



MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE FOR JUVENILE HEARING BOARDS IN RI

PREFACE



The Mental Health Guide for Juvenile Hearing Boards in Rhode Island is intended to inform members of the JHB about mental health and mental health services in RI. This guide was created by Rhode Island for Community & Justice (RICJ) to promote more equitable and positive health outcomes for youth by supporting restorative and community-based diversion opportunities. Our mission statement is to fight bias, bigotry, and racism.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is the state of our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. Everybody has mental health, but not everybody has a mental health condition (eg. depression). It is important to promote mental health for everyone, especially youth, because good mental health is associated with more positive outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. There are many factors that may affect one's mental health including genetics, physical health conditions, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as the experiencing or witnessing of violence, abuse, or neglect, and exposure to stress.¹



WHY IS MENTAL HEALTH RELEVANT FOR JHBs?

A significant proportion (approx. 70%) of juvenile offenders meet criteria for at least one mental health condition.² Connecting youth to mental health services early can help them recover more quickly from a crisis or trauma, and prevent more severe mental health crises in the future. Youth whose mental health is supported are less likely to re-offend and more likely to do better at home, in school, and in their communities.

Furthermore, contact with police officers can itself negatively affect the mental health of youth and their family. A history of arrest before age 25 is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes including higher rates of depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts.³ Youth and families of color experience disproportionately higher rates of arrest and report higher rates of emotional distress during police encounters than white youth and families.⁴

WHAT CAN JHBs DO TO HELP YOUTH & FAMILIES WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS?

JHBs can be a crucial intervention point for youth and families with mental health concerns to prevent future system involvement. There is a limit, however, to what JHBs can do for cases in which there are mental health concerns given that members are volunteers who are not expected to have formal education or training on mental health.

JHBs can:

- Assign a mental health evaluation as a sanction for youth.
- Refer youth and families to mental health clinics/clinicians.
- Refer youth and families to counseling programs.
- Arrange for a clinician to attend hearings to advise the JHB.

JHBs cannot:

- Diagnose mental health conditions in youth.



DISCUSSING MENTAL HEALTH WITH YOUTH & FAMILIES

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT & SOCIAL INFLUENCES

A youth's mental health is highly influenced by their family members and caregivers, so it is often helpful to engage the whole family in a discussion regarding mental health. However, stigma, misinformation, and fear of blame can often prevent families from openly talking about mental health topics. Cultural beliefs and other social factors can also affect a family's attitude towards these topics. Open and honest conversations are key in reducing feelings of shame or isolation for youth and families.



APPLYING DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Cultural humility is an approach to care based on: (a) willingness to admit that one does not know everything, (b) openness to learning from others, and (c) reflection on the effects of one's own culture and personal experiences on their values, beliefs, and biases.⁵ In this approach, youth and families are the experts on the social and cultural contexts of their lives. This encourages a more balanced power dynamic between the youth, family, and the JHB.

Restorative justice is an approach based on understanding the nature of harm and identifying the needs of those involved through inquiry. It asks for the person responsible to take accountability and own up to their actions so they can actively participate in repairing the harm. By seeking to understand the harm, the impact on the victim can be fully recognized and responded to properly. This also allows for the causes of such incidents to be discovered and addressed to help prevent further incidents.



TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH⁶

Mental health can be a difficult topic to discuss. Here are some tips for talking about mental health with youth and families:

- Be mindful of body language and tone of voice. Showing respect can make families more receptive.
- Remind them of the youth's strengths. Talk about the positives before mentioning any concerns.
- Address worries and fears by being reassuring. Mental health conditions are common and treatable.
- Explain benefits of prevention and early intervention. The sooner a youth is supported, the better their health outcomes will be.
- Provide culturally sensitive educational resources. Informative materials can help youth and family process.
- Continuously reflect to recognize the different social influences and perspectives present in a situation.

SELF-CARE FOR JHB VOLUNTEERS



YOUR MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Taking care of your own mental health as a volunteer for the JHB is imperative. In addition to your responsibilities, you have taken on this important work to serve your community. The stories you hear can be painful, and it is normal to be affected by that. An extreme form of this is called secondary traumatic stress. When this is combined with burnout, which is characterized by feelings of exhaustion, negativity/cynicism, and not being effective in your work, it is called compassion fatigue.⁷

Self-care is based on developing an increased awareness of one's needs to be able to better tend to them. This can help you manage stress to maintain good mental health and be an effective JHB member. If you are struggling with your mental health, it is advisable to seek professional support.

AS AN INDIVIDUAL

- Do your best to always get enough sleep, exercise regularly, and eat healthy.
- Practice paying attention to your body and mind to recognize what is harmful and what is beneficial to your mental health.
- Try active and engaging relaxation techniques (like mindfulness practice) rather than passive ones (like scrolling on your phone).
- Frequently check in with yourself to assess your stress levels.
- Set boundaries to balance the pressures of the JHB and your regular responsibilities. Take a break when necessary.
- Regularly participate in enjoyable and meaningful activities.
- Stay connected with friends and loved ones.
- Develop relationships with peers/colleagues for mutual support.

AS A GROUP

- Ask for and offer support when it is needed.

- Highlight each other's strengths.
- Make time to check in with each other about how you are feeling in-between hearings. Talk about your hopes and fears.
- Prepare for hearings by discussing each other's needs and how you can best support one another.
- Debrief after hearings by talking about what went well and what you wish you could have done differently.
- Share materials and resources you find helpful with each other.

EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Strengths reflection

In order to help you find out and talk about what your strengths are, RICJ can provide access to the CliftonStrengths assessment. Share your top strengths with the group to acknowledge and appreciate the different skills everyone brings. Discuss ways to best utilize each other's strengths.

Mindfulness practice

Mindfulness is an active relaxation technique that involves the practice of focusing your attention on the present moment to increase internal and external awareness through your senses. Meditation is a well known form of mindfulness in which the breath is used to help increase presence. However, any intentional act of trying to stay present, such as making an effort to notice your surroundings more than usual, can be considered mindfulness.

Progressive muscle relaxation

This activity involves focusing attention on tensing and then relaxing the muscles in different parts of your body to bring more awareness to your physical sensations. Start with your head or toes. Tense your muscles for about five seconds and then relax for 30 seconds before repeating with another group of muscles, working your way up or down the body.

Other self-care activities:

- Reading a book
- Making a list of gratitudes
- Playing a game with a friend
- Talking to a therapist
- Going for a walk
- Limiting screen time
- Cooking your favorite meal
- Doing a guided meditation

CONNECTING TO SERVICES

TIDES FAMILY SERVICES

Tides Family Services operates 24/7 community-based programs for youth and families with six locations in RI. They provide diversion programs, educational supports, and clinical programs like Children’s Mobile Crisis Response and Functional Family Therapy, all with a restorative justice focus. RICJ is partnered with Tides for a project funded by USDOE to provide case management services to three urban JHBs.



Phone: (401) 822-1360 **Email:** contactus@tidesfs.org

FAMILY CARE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (FCCPs)

FCCPs are regionalized community agencies throughout RI that provide wraparound services for youth who are at risk of DCYF involvement, including the juvenile justice system, and/or meet criteria for a mental health diagnosis. While FCCPs are partly funded by DCYF, they are independent agencies. Receiving services from FCCPs does NOT mean youth and families will become involved with the legal system in any capacity.

West Urban Core

FAMILY SERVICE OF
RHODE ISLAND
Phone: (401) 519-2280

Cranston, Providence

East Urban Core

COMMUNITIES FOR PEOPLE
Phone: (833) 322-7123

Central Falls, E. Providence, Pawtucket

East Bay

CHILD & FAMILY
Phone: (401) 848-4124

Barrington, Bristol, Jamestown, Little
Compton, Middletown, Newport,
Portsmouth, Tiverton, Warren

Washington Kent

TRI-COUNTY COMMUNITY
ACTION AGENCY
Phone: (866) 840-6532

Charlestown, Coventry, E. Greenwich, Exeter,
Hopkinton, Narragansett, New Shoreham, N.
Kingstown, Richmond, S. Kingstown, Warwick,
W. Greenwich, W. Warwick, Westerly

Northern RI

COMMUNITY CARE ALLIANCE
Phone: (401) 235-7252

Burrillville, Cumberland, Foster,
Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, N.
Providence, N. Smithfield, Scituate,
Smithfield, Woonsocket

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS (CMHCs)

For youth and families with or without insurance, there are private nonprofit licensed CMHCs that offer affordable mental health services in RI.

<p>COMMUNITY CARE ALLIANCE Phone: (401) 235-7410</p>	<p>NEWPORT MENTAL HEALTH Phone: (401) 846-1213</p>
<p>EAST BAY COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM Phone: (401) 246-1195</p>	<p>THE PROVIDENCE CENTER Phone: (401) 276-4020</p>
<p>GATEWAY HEALTHCARE Phone: (401) 729-8701</p>	<p>THRIVE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH Phone: (401) 691-6000</p>

SPECIALIZED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

This is an incomplete list of organizations that provide services for youth with special circumstances. No insurance is required.

Organization	Services	Location	Phone
Interfaith Counseling Center RI	Spirituality-sensitive counseling & support for people of any faith.	1520 Broad St, Providence, RI 02905	(401) 461-5234
FRIENDS WAY	Bereavement center that provides peer support for youth & families.	765 W Shore Rd, Warwick, RI 02889	(401) 921-0980
Youth Pride RI	Individual counseling, peer support & youth programming for LGBTQ+ teens.	743 Westminster St, Providence, RI 02903	(401) 421-5626
Jim Gillen Teen Center	Recovery coaching, peer support & youth programming.	1280 North Main St, Providence, RI 02904	(401) 632-4077

MORE RESOURCES

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID (YMHFA)

YMHFA is a free training about how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges. Scan the code to find a course near you.



NATIONAL

If you are seeking general information about mental health:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
[nami.org](https://www.nami.org)
- Mental Health America (MHA)
[mhanational.org](https://www.mhanational.org)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
[samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
[nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov)
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
[cdc.gov/mentalhealth](https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth)

STATEWIDE

If you are seeking local resources and support for mental health:

- NAMI Rhode Island (NAMI RI)
[namirhodeisland.org](https://www.namirhodeisland.org)
- Mental Health Association of Rhode Island (MHA RI)
[mhari.org](https://www.mhari.org)
- Parent Support Network of Rhode Island (PSN RI)
[psnri.org](https://www.psnri.org)
- Rhode Island Regional Coalitions
[riprevention.org](https://www.riprevention.org)

RICJ can also help provide resources, including access to the Unite RI network, as well as peer support. Contact us for more information.

REFERENCES



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