

Maximizing the Impact of Juvenile Justice Interventions: The Importance of Risk/Needs Assessment

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Key Points: Screening vs. Assessment

Screening

- Short; used with every youth in an intake-type setting
- Identifies youths who might have the characteristic in question (e.g., mental health problem)
- *Sorts youth into categories, to...*
 - ▣ Provide need for immediate attention (detention)
 - ▣ Help decide need for a more individualized assessment

Assessment

- Follow-up on youth “screened in” to make decisions about individualized need for interventions

Key Points

- Screening tools and assessment instruments were designed for use with *specific* populations for *specific* purposes
- A “one size fits all” tool does not exist
- The appropriate tool depends on the decision point
- Two types of risk tools: Brief risk assessment vs. comprehensive risk assessment tools
- Risk assessment \neq mental health assessment

What is a Risk Assessment Tool?

- A *risk for reoffending assessment tool* is an instrument developed to help answer the question: “Is this youth at relatively low or relatively high risk for reoffending?”
- Some, but not all, risk assessment tools also address what is causing the youth to be at low or relatively high risk for reoffending (in other words, some identify *crime-producing needs*)

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND IMPORTANCE OF RISK ASSESSMENT



Research Evidence: Guiding Principles

There is emerging consensus on characteristics of effective programming for young offenders:

- ❑ Punitive sanctions **do not** have a significant effect on re-offending (Gatti et al., 2009).
- ❑ Most low-risk youth are unlikely to re-offend even if there is no intervention (Lipsey, 2009). But mixing them with high risk youth can make them worse.
- ❑ When services are **matched** to youth's "crime-producing" (criminogenic) needs, the lower the chance of repeat offending.
- ❑ The goal is to have the right services for the right youth.

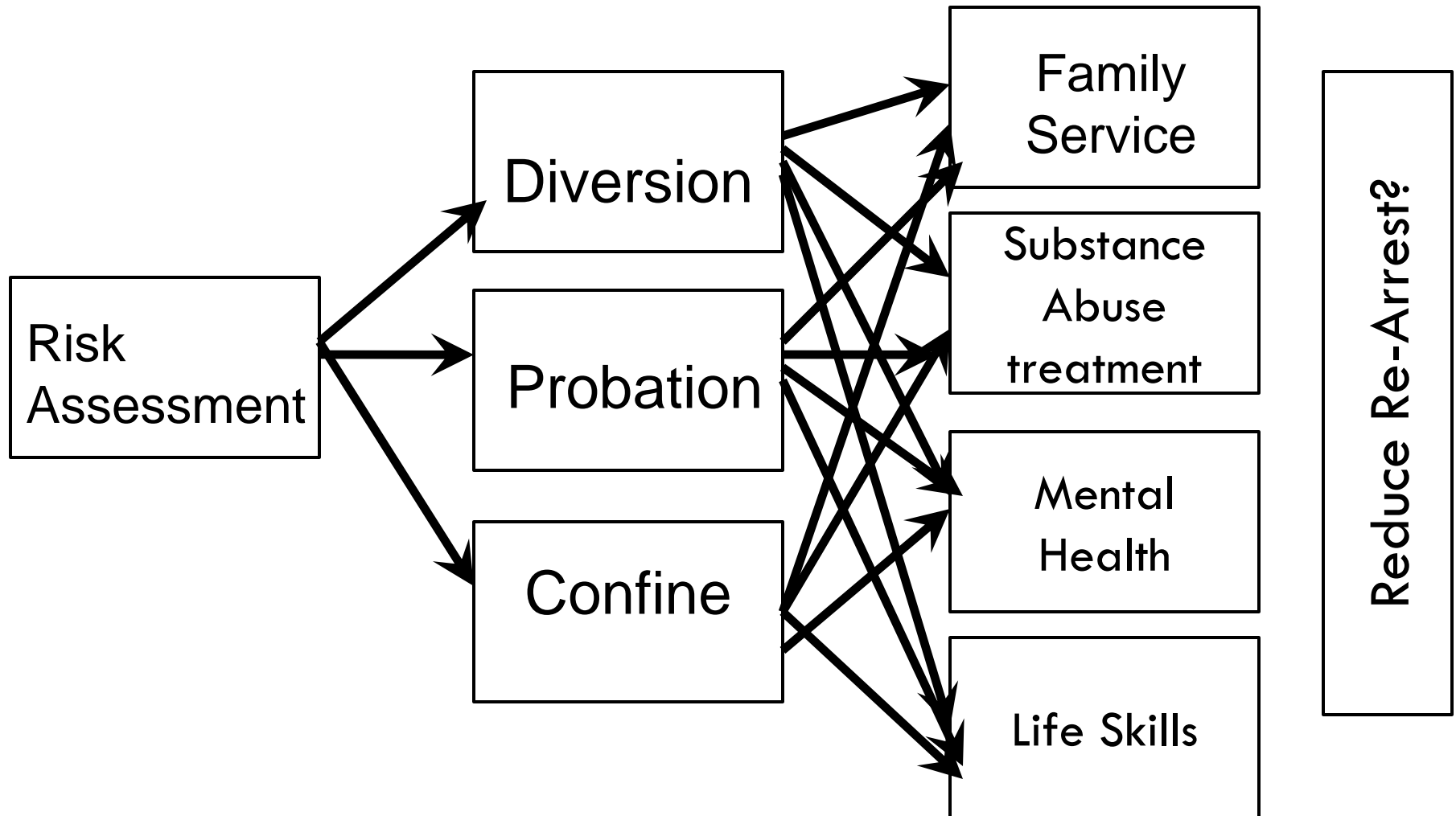
Results of Cost/Benefit Research: Benefits Per Dollar Invested

- **For every \$1.00 spent on the following services, you save:**
 - Functional Family Therapy: \$28.34
 - Multisystemic Family Therapy: \$28.81
 - Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care: \$43.70
 - Adolescent Diversion Project: \$24.92
 - Juvenile Boot Camps: \$0.81
 - Scared Straight: **-\$477.75** (NET LOSS)

