

## Improving Linkage between Mental Health and Juvenile Justice

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Despite recent compelling evidence of high rates of mental disorder and suicide risk in justice system youth, application of evidence-based practices for screening, assessment, and linkage with the mental health service sector has been slow. The combined effect of the juvenile justice system's complex and fragmented nature, its low resources, and the social stigma of the youth it serves, make adoption of efficient and effective practices challenging and essential. We developed a manualized psychoeducational intervention to increase Probation Officers and community mental health providers' linkage and communication. Coupled with training for Probation gatekeepers in the use of standardized diagnostic screening for youth in their care, Project Connect employs a 2-day interactive format, targets local practices and service delivery systems, and is grounded in best practices for screening and assessment. We present here the results of a county-wide application, including information on feasibility, palatability, and changes in justice staff mental health knowledge, self-efficacy, and referral practices. Project Connect is likely to empower justice gatekeepers as they interact with mental health providers.

**Learning Objective(s):** At the conclusion of this presentation, participants should be able to:

1. Describe the content of existing standards for the assessment and management of suicide risk for youth in juvenile justice settings, as well as discuss their limitations.
2. Describe the components of Project Connect, a psychoeducational training to promote linkage and communication between probation officers and community mental health providers that is being utilized as a component of NYS Youth Suicide Prevention Program.
3. Summarize Project Connect evaluation findings on justice staff's mental health knowledge, self-efficacy, and referral practices, and the linkage and communication between probation officers and mental health linkage and community mental health providers.

