
V. STAGE 3: EXIT FROM INCARCERATION

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that juveniles experience high recidivism rates, ranging from 55 to 75 percent.²¹ In addition, most youth do not reengage with the educational system after leaving confinement. For instance, the New York City Department of Education documented that two-thirds of high school-age offenders do not return to school after release.²² Research in Kentucky showed a 95 percent dropout rate between release and entrance into a public school system or transitional educational center.²³ The key to preventing this, as suggested by some research, is engagement.²⁴ Therefore, effective transition programming needs to focus on a youth's re-entrance into the community-based education system and appropriate workforce opportunities.

Making the transition from juvenile detention and correctional facilities, which are designed to provide a structured environment with continuous supervision and a wide range of services, to the less-structured environment of mainstream education settings or employment may be difficult. A young offender transitioning back to society is often still affected by the social and personal influences that contributed to the conduct resulting in incarceration in the first place. He or she may need an array of support services upon re-entry, ranging from counseling and other mental health services to medical services, as well as additional tutoring or other academic supports to successfully reintegrate. Some of these services may be outside the scope of services provided by the mainstream education system, and certainly outside the scope of an employer's responsibilities, adding another layer of complexity to successfully meeting the youth's transition needs. Planning for services requires collaboration at multiple levels.²⁵

WHAT WORKS AT THIS STAGE: INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

The exit phase is intense and requires a number of activities and services at both the current facility and the future placement and school. In addition to activities already being conducted, such as continuing systematic assessments and updating the transition plan accordingly (see entry and residence stages), three other strategies should be placed into action.

Strategy One: Begin Pre-Release Information Sharing

Pre-release information sharing comprises discussions among the facility and the receiving school, the transition team, and the youth, during which the youth's service needs, academic achievement, placement considerations, and future goals are discussed.²⁶ This discussion should be based on the transition plan and include such information as what has and has not been effective in caring for the youth and what types of support options are available at the receiving entity. All entities should discuss how they will assist one another in working with the youth given their role (e.g., schools, probation agencies, and facilities working together to monitor attendance and behavior standards). Concrete, specific, and measurable goals for the youth should be established or revised now, ensuring that a solid exit plan is in place before the youth leaves the facility.

To facilitate this process, many States have established **reentry initiatives**. Some are Statewide, whereas others target specific populations.

In Maine, State law provides for a “reintegration team” to be established within 10 days of learning about the re-enrollment of a student from a correctional facility.²⁷ This team consists of the school’s administrator and the student’s classroom teacher, parent, or guidance counselor, and is responsible for reintegration planning for the student.

Strategy Two: Conduct a Pre-Release Visit to the School

A **pre-release visit** to the receiving school and an **admission interview** should be conducted at this stage. The youth, the juvenile justice official, and family members (or an adult advocate/mentor) should visit the school and meet the principal and potential teachers. This can break the ice between the receiving school staff and the youth. It can also help in forming first impressions (or revising old impressions if the youth is re-entering the same school from before incarceration) and ameliorating potential fears that both the school staff and the youth may have. Classroom placement and curricular options can also be discussed at this time.

The admission interview, often conducted by the principal, lets the school get reacquainted with the youth and parents, as well as understand the impact of rehabilitation. The principal may choose to ask about the following measures: likes and dislikes, self-perception, relationships with parents and authority figures, academic and vocational goals, mental health concerns, and strengths and weaknesses. The interview is an ideal time for school staff to discuss school rules and any “zero tolerance” policies. The youth and his or her parents should be required to sign a Statement acknowledging that they are aware of and understand the school rules. If a youth/parent handbook outlining school rules and policies is available, it should be given to the youth and his or her parents at this time. In addition to discussing rules and policies, this is a key opportunity for school staff members to encourage school attachment and engagement, for both the youth and the parents.²⁸

Strategy Three: Start Transitional Counseling and Continue Mentoring

Transitional counseling should occur in conjunction with pre-release information sharing. A counselor at the facility should check in as the youth leaves the facility and enters school to ensure that he or she is on track with his or her goals and feels supported. A youth who has been incarcerated may feel abandoned when leaving a structured environment that offered a great deal of individual attention for the less-structured environment of a public school. This is another reason a **mentor or an adult advocate** is extremely useful.

A. PRACTICES SPECIFIC TO RECORDS TRANSFER AT EXIT

As a youth exits the system, he or she either returns to the community or transfers to another juvenile detention, juvenile corrections, or adult corrections facility. It is vital that the information packet be complete when a youth leaves the system so that the youth’s aftercare transition goals can be implemented and he or she can receive the proper referrals and services necessary for success after leaving the system. The educational exit packet should include a copy of the exit transition plan, grades and credits earned, classes taken, scores on standardized assessments, IEP if applicable, examples of the student’s work, and all other information about the academic progress the youth has made while committed.

Transition program managers can use the following strategy when considering records transfer procedures for a youth exiting the system.

