juveniles. Their training includes community-based youth-serving organizations, and local youth who are paid to participate in role-plays. The 2-day training is not limited to patrol officers. Specialized units (ex. school resource officers) are encouraged to undergo training. Methods of instruction include interactive discussions with adolescent development experts and psychiatrists, educational films, and involvement of community youth.

Each Training Includes: Command/Management staff briefing (2-4 hours), lectures, scenario-based examples, interactive discussions, use of films and skits involving local youth, baseline and post-training evaluations of officers’ attitudes, and knowledge of core competencies for each training.

EDUCATION AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR): Georgetown University’s Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) Juvenile Diversion Certificate Program brings together teams of criminal justice, school officials, and local leaders who are committed to strengthening diversion efforts. Teams receive in-depth training and guidance on diversion policies, practices, and programs and provides the knowledge and tools needed to implement or improve juvenile diversion programming in the teams’ jurisdictions. For more information on this program and how to apply visit: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/certificate-programs/diversion/>.

SAMPLE POLICIES ON INTERACTING WITH YOUTH

DEPARTMENT: Cambridge Police Department (MA)

Department Demographics: Acting Commissioner Christopher Burke, 254 officers

Special Order Number & Title: Policy No. 460 Juvenile Justice Guidelines

Issuance/Revision Date: 07/01/2008

Policy Brief: It is the policy of this department that juveniles shall be afforded their constitutional and statutory rights when being questioned, searched, detained or arrested; juvenile offenders shall not be detained at the police station for any longer than necessary; Officers shall, whenever reasonable and justified under this policy, take those measures necessary to effect positive change in juvenile offenders that are consistent with Massachusetts General Laws, and the safety and security interests of the community; the department is committed to the development and perpetuation of programs to prevent and control juvenile delinquency.

DEPARTMENT: Everett Police Department (MA)

Department Demographics: Chief Steven Mazzie; 90 officers

Special Order Number & Title: Policy No. 340 Handling Juveniles

Issuance/Revision Date: 10/22/2007

http://strategiesforyouth.org/sfysite/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Everett_Juveniles.pdf

Policy Brief: The Everett Police Department recognizes that juveniles are psychologically, emotionally, and physically different than adults and occupy a unique legal status in the court system. These differences require officers to be aware of juveniles' special circumstances and needs, and to give special consideration to involving social service agencies as appropriate to address the issues that lead juveniles to become involved with the police. Police officers play a very important part in the Juvenile Justice System. Patience, understanding and firmness, together with close cooperation with court officials in the processing of juvenile cases, are necessary for the system to operate most effectively. For most people, the ultimate symbol of authority in a community is the police force. This is probably remains true for juveniles as well. But while the majority of people accept the presence of such authority with no problem, juveniles may tend to react in inappropriate ways. It cannot be overemphasized that police contact can be very important in the social development of the young people in a community. Police reaction to this sensitive relationship can solidify favorable attitudes already in existence, and more importantly, help to guide the behavior of the borderline case.

DEPARTMENT: San Francisco Police Department

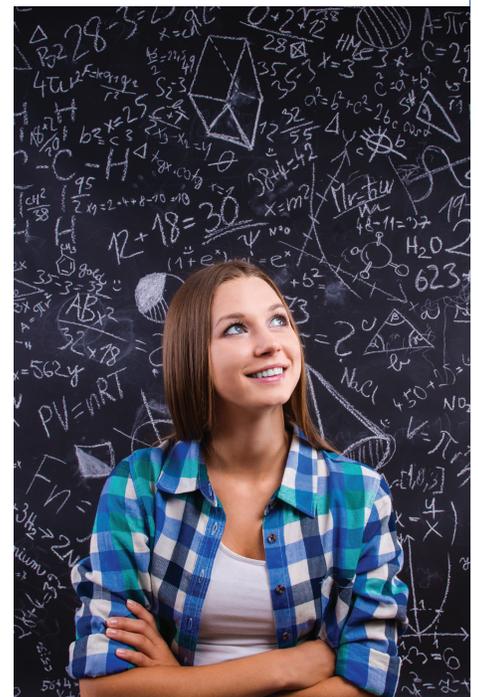
Department Demographics: Interim Chief Toney Chaplin; 2,328 officers

Special Order Number & Title: 7.01 Policies and Procedures for Juveniles Detention, Arrest, and Custody

Issuance/Revision Date: 05/07/2008

<http://sanfranciscopolice.org/sites/default/files/FileCenter/Documents/14752-DG07.01.pdf>

Policy Brief: It is the policy of the San Francisco Police Department that all members shall treat individuals with respect and courtesy regardless of age or social status, and shall comply with all relevant General Orders, including but not limited to General Order 5.15 (Enforcement of Immigration Laws), General Order 5.17 (Policy Prohibiting Biased Policing) and General Order 5.20 (Language Access Services for Limited English Speaking Persons). Members of the San Francisco Police Department have a unique opportunity to influence the lives of children and youth.



