

**5.10 Support community programs that provide youth with mentoring as an intervention and as a prevention strategy, to reduce victimization by and involvement in violence and to promote healthy development by youths.**

All children's mentoring programs should provide ongoing trauma-informed training and supervision to their adult mentors to ensure the children's safety and maximize the benefits of the mentoring relationship.

**5.11 Help communities learn and share what works by investing in research.**

A coordinated national initiative should be created to develop public-private partnerships and funding to ensure that scientific research on the causes of children's exposure to community violence, ways to prevent such exposure, and methods of treating its adverse effects is translated into effective and efficient interventions that are available to, and used successfully in, every community in our country.

## **6. Rethinking Our Juvenile Justice System**

The vast majority of children involved in the juvenile justice system have survived exposure to violence and are living with the trauma of those experiences. A trauma-informed approach to juvenile justice does not require wholesale abandonment of existing programs, but instead it can be used to make many existing programs more effective and cost-efficient. By correctly assessing the needs of youth in the justice system, including youth exposed to violence, and matching services directly to those needs, the system can help children recover from the effects of exposure to violence and become whole.

As a guide to addressing the needs of the vast majority of at-risk and justice-involved youth who have been exposed to violence, the task force offers the recommendations listed below.

**6.1 Make trauma-informed screening, assessment, and care the standard in juvenile justice services.**

All children who enter the juvenile justice system should be screened for exposure to violence. The initial screening should take place upon the child's first contact with the juvenile justice system and should include youth who meet the criteria for diversion from the system. Where feasible, juvenile justice stakeholders should develop trauma-informed care and treatment for children diverted to prevention, mental health, or dependency programs.

**6.2 Abandon juvenile justice correctional practices that traumatize children and further reduce their opportunities to become productive members of society.**

Juvenile justice officials should rely on detention or incarceration as a last resort and only for youth who pose a safety risk or who cannot receive effective treatment in the community. Facilities must eliminate practices that traumatize and damage the youth in their care.

**6.3 Provide juvenile justice services appropriate to children's ethnocultural background that are based on an assessment of each violence-exposed child's individual needs.**

Culturally sensitive role models, practices, and programs aimed at healing traumatized youth and preventing youth from being further exposed to violence in the juvenile justice system should be expanded nationwide and incorporated into statewide juvenile justice systems.

**6.4 Provide care and services to address the special circumstances and needs of girls in the juvenile justice system.**

Programs that provide gender-responsive services for girls healing from violence and other traumatic events, including sexual and physical abuse, should be supported and developed.

**6.5 Provide care and services to address the special circumstances and needs of LGBTQ (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-questioning) youth in the juvenile justice system.**

Every individual who works in the juvenile justice system should be trained and provided with ongoing supervision in order to be able to deliver trauma-informed care while demonstrating respect and support for the sexual orientation of every youth.

**6.6 Develop and implement policies in every school system across the country that aim to keep children in school rather than relying on policies that lead to suspension and expulsion and ultimately drive children into the juvenile justice system.**

Successful school-based programs that help students develop better ways of handling emotional distress, peer pressures, and problems in family and peer relationships and that integrate recovery from trauma should be expanded and then embedded into existing school curricula and activities to increase students' abilities to have positive experiences with education, recreation, peer relationships, and the larger community.

**6.7 Guarantee that all violence-exposed children accused of a crime have legal representation.**

We should ensure that all children have meaningful access to legal counsel in delinquency proceedings. Screen all children who enter the juvenile and adult justice systems for exposure to violence and provide access to trauma-informed services and treatment. Train defense attorneys who represent children to identify and obtain services for clients who have been exposed to violence and to help identify and prevent abuses of children in juvenile detention and placement programs.

**6.8 Help, do not punish, child victims of sex trafficking.**

Child victims of commercial sex trafficking should not be treated as delinquents or criminals. New laws, approaches to law enforcement, and judicial procedures must be developed that apply existing victim protection laws to protect the rights of these child victims.

**6.9 Whenever possible, prosecute young offenders in the juvenile justice system instead of transferring their cases to adult courts.**

No juvenile offender should be viewed or treated as an adult. Laws and regulations prosecuting them as adults in adult courts, incarcerating them as adults, and sentencing them to harsh punishments that ignore and diminish their capacity to grow must be replaced or abandoned.