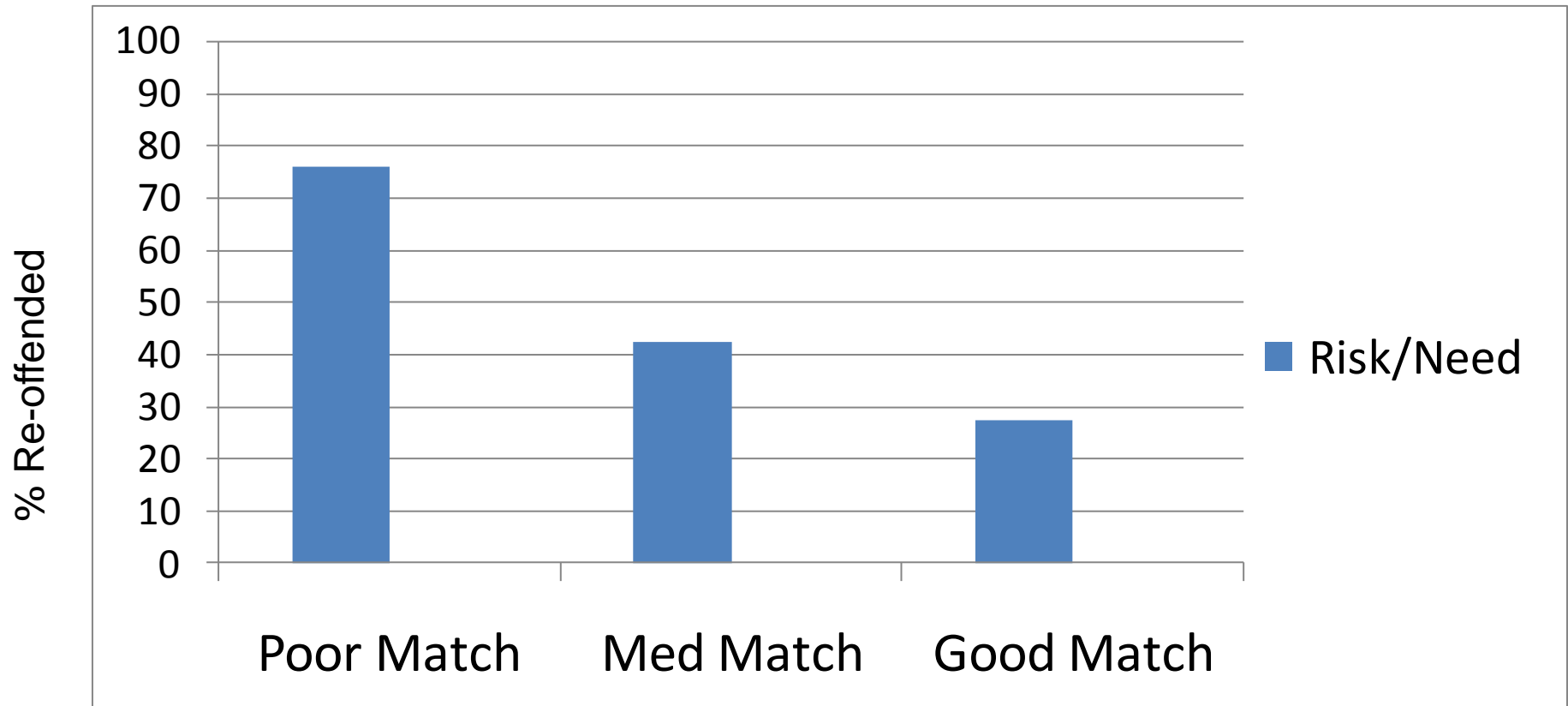
The First Step is Valid Identification

- Risk assessment, if properly implemented, can identify youth at highest risk for re-offending and *guide intervention* efforts that could:
 - *Prevent re-offending*
 - *Reduce risk of future harm* among youth who have recently engaged in harmful aggressive behavior
 - *Reduce costs* to victims, service providers, and the juvenile justice system
- **Intervention** includes:
 - Placement/disposition decisions
 - Referral to appropriate services/programs
 - Monitoring/supervision level

