



Working Together in the Pandemic: Tips for Front-Line Juvenile Justice Staff

Co-workers are a vital source of mutual support for juvenile justice staff, especially in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. By working together effectively, you, along with your colleagues, achieve several crucial goals of your facility or agency, including:

- 1 Increasing the safety of youth and everyone at your work setting
- 2 Serving as role models for youth on making and keeping relationships strong
- 3 Increasing the morale and sense of trust and cohesion of your team
- 4 Setting an example of teamwork for your administrators and organization
- 5 Making sure every staff member feels supported by their co-workers
- 6 Making the unavoidable stress of the work and the crisis manageable for all staff
- 7 Reducing burnout, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue of all staff
- 8 Increasing the positive recognition and appreciation for every staff member

In crises, relationships between co-workers can become frayed or even conflictual, which leads to lower morale, less effective performance, a loss of trust, and less safety. Finding constructive ways to restore an atmosphere of mutual cooperation, respect, and trust is essential in all juvenile justice work, but especially in times such as this pandemic. These ways may include:

- When disagreements over procedures or ways of interacting with and supervising youth occur, it is essential that co-workers talk it out with respect and agree on how to handle the work and support one another.
- When frustrations or worries about the work or the work environment lead to impatience, arguments, or a lack of cooperation amongst co-workers, it is essential for each staff person to step back and reset so that everyone is able to come together as a team.
- When critical incidents such as fights or rule violations by youth undermine co-worker cooperation and morale, and pit colleagues against one another, it is crucial to address these incidents with skilled facilitators to restore mutual trust.
- When team leaders and supervisors identify gaps or challenges in working together that occur during crises, they set a critical example and help co-workers regain their mutual support for and from one another.

Questions to Consider to Keep Your Work Team Strong

- What are you doing to ensure your own and your co-workers' safety every day?
- If you or your co-workers' safety is uncertain, for example, you can't socially distance or don't have enough safety supplies or equipment on your unit, how can you develop or add to the best plan with the input of all your co-workers?
- When youth behave in problematic or even potentially unsafe ways, how do you and your co-workers work together to support each other while addressing the youth's actions?
- When a critical incident involving a threat to youth's or staff's safety occurs, how do you and co-workers support each other?
- When a critical incident involving the illness, injury, or death of a youth or co-worker occurs, how do you and co-workers support each other?
- What are you doing to be a role model for the youth you're working with? Are you actively showing respect, appreciation, and support to your co-workers or supervisees?

Do's and Don'ts for Working as a Team in Times of Crisis

DO *carefully track current or imminent stressors, dangers, or other safety risks that you and your co-workers are facing or confronted with, and work together to find ways to minimize the harm to all members of the work team.*

DON'T assume that stressors or safety risks are so frequent or unavoidable that there is no way to find ways to minimize the harm to you and your co-workers.

DO *identify natural ways to express your appreciation and respect for your co-workers, especially when you see them do something that makes everyone safer or depicts being a role model for courage, dedication, skill, and compassion.*

DON'T assume that work relationships are automatically supportive or overlook opportunities to show your co-workers your respect and appreciation for them and the contributions they make.

DO *take time to discuss with your co-workers when a critical incident such as violence, injury, illness, or death occurs so that they know you are there for them and they are there for you.*

DON'T assume that debriefing is a waste of time or optional. Your ability to manage stress and to stay healthy and effective in times of crisis depends on your team's support, appreciation, and respect for one another.

DO *maintain an open line of communication with supervisors and administrators so that you can be confident that your team's safety, well-being, and contributions are a priority.*

DON'T assume that supervisors or administrators care only about themselves in a crisis. An "us-versus-them" mentality undermines confidence and the sense of being in this together.



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