Strategy One: Release a Youth's Records in a Timely and Secure Manner

As the youth exits the system, it is important for his or her **records to be released in a timely manner** to the next educational placement. A delay in this process can lead to a lapse in engagement during the transition process, which significantly reduces the likelihood of success.²⁹ To remedy this, several States (including Florida, Kentucky,^x and California^y) have introduced laws requiring records to be transferred within a certain number of days. In Florida, for instance, educational records must be provided by the school district within 5 days of the institution's request.^z Another way to facilitate effective records transfer is to have them sent to a **designated staff member** at the community school to which the youth is returning. Likewise, if the youth is transferring to another detention or correctional facility, the records should be transferred to a designated staff member at the new placement. Assigning one person to receive and/or release records helps eliminate confusion.

Strategy Two: Use a Consistent Method for Transferring Educational Records

In order to ensure that youth receive appropriate educational services and earn credit for the work they complete while in the system, facility staff must use a consistent method for transferring educational records to the youth's next educational placement. In Massachusetts, for example, educational programs are required to use a Universal Student Transcript (UST) designed to promote credit recovery and to reduce delays in transferring student records, thus decreasing delays in reintegration into the community school. The UST consists of a standardized set of forms, with sections that detail: 1) course titles, 2) grades earned, 3) effort made, 4) contact hours, 5) course teachers, 6) topics covered/ skills addressed, 7) text/materials used, and 8) comments. Educators are required to generate a UTS for any youth that is detained or committed by the Department of Youth Services (DYS) and spends more than 15 consecutive school days in a residential DHS facility. In addition, educational programs are required to complete and send out the UST within 48 hours of a youth's exit from the system or transfer to another detention or corrections facility. To ensure that the UST was used consistently and appropriately across educational programs when it was introduced, mandatory trainings were held for educators.³⁰

B. PRACTICES SPECIFIC TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AT EXIT

As a youth prepares to leave a juvenile justice facility, family involvement is critical. Consequences, positive or negative, of decisions made at this stage will have a direct impact on both the youth and the family. Below are strategies that can promote a youth's success through family involvement.

^x See <http://www.lrc.State.ky.us/KRS/158-00/137.PDF> for information on Kentucky's Rule 158.137.

^y See http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_0451-0500/ab_490_bill_20031012_chaptered.pdf for information on California's AB 490.

^z See https://www.flrules.org/Gateway/View_notice.asp?id=5616414 for more information.

Strategy One: Engage the Family in All Decision-Making Processes

When exiting from the system, the youth will optimally be reunited with his or her family. To this end, it is imperative that **family members be engaged in all decision-making processes**, such as

- identifying specific goals and corresponding support services for the youth and his or her family,
- recommending educational placement, and
- establishing timelines for exiting.

Strategy Two: Prepare the Family for Changes in Their Child

As the exit time approaches, facility administrators should increase their attempts to engage family members. Holding conversations with parents and their child will help them learn more about how their son or daughter has changed as a result of residing in an institution (e.g., hygiene and personal care, food preparation and eating, studying and homework, taking responsibility for chores). Giving the family ideas about how to support their child will help ensure that positive habits continue beyond incarceration.

Strategy Three: Make the Transition Process as Gradual as Possible

Another key strategy is to **make this stage gradual through home visits**. It is ideal if the youth can return home for short visits of a few hours ramping up to longer visits of a few days before actually returning home. This process can help the family transition and identify potential problems while support services are still in place.

NEXT STEPS

In the Appendices is a self-study tool specific to this stage of transition. The tool will help you gather applicable institutional data on your transition processes, determine your status in implementing key strategies, and plan next steps in program improvement efforts. Additionally, action documents specific to this stage have been compiled below, to serve as examples of how States are implementing the presented strategies. For each document presented, the source, a Web site to access the document, and a brief description are provided. Resources for use at exit include a mentoring needs assessment, and a youth's release action plan.

Resources for Exit
Youth Interviews
Mentoring Needs Assessment Source: Aftercare for Indiana through Mentoring Program (AIM) URL: http://aim.spea.iupui.edu/members/NEEDS_ASSESSMENT_INTERVIEW_2004.doc (note: hit "cancel" in dialog box requesting logon information) Description: The purpose of this interview is to assess a youth's needs. It is used to guide AIM programming while the participant is incarcerated and is the basis of the development of a re-entry plan prior to release.

Resources for Exit

Youth's Release Action Plan

Source: Wisconsin Department of Corrections

URL: 1. http://www.wi-doc.com/DJC_newsletter/newsletter_feb06/2312%20Youth's%20Release%20Action%20Plan%2010-05.doc

Description: This form documents youths' identification of people and supports needed upon release to promote successful outcomes after incarceration.

If an agency, organization, or publisher wishes to suggest additional documents or resources for this Toolkit, it may submit a request to ndtac@air.org. NDTAC will review the information and consider it for inclusion in a future version of the Toolkit.