Matching the Right Youth to the Right Interventions and Services

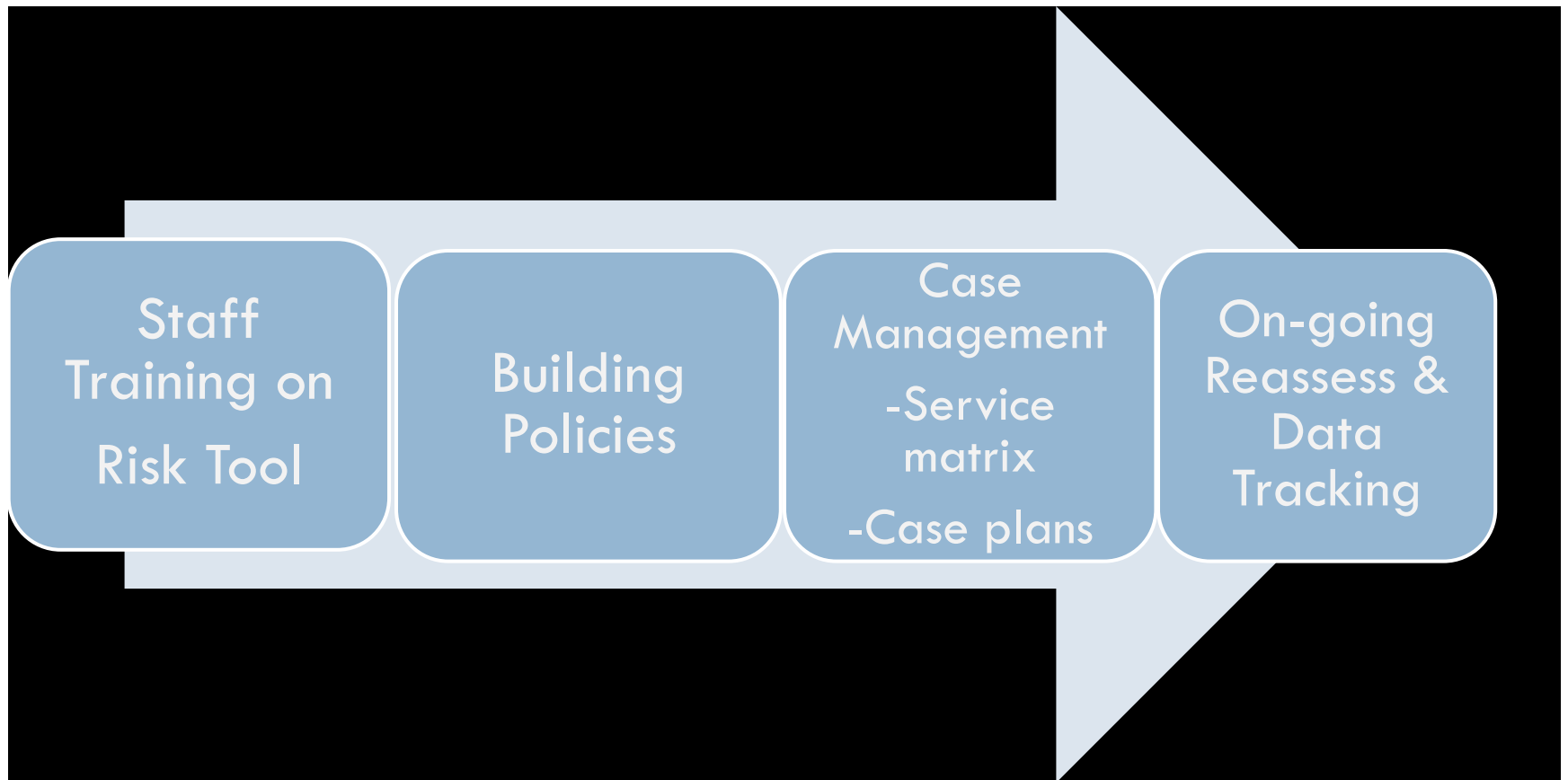


Potential for Case Management If Assessment is Implemented Properly (Vieira et al., 2009)



Match based on # of Services Given in Response to a Youth's Criminogenic Needs

The Implementation Process is Crucial



Cost-Savings

- Proper implementation of a risk assessment can save costs by:
 - ▣ Reducing the number of costly assessments when they are not warranted,
 - ▣ Not recommending services for youth who **do not** need them,
 - ▣ Reducing costly out-of-home placement when it is unnecessary for addressing the risks and needs of the youth, and
 - ▣ Guiding case plans to reduce chances of re-offending.

IMPORTANT RISK ASSESSMENT CONCEPTS



Some Terms

- **Risk:** likelihood of future offending
- **Risk factor:** anything that increases the probability that a person will re-offend:
 - Static Risk Factors – do not change
 - Dynamic Risk Factors (criminogenic *needs*) – changeable, targets for services and intervention
- **Protective factor or strength:** decreases the potential harmful effect of a risk factor
- **Responsivity factor:** characteristics of the individual that can affect intervention success

Static Risk Factors

History of Antisocial Behavior

- ▣ Early Onset History of violence
- ▣ Early Onset History of arrests
- ▣ Past antisocial and official delinquent behavior
- ▣ Onset of Substance Use

Criminogenic Need/Dynamic Risk Factors

Personality/Attitude – (Largest Effects)

- ▣ Personality traits – Lacks Remorse, Lacks Empathy, CD/ODD
- ▣ Attention Deficit
- ▣ Impulsivity/Risk-Taking
- ▣ Antisocial Attitudes

Family Factors

- ▣ Inconsistent discipline – (large effect)
- ▣ Antisocial/criminal parents

Criminogenic Need Factors cont.



Substance Abuse

- ▣ If it has a direct effect on their criminal activity and is outside of the norm for adolescence