Members shall seek partnerships with families, schools and juvenile-centered groups to prevent and solve problems affecting children and youth. When detaining, arresting or taking a juvenile into temporary custody members shall choose the alternative that least restricts the juvenile's freedom of movement, provided that alternative is compatible with the best interests of the child and the community.

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About the Project

The Police Foundation, with funding from the California Endowment and with the support of the California State Sheriffs' Association and the California Police Chiefs Association, has developed this series of issue briefs to address various components of a successful Police-Youth-Family-Community Partnership. These briefs are designed for California law enforcement leaders with a tool-kit that helps advance strategies around youth engagement. Other briefs in this series cover topics including the teen brain and establishing a career pipeline.

About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is a national, non-profit, bipartisan organization that, consistent with its commitment to improve policing, has been on the cutting edge of police innovation for over 40 years. The Police Foundation's work is informed by available evidence and aims to increase public safety and strengthen communities. The professional staff at the Police Foundation works closely with law enforcement, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, victim advocates, and community-based organizations in order to develop research, comprehensive reports, policy briefs, model policies, and innovative programs that will continue to support the work of law enforcement personnel as it relates to increasing strong community-police partnerships.

<http://www.policefoundation.org>

About the California Endowment

The California Endowment is a private, statewide health foundation with a mission to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. Health Happens Here is the core of our work. It challenges us to think about people's health beyond the doctor's office and beyond the good vs. bad choices people make. In reality, our health happens where we live, learn, work and play—in neighborhoods, schools, and with prevention.

<http://www.calendow.org/our-story/>

About the California Police Chiefs Association

Established in 1966, the California Police Chiefs Association is an organization that represents municipal law enforcement agencies in California.

The State has been divided into 16 regions and the police chief representative from those areas is also a member of the Board. Each regional representative acts as the official liaison between the Association and Police Chiefs in the local area regarding issues related to the law enforcement community and the administration of municipal police agencies.

The California Police Chiefs Association is an influential participant in the State of California's legislative process. The Association stretches throughout the state and its membership is comprised of many well respected and nationally recognized Police Chiefs.

The objectives of the association are to promote and advance the science and art of police administration and crime prevention; and to develop and disseminate professional administrative practices, and to promote their use in the police profession; to foster police cooperation and the exchange of information and experience throughout the State; to bring about recruitment and training of qualified persons in the police profession; to encourage the adherence of all police officers to high professional standards of conduct in strict compliance with the Law Enforcement Officer's Code of Ethics.

The California Police Chiefs Association committees offer involvement in working with peers to assess current issues in law enforcement and develop solutions, ideas and projects in response to those issues. The California Police Chiefs Association committees are active in developing publications, sample policies and guidelines which serve to assist members in their jobs. Standing committees of the Association include: Training, Standards & Ethics, Law & Legislation, Nominations & Past Presidents, Associate Member, Small Agency, Large Agency,

Technology, Communication/Membership, and Retired Members. As contemporary issues are identified, ad hoc committees are established to provide guidance to the Association and its membership.

The political environment mandates that The California Police Chiefs Association speak on behalf of police leadership and for the law enforcement community in California. The California Police Chiefs Association provides the opportunity for a voice in the legislature by influencing public safety legislation through The California Police Chiefs Association Government Relations Program.

The California Police Chiefs Association Annual Conference provides the opportunity to participate in educational session, listen to keynote speakers on issues related to the administration of law enforcement agencies and the industry, and interact and network with other municipal chiefs of police.

<http://www.californiapolicechiefs.org/introduction>

About the California State Sheriff's Association

California State Sheriffs' Association (CSSA) is a nonprofit professional organization comprised of the 58 sheriffs along with thousands of law-abiding citizens throughout the state. The association was formed in 1894 for the purpose of giving California sheriffs a single effective voice. It was also formed for the purpose of sharing information and providing assistance to sheriffs and departmental personnel, thus enabling them to improve the delivery of law enforcement services to the citizens of this State.

Every sheriff works diligently with fellow sheriffs through CSSA to improve the profession and to elevate the law enforcement system through cooperation with other law enforcement agencies. As the sheriffs are constitutionally elected officials, the California legislature regulates their duties and responsibilities. The sheriffs serve as upholders for your public safety needs. CSSA functions as a legislative watchdog for the county sheriff and sheriff's personnel as well as for citizens on professional and law enforcement issues.

The California State Sheriff's Association's mission is to support the role of sheriff as the chief law enforcement officer in each California County and to speak as a collective voice on matters of public safety.

<https://www.calsheriffs.org/about-us.html>

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