

Responder Program | Development Manual

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Turning lives around one child at a time.

Dear Potential Responder Program:

Mental illness is just that: an *illness* that must be treated. Youth with untreated mental illness often engage in disruptive, unsafe, and illegal activities because they have little or no control over their behaviors. With disturbing regularity, society attempts to control these inappropriate behaviors by punishing the child, rather than addressing the underlying need for treatment. Consider, for a moment, a child diagnosed with diabetes. Is the child at fault? No. Is the condition controlled by punishing the child? Of course not. It should seem equally absurd to attempt to gain control over a child's mental illness through punishment and incarceration. Detention has never cured diabetes; it can also never cure bipolar disorder, depression, or schizophrenia.

The MacArthur Foundation has long recognized this simple truth. Through its generous support, the Responder Program was created in Summit County, Ohio to divert youth with a history of mental illness and school behavior issues away from the traditional court system. Instead, youth and their families are linked to appropriate social services.

As you consider developing a similar program in your area, remember that it is critical to include all of the key stakeholders from the beginning. Collaboration between the various stakeholders during all stages of development will ensure buy-in, will enhance discussion, and will more completely meet the needs of the entire community. Active participation of all partners is key to building a responsive, successful program.

This Responder Program Manual has been created to help you develop a Responder Program that meets the needs of your youth, families, schools, and neighborhoods. It is merely a guide and as such, I strongly encourage you to make modifications to tailor the program exactly to the needs of your community. My hope is that this manual will be a useful resource as you begin this important process of serving youth with mental illness.

Best Wishes,

Judge Linda Tucci Teodosio

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Responder Program | Introduction

The Responder Program: A Joint Project of Juvenile Court, Mental Health Partners, and Public Schools

Closure of many State-run, residential mental health facilities for youth has not eliminated the need for mental health services. Instead, it has transferred the responsibility for caring for these youth to families and local communities. Not surprisingly, many of these youth end up involved with the juvenile justice system. According to the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice:

- Over 70% of youth involved in the juvenile justice system are experiencing mental health disorders.
- More than half of these youth met criteria for at least two diagnoses
- Over 60% of youth with a mental disorder also had a substance abuse disorder.
- Nearly 27% of justice-involved youth have disorders that are serious enough to require immediate and significant treatment.

The impact of mental health and the co-occurring disorders of mental illness and substance abuse upon cases appearing before juvenile courts is clear.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has further revealed that as many as 70% of youth incarcerated in our nation's juvenile facilities suffer from disabling conditions (July 2000). Recent Ohio studies indicate that in 2004, 44% of youth committed to the custody of the Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS) are in need of special education and/or related services. This compares to 14% of youth in the general population that require these services statewide. In fiscal year 2003, 3,085 youth were incarcerated at the ODYS; of these, 1,361 were special education students. These statistics indicate that there are three times as many youth with developmental and other disabilities in the custody of ODYS as compared to the general population.

As has been noted by many experts in this field, characteristics frequently associated with mental health concerns and disabilities can be predictors of delinquency and can often lead youth with such disabilities to the juvenile justice system. These characteristics include: 1) poorly developed reasoning ability, 2) inappropriate affect, 3) lack of cooperation, and 4) inappropriate responses. It is noteworthy that youth with

disabilities are more likely to do poorly in school. There is also a strong correlation between school failure and delinquency. Numerous no-tolerance policies in schools following recent tragedies in places such as Columbine may also contribute to an intolerance of behaviors frequently seen in students with disabilities.

As noted by Dr. Thomas Grisso, Director of the Law-Psychiatry Program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the developer of the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI), competency is also coming to the forefront as an issue in juvenile court. When juvenile courts were developed, competency was not a primary issue because the role of the court was universally viewed as rehabilitator, not punisher. Laws have changed, with the focus shifting more to punishment and treating juveniles as adults. Thus, the requirements and safeguards of due process for juveniles have become more and more vital. Unlike for adults, Ohio does not have a set statutory standard for determining when youth are competent to stand trial.

Also troubling is that youth with mental health concerns frequently come to the court's attention at a younger age as referrals from schools because of the above described behaviors. Since juvenile courts often have a range of graduated sanctions, early and frequent referrals can allow for deeper penetration of these youth into the juvenile justice system.