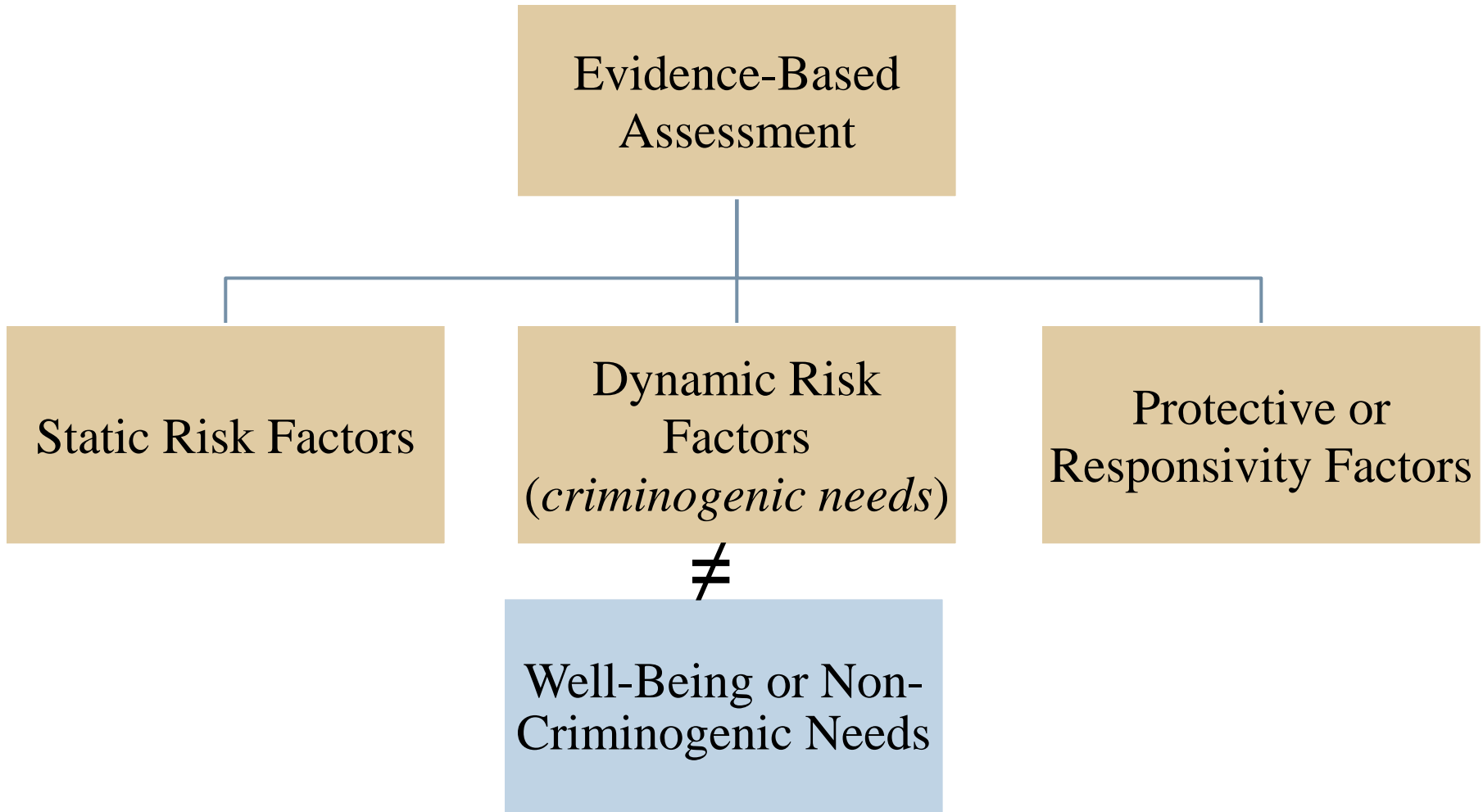
Poor School/Work Achievement

Antisocial Peers

Other Variables

- ▣ Past Intervention Failures, Availability of Services
- ▣ Parental Involvement

Elements of a Comprehensive Risk for Re-Offending Assessment



IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTAL CONCEPTS

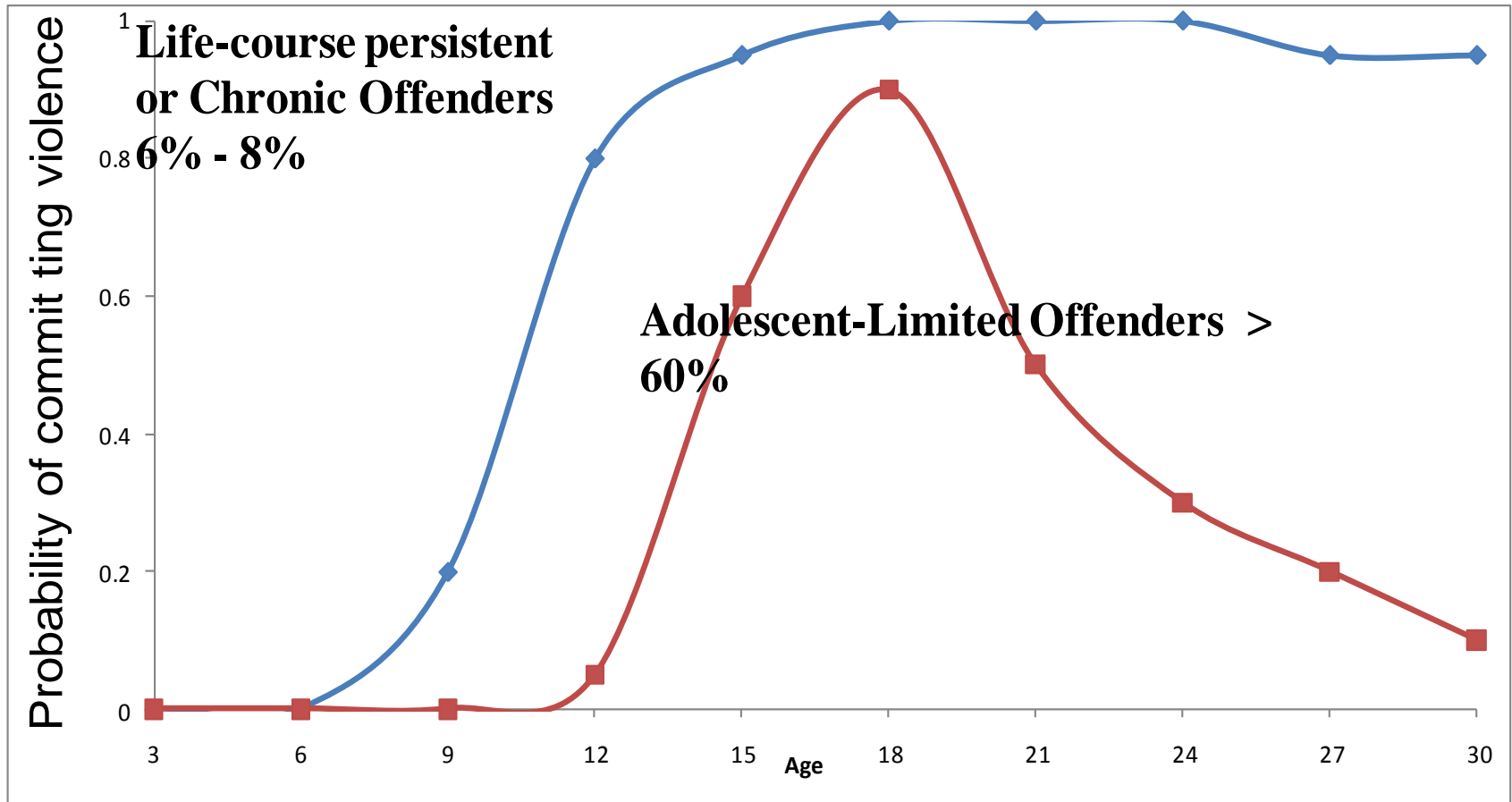


General Principles of Risk in Youth

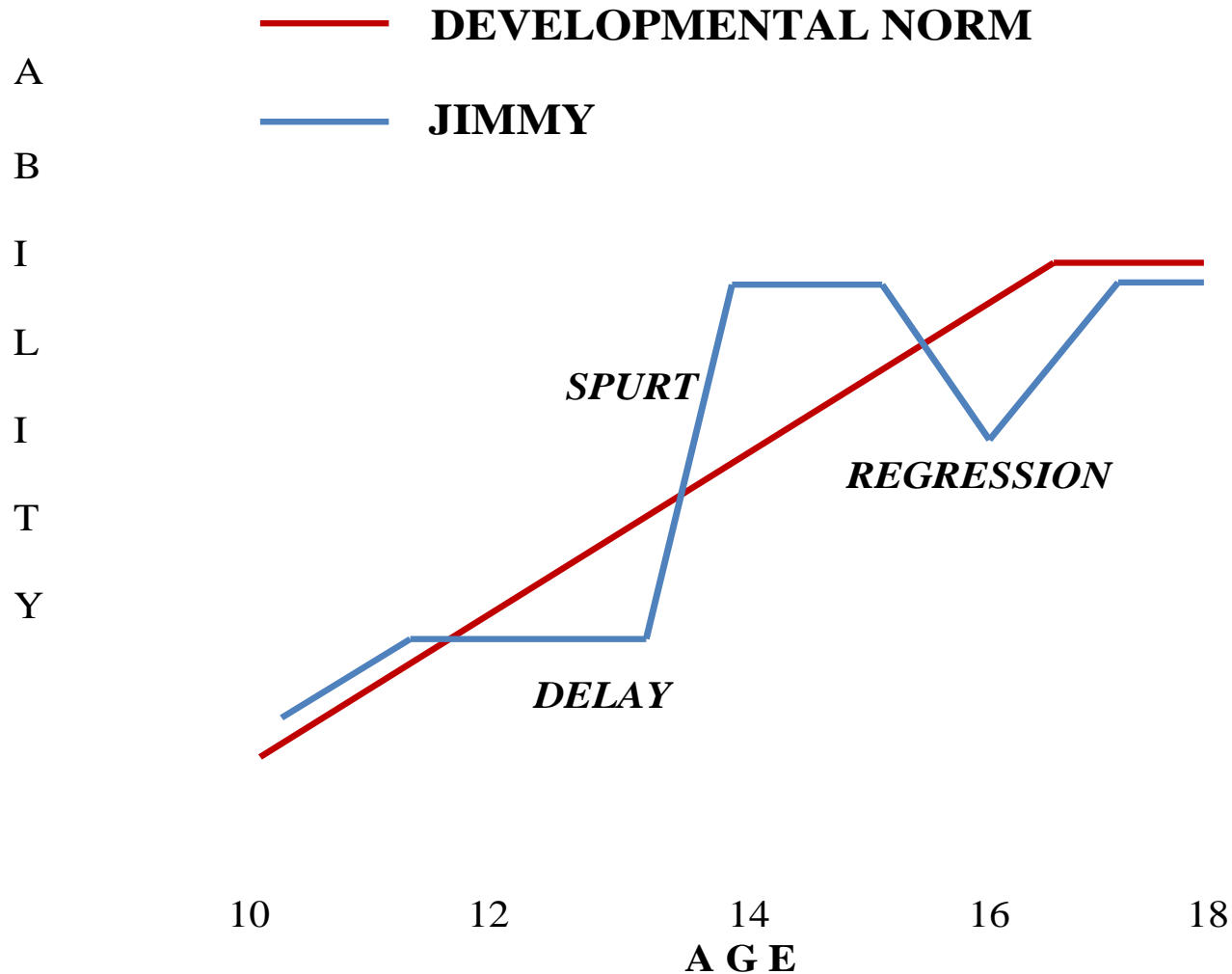
1. Aggression and delinquent activity are **near normative**
 - Roughly 6 in 10 males have a juvenile court record
 - Roughly 1 in 10 males have arrests for violent offenses
 - Self-reported aggression closer to 1 in 4 adolescent males
2. Risk can **change** across adolescence
3. Violent and delinquent behavior will **desist** for most youths during late adolescence/early adulthood

Offending Desists for Most Male Adolescents

(Reference group = Community males; Farrington, 1995; Loeber et al., 1991 Moffitt, 1993, Moffitt & Caspi, 2001)



Development Does Not Proceed Evenly Across Adolescence



Application of Developmental Concepts

- For JJ personnel and courts, these developmental facts make estimates of risk of future violence more difficult...
 - ▣ Risk assessments should be seen as having limited “shelf-life” for most youths (Grisso, 2004)
 - ▣ Tools should use a variety of evidence-based risk factors
 - ▣ Tools should include risk factors capable of change
 - ▣ Re-assessment is essential