Program Goals

The Responder Program seeks to address the problems noted above. Specifically, its goals are to:

- **Promote Early Intervention**

The responder program in Summit County focuses on middle school students. Most referrals to juvenile court begin when children reach the middle school years. Younger youth are usually not competent for court involvement. Thus, by focusing on middle school youth, the Responder Program hopes to intercept children at the earliest possible stage and divert them away from the juvenile justice system and toward appropriate mental health treatment.

- **Facilitate Early Recognition**

Most children spend the majority of their days in school, so school personnel may be the first to recognize something amiss. Training school staff to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness will enable them to make appropriate referrals. Historically, teachers and school personnel have not had alternatives to calling the police when youth who display these symptoms act out in class or in the school building. The Responder Program is an additional tool for schools to use to provide effective services to youth with mental illness while maintaining a safe and productive school environment for all students.

- **Improve School Attendance and Performance**

Youth with mental illness are often truant from school due to their disability(ies). The Responder Program allows schools to assist youth who are experiencing numerous unexcused absences by referring them for screening and evaluation and by securing services to get youth back into the classroom.

- **Involve Families as a Meaningful and Valued Part of the Team**

Families must be part of the process. After all, family members know their children best. It is unlikely that a viable case plan for the child's wellness can be developed without the input of the family. The Responder Program acknowledges and celebrates the role of parental involvement.

- **Empower Schools with Confidence about the Referral Process**

Sometimes an external motivator is necessary to encourage families and children to comply with necessary services. The potential for the juvenile court to become formally involved if voluntary compliance is not achieved can provide that external motivation. Schools are more likely to make referrals to the program knowing that a more traditional approach including court involvement is possible.

- **Direct Children away from the Juvenile Justice System and toward Appropriate Mental Health Services**

Responders must be aware of the services available in the community in order to make appropriate referrals. If appropriate referrals are made and when children and families engage in appropriate services, a referral to juvenile court can often be avoided.

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Responder Program | Formation

Consider using the [Program Formation Workbook](#) to address the following elements.

I. Identify the Problem

- A. Youth with mental health concerns whose truant and/or disruptive behavior in school results in infiltration into the juvenile justice system

II. Identify Stakeholders

- A. Possible Stakeholders
 - i. School leaders: superintendents, principals from several different schools
 - a. OPTION: Consider including principals from different types of schools and different grade levels
 - ii. School personnel: teachers, guidance staff
 - a. OPTION: Consider including staff from various levels and types of schools.
 - iii. Court leaders: judges, court administrators
 - a. The judge must be included in this process. For maximum success, the judge should be the driving force behind program development.
 - iv. Court staff: intake officers, school/truancy specialists
 - v. Police: school resource officers, CIT officers (officers specially trained to address mental health issues)
 - vi. Mental health providers, including substance abuse providers
 - vii. Parents

III. Host Open Discussion with Stakeholders

- A. Identify specific concerns that each stakeholder has about school truancy and/or negative school behaviors
 - i. Establish the rationale for the program
 - a. For example: A number of youth with mental illness engage in disruptive and acting-out behavior that is symptomatic of mental illness. Many times, the illness goes unrecognized, undiagnosed, and untreated. While disruptive behavior is certainly inappropriate in a school setting, involving law enforcement and the juvenile justice system is often the only option presented to teachers and school personnel for managing youth whose behavior is disruptive. Rather than a referral to the juvenile court, a referral to mental health services is more appropriate and effective. The Responder Program provides this option.

B. Identify program goals

- i. For example: The goals of the Responder Program are to provide schools with an additional tool for addressing issues presented in the classroom by youth with mental illness, to direct these youth to appropriate mental health services in the community, and to reduce the contact between youth with mental illness and the juvenile justice system.

C. Identify necessary resources

i. Program Staff

- a. Program Director: This individual oversees program operations and is responsible for:
 - resolving most issues that arise
 - supervising Responder Program staff
 - collecting, tracking, and reviewing data
 - reporting program success to the stakeholders
 - making recommendations for program modification as necessary.
- b. Responder: This frontline staff member responds to referrals and works with youth and families. This person is responsible for:
 - responding to each referral made by schools
 - completing screening tools with youth
 - conducting team meetings and developing intervention plans
 - staying connected with youth and families to ensure intervention plan compliance
 - submitting required forms and data to the program director
 - assisting the program director in developing program modifications as required
- c. Administrative Assistant: This person assists with various administrative tasks (mailings, etc.) on an as-needed basis.
- d. School Contact: This person acts as a point of contact at the school for the responder and the program director and assists the responder in navigating the processes of the school.
- e. OPTIONS
 - Assign responsibility for all duties to one individual
 - Reconfigure how current court-school/truancy specialists respond to referrals
 - Divide administrative tasks among existing staff, thereby eliminating the need for an administrative assistant

- ii. Physical Space
 - a. Office space (and all standard office equipment) at the court for conducting daily business
 - b. Private, quiet space at each school to meet with families and conduct team meetings
 - c. OPTIONS:
 - Base the responder primarily in the school, at a community mental health facility, or at the juvenile court
- iii. Equipment and Supplies
 - a. Computer (possibly a laptop)
 - b. E-mail
 - c. Telephone (including cell phone)
 - d. Standard office supplies (paper, pens, etc.)
- D. Identify resources each stakeholder can provide to the program
 - i. For example: The juvenile court provides staff, physical office space, and all equipment and supplies, largely from resources already in place. The schools provide private, quiet space for the responder to meet with families and conduct team meetings. The schools make the referrals. The schools permit staff (teachers, guidance staff, and principals) to attend training about the program. The mental health provider assists in conducting the training and accepts referrals from the responder.
- E. Identify necessary resources that cannot be provided by an existing stakeholder
- F. Determine how to fill the resource gaps. This may include searching for additional funding streams.
 - i. For example: This program was originally created through funding from the MacArthur Foundation; however, the program is now self-sustaining.

IV. Identify Participating Schools

- A. Middle schools were selected because children of this age are often first showing the signs and symptoms of mental illness. Also, this is usually the age where a referral to the juvenile justice system is first seen as an option for disruptive conduct.
- B. Schools are asked to apply to the juvenile court for participation in the Responder Program in the spring of the preceding academic year.
 - i. Schools apply by completing the [School Application to Participate](#) and submitting it to the juvenile court.
 - ii. The juvenile court selects schools to participate based on the resources the school can commit to the program and the school's willingness to support the program.

- a. OPTIONS
 - Elementary
 - High school
 - Alternative schools
 - By district
 - No application

V. Create Time Frame for Program

- A. The program is introduced to school personnel prior to the beginning of the academic year through training sessions.
- B. At the start of the academic year, students and parents are notified of the Responder Program as an option for addressing inappropriate behaviors.
 - i. Families receive [brochure](#) about the Responder Program.
- C. Responder Program staff are available at the beginning of the academic year and remain available as a resource to school personnel and families throughout the year.
 - i. OPTION: Introduce the program at a different point in the academic year
- D. Once a youth is referred to the program, Responder Program staff will follow the youth throughout the academic year.

VI. Conduct Training

- A. Content
 - i. Introduction: Court staff or the juvenile court judge will address the issues presented by the involvement of youth with mental illness in the juvenile justice system and an overview of court programs that have been developed to deal with the issues. The description will include an overview of the options that are (and are not) available locally and through the Department of Youth Services.
 - ii. Mental Health Concerns: Mental health staff will discuss the signs and symptoms that school personnel can look for to determine whether a youth's behavior is possibly the result of mental illness. This will focus not only on the occurrence of acute events that occur in the classroom or on school grounds, but also in chronic issues that may present themselves by way of truancy or other non-acute behavior at school.
 - iii. Process: Representatives from the court and mental health will review the process that will be followed when an event occurs that triggers a call to the responder (see [Operation](#)).

- iv. Parent and Family Involvement: Parents will share both their family’s experience in the school setting and their insight into the Responder Program.
 - v. Wrap-up: Court staff and mental health staff will answer questions regarding mental illness and the Responder Program. Teachers and school staff are encouraged to make suggestions that will make the process more beneficial to them.
 - vi. NOTE: The training should be specific to the designed program; however, the primary focus must be on tools for making appropriate referrals (i.e., youth with possible mental health concerns).
- B. Materials ([Appendix B](#))
- i. [PowerPoint presentation](#)
 - ii. Mental health training materials can be provided by your local mental health partner. The [National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice](#) also has two training resources that may be useful: *Workforce Development* and *Family Engagement*.
 - iii. [Flow charts](#)

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Responder Program | Operation

I. Identify Youth in Need

- A. The school identifies youth with suspected acute or chronic mental health concerns.
 - i. Identification can be made as a result of an acute incident, chronic signs of a problem, or as a result of chronic truancy.
 - a. In the case of an acute concern and if staff feels it necessary, the police (*in addition to* the responder) can be contacted.
 - b. Staff may also call or page regarding chronic concerns that might lead to involvement with the juvenile justice system if there is no intervention.
 - ii. Staff is *not* expected to make a mental health diagnosis, but is expected to make a referral to the Responder Program if behavior of concern is present.