HOW TO SELECT A RISK ASSESSMENT

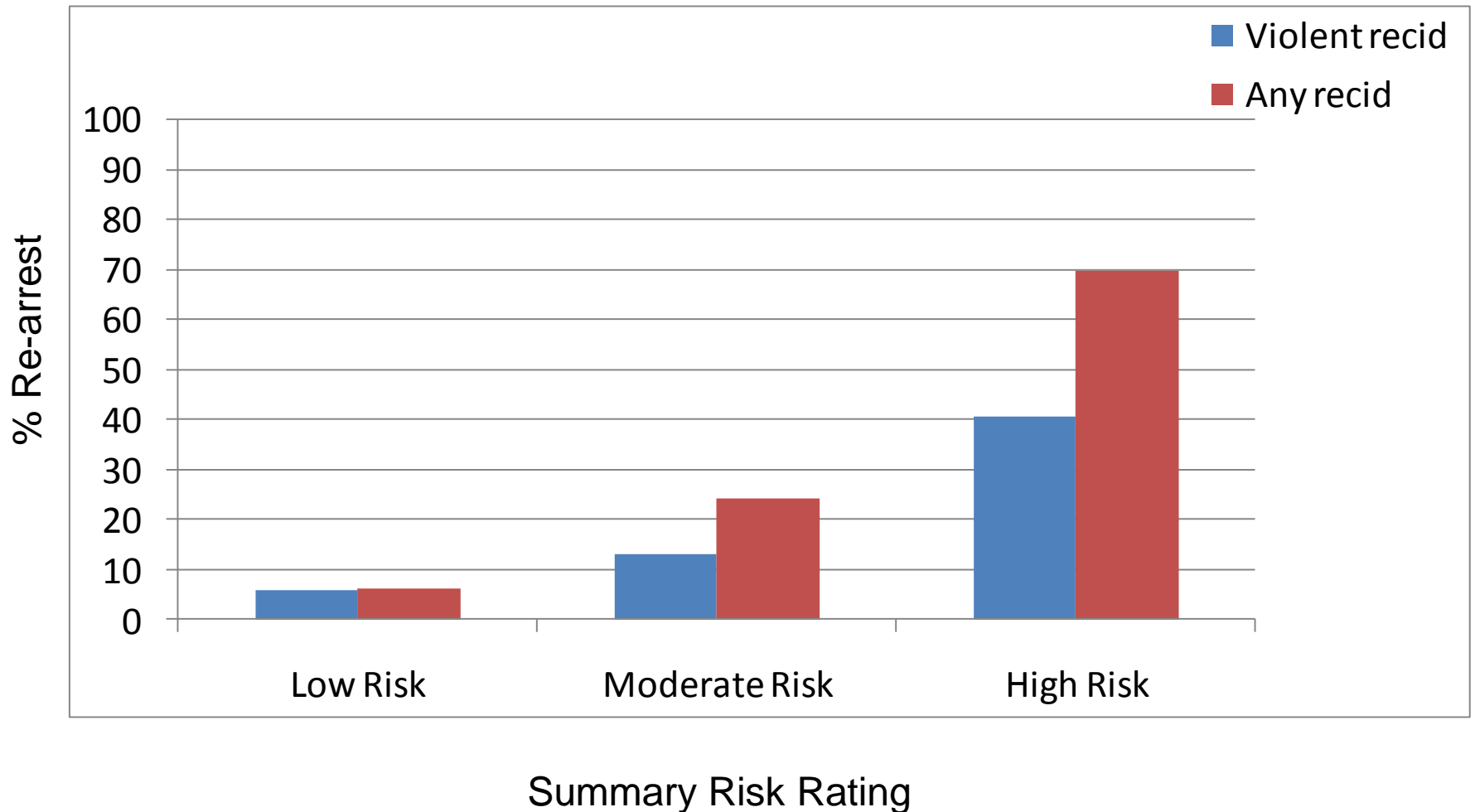


How to Pick an Evidence-Based Risk Assessment Tool (Vincent et al., 2009)

- Purports to assess “risk” for re-offending
- Has a test manual
- Was developed for, or validated on, juvenile justice youth in the right setting
- Is feasible
- Permits re-assessment
- Demonstrates reliability - two independent raters would reach similar conclusions
- Demonstrates a strong relation to re-offending (predictive validity)

Illustration of Predictive Validity for Re-offending

(SAVRY; Abramowitz & Gretton, 2002)



More About Validity

- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Age
- Setting
 - ▣ Pre-adjudication
 - ▣ Probation
 - ▣ Institutional

Evidence-Based or Promising Comprehensive Risk Assessment Tools for Use Post-Adjudication

- **SAVRY** (Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth): Violence and general re-offending for ages 12-17.
- **YLS/CMI** (Youth Level of Services/Case Management Inventory): General re-offending for ages 12 – 17.
- **RRC** (Risk and Resiliency Checklist, aka SDRRC or LARRC): General re-offending.
- **WSJCA (aka YASI or PACT)**: (Washington State Juvenile Court Assessment): General re-offending. Contains a pre-screen and an assessment.

What Risk Assessments Do NOT Do

- NOT prescriptive
- NOT appropriate for identifying risk for sexual offending
- NOT mental health assessments
 - ▣ They also do not identify potential mental health problems in need of an assessment
- Typically do NOT include **items** that are unrelated to future offending, like “well-being needs” (e.g., special education, depression, trauma)

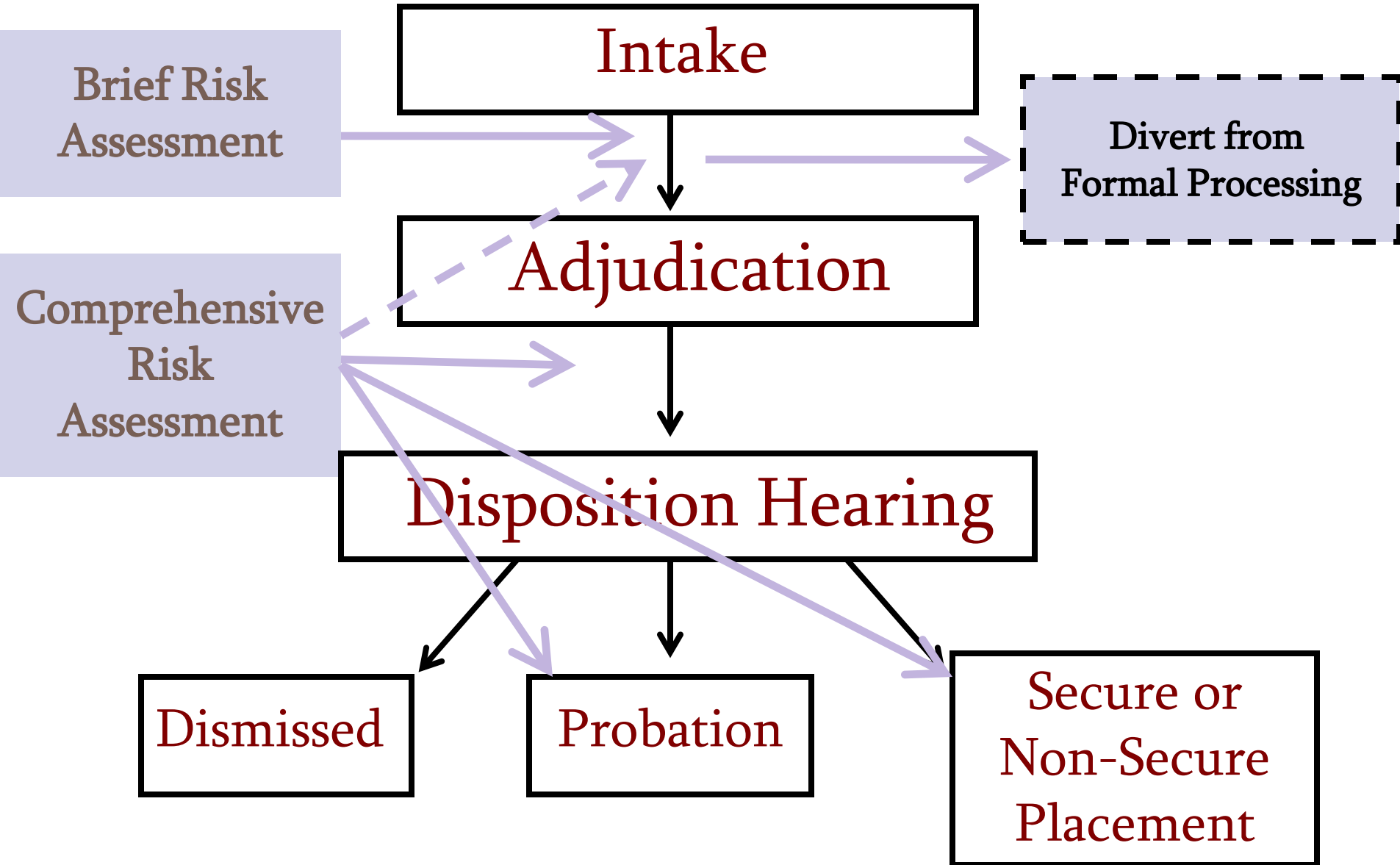
SOME POINTS ABOUT
IMPLEMENTATION:
RISK FOR RE-OFFENDING
VS. MENTAL HEALTH



Selection of the Risk Assessment is Dependent on the JJ Decision Point

- Pre-adjudication:
 - ▣ Brief Risk Assessment Tool
 - ▣ Comprehensive Risk Assessment not recommended without information-sharing agreements in place – potential for self-incrimination and risk to validity
- Post-adjudication/Pre-disposition
 - ▣ Ideal use for comprehensive risk assessment
- Post-disposition
 - ▣ Essential Use for comprehensive tool at admission and discharge
- Re-entry or aftercare

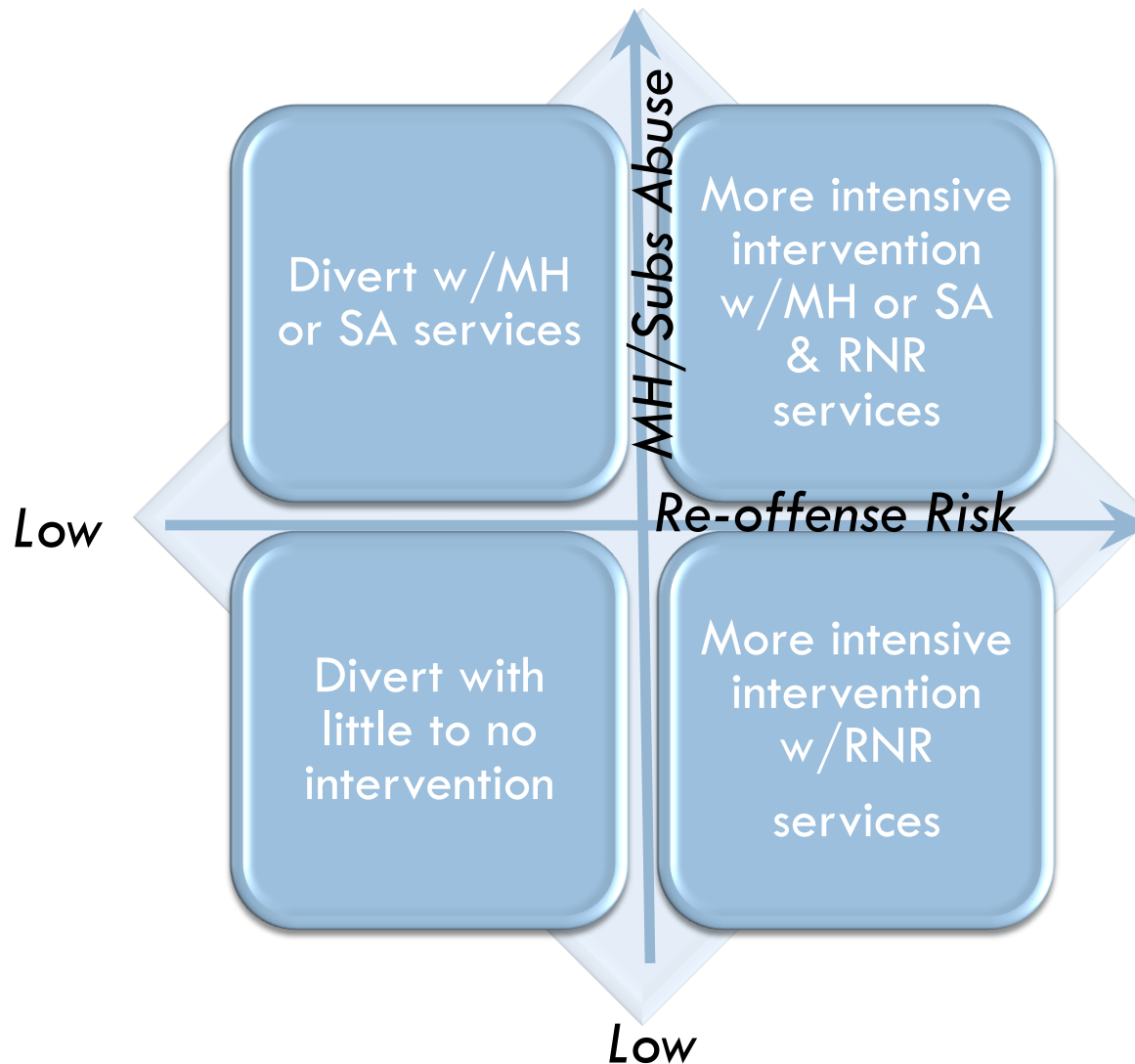
Relevant Assessment Points



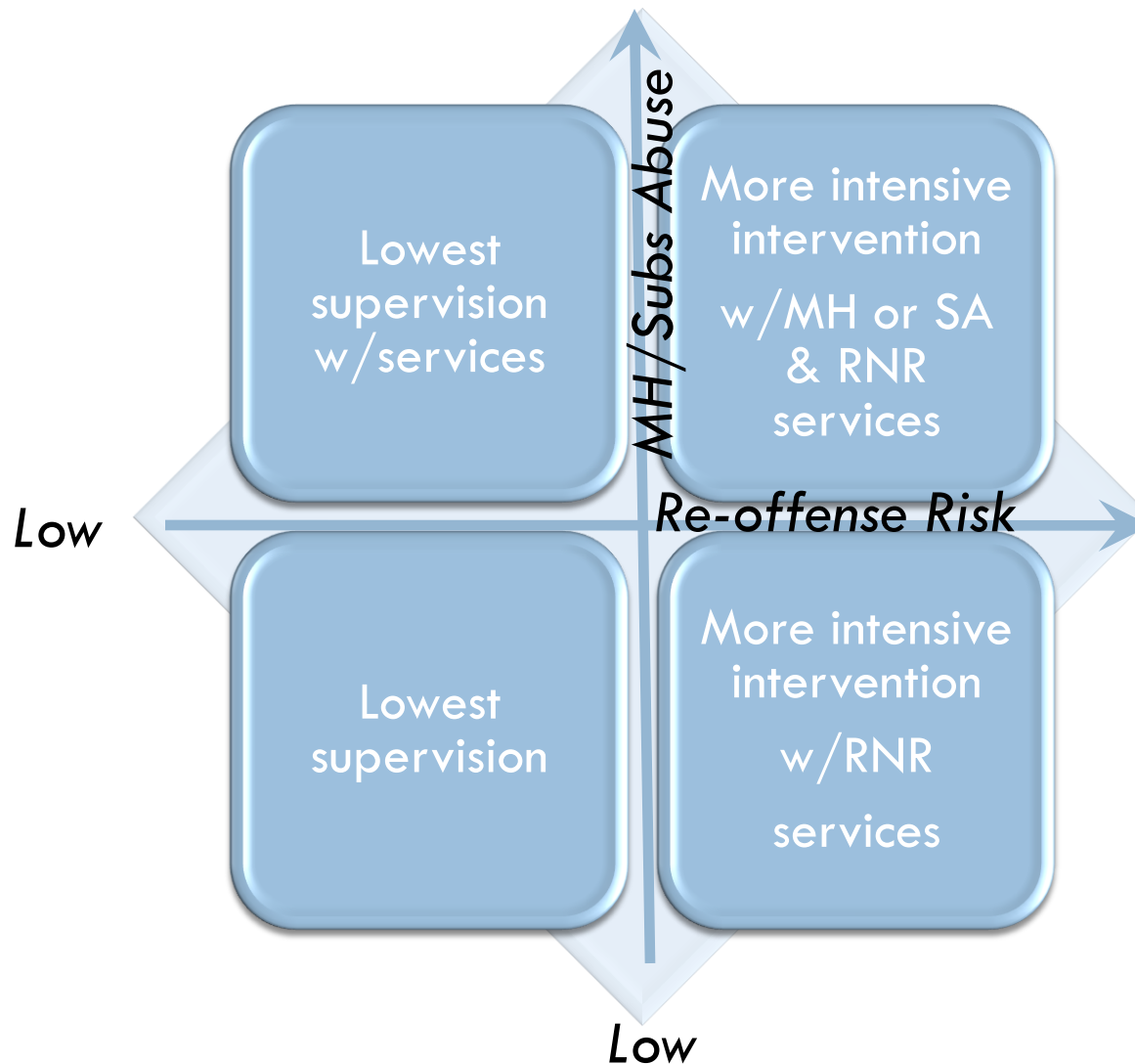
Screening Tools that May Accompany Risk Assessment

- Mental Health Screening
 - MAYSI-2
- Trauma
 - TSCC
 - UCLA PTSD
- Substance Abuse Screening
 - GAIN-SS
 - SASSI
- Needs Screening (well-being needs)
 - JIFF

Decision-making Model



Decision-making Model if Diversion not an Option



Essential Steps of Implementation

- Clear policy
- Staff training and re-training
- Appropriate case