II. Initiate Assessment Process

- A. The responder or school contacts the family to initiate an assessment for participation in the Responder Program.
 - i. No mental health assessment or treatment is conducted until the youth's parent or guardian is contacted.
 - ii. The responder utilizes standard mental health screening tools to assist in the evaluation of youth for participation in the Responder Program.
 - a. Mental health screening tool(s) should be selected based upon a program's unique concerns and available resources.
 - iii. OPTIONS
 - a. If the incident is acute, the responder responds directly to the school to help de-escalate the situation. If this option is selected, the responder **MUST** be appropriately trained in crisis management techniques.
 - b. A CIT-Y officer or school resource officer responds to the acute incident and makes a referral to the Responder Program.

III. Carry Out Responder Response

- A. If the responder determines upon assessment and consultation with the family that mental health treatment or additional support is indicated, the responder convenes a team meeting composed of:
 - i. the family
 - ii. the teacher or school representative
 - iii. any mental health personnel involved in the youth's care

- iv. any person that the family feels could provide support
 - v. a parent advocate from a mental health advocacy group, as desired by the family.
- B. Following the team meeting, an intervention plan is developed.
- i. The responder makes appropriate referrals to facilitate the successful completion of the intervention plan.
 - a. OPTION: The intervention plan is created during the team meeting and all members leave the meeting with a copy of the plan.
- C. The responder continues to meet with the family at least once per month, or more frequently as needed, for the balance of the school year to assure that the intervention plan is being followed.
- i. The responder answers questions and provides support to youth and families.
 - ii. The responder convenes additional team meetings as necessary.
 - iii. OPTIONS
 - a. The responder engages in more or fewer contacts with youth and families.
 - b. The responder provides some level of mental health services directly, but only if the responder is appropriately licensed staff and appropriately supervised.

IV. Carry Out Court Response

- A. If the event that brought the youth to the attention of the responder was one in which charges could have immediately been filed, compliance with the intervention plan will prevent the filing of a charge.
- i. If the youth fails to comply with the intervention plan, the school is notified so that it can determine whether or not to file additional charges.
 - ii. In the case of truancy, compliance with the plan serves to divert the youth and family from the official court process, even if the threshold number of unexcused absences is reached during the term of compliance.
 - iii. OPTION: File the charge in all cases and dismiss the charge upon successful completion of the program.

V. Complete Necessary Forms ([Appendix C](#))

- A. [Letter of Introduction to the Responder Program](#)
- i. Provided to all parents at the participating school as an introduction to the Responder Program
- B. [School Application to Participate in Responder Program](#)
- i. Used to expand the program and to help identify schools with the greatest need and commitment to the program

- C. [Responder Program Referral Form](#)
 - i. Completed electronically by referring school personnel
 - ii. Emailed to the responder for follow-up
 - iii. Emailed to court's intake supervisor so youth involved with the program are identifiable by the court should referrals be received
- D. [Responder Program Initial Screening Form](#)
 - i. Used by the responder upon initial contact with youth and families
- E. [Responder Program Disposition](#)
 - i. Reports results of initial meeting
 - a. Whether the youth and family are appropriate for the program
 - b. Whether further assessment is needed
 - c. Willingness of youth, families, and school to participate in the program
- F. Responder Program Intervention Plan
 - i. Details plan for improving school attendance and/or behavior
 - a. Created with input from the entire team, including the youth and family
 - b. Includes referrals to be made by the responder and resources to be utilized by family
- G. [Responder Program Progress Notes](#)
 - i. Captures minutes of each meeting with team
 - a. Recorded by responder
- H. [Responder Program Attempts to Contact Form](#)
 - i. Records both successful and unsuccessful attempts of contact with the family by the responder
- I. [Responder Program Brochure](#)
 - i. Explains Responder Program

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Responder Program | Data Review

I. Identify Measurable Outcomes

- A. Specific outcomes to be measured must reflect the goals of the program.
 - i. Success of program
 - a. Success is defined as a young person who is diverted from the formal juvenile justice system.
 - How many youth successfully completed the program?
 - ii. Satisfaction of participants
 - a. Were youth satisfied with their experience?
 - b. Were families satisfied with their experience?
 - c. Were teachers/school staff satisfied with their experience?

II. Identify Data to be Collected

- A. Data collection should be driven by program intent.
 - i. Incorporating needs and interests of stakeholders
- B. Data may be necessary for future development.
 - i. Securing funding
 - ii. Justifying program changes
 - iii. Ensuring program continuation
- C. A minimum amount of data must be collected from the beginning.
 - i. Facilitates long-term tracking (rather than attempting to create a database from case files)
 - ii. Supplement sample list of data ([Appendix D](#)) to reflect unique program goals
- D. OPTIONS
 - i. Track youth over a period of time to determine if program completion deters future issues with school truancy and/or negative school behaviors
 - ii. Include measurements to determine if youth/families gain specific skills or knowledge
 - a. Do youth have improved reading skills?
 - b. Do youth have improved coping skills?
 - c. Do youth have lowered risk assessment scores?
 - d. Are parents able to identify more resources for their child?
 - e. Do parents have an increased knowledge of how to access resources?

- iii. Track a “control group” of youth (youth who were referred to the traditional juvenile justice system) to determine the success of the Responder Program as compared to the traditional method of intervention

III. Collect Data

- A. Program operation data
 - i. The responder collects data through the completion of various forms used by the Responder Program.
 - ii. The responder reports the information to the program director on at least a monthly basis.
 - iii. The program director enters the data into an Excel spreadsheet for storage and tracking (see [Sample Data Spreadsheet](#)).
- B. Satisfaction data
 - i. The program director sends mailers containing a brief [letter](#) and a survey to each youth, [family](#), and [school staff member](#) involved in the program.
 - ii. The participant completes the short survey and returns it by mail in the postage-paid enveloped or postcard.
 - iii. The program director enters this data into an Excel spreadsheet for storage and tracking (see [Sample Data Spreadsheet](#)).

IV. Review Data

- A. Data review should be conducted on at least a yearly basis, preferably at the close of the academic year.
 - i. More frequent review is recommended.
 - a. OPTION: Conduct a review at the winter holiday break or at the close of the first semester.
- B. The goal of the data review should be three-fold.
 - i. Confirm completeness and accuracy of data
 - a. Seek out missing pieces of data and data that seems inaccurate
 - ii. Determine if program goals are being met
 - a. Review the data in relation to each outcome for specific trends
 - iii. Identify areas of weakness and modify the program accordingly
- C. Benefits of regular review
 - i. Provides an opportunity to improve the operation of the program in order to best meet the needs of youth
 - ii. Ensures accountability of staff
 - iii. Promotes fiscal responsibility by ensuring that programs are producing the desired outcomes in a cost-effective manner

V. Manage Data Review Materials ([Appendix D](#))

- A. Satisfaction Survey for Youth
- B. [Satisfaction Survey for Families](#) (print on self addressed-stamped post card)
 - i. [Letter to families](#) introducing survey
- C. [Satisfaction Survey for Referring School Staff/Teacher](#) (print on self-addressed-stamped post card)
 - i. [Letter to teacher/school staff](#) introducing survey
- D. [Data Tracking Forms](#)
- E. [Sample Data Spreadsheet](#)

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Responder Program | Appendices

A. Program Formation Workbook

A.1 [Microsoft Word version](#)

A.2 [PDF version](#)

B. Training Materials

B1. [PowerPoint Presentation](#)

B2. [Flow Chart](#)

C. Forms

C1. [Letter of Introduction to the Responder Program](#)

C2. [School Application to Participate in Responder Program](#)

C3. [Responder Program Referral](#)

C4. [Responder Program Initial Screening](#)

C5. [Responder Program Disposition](#)

C6. [Responder Program Progress Notes](#)

C7. [Responder Program Attempts to Contact](#)

C8. [Responder Program Brochure](#)

D. Data Review Materials

D1. [Satisfaction Survey for Families](#)

D2. [Letter to Families introducing Survey](#)

D3. [Satisfaction Survey for Referring School Staff/Teacher](#)

D4. [Letter to Teacher/School Personnel introducing survey](#)

D5. [Data Tracking Forms](#)

D6. [Sample Data Spreadsheet](#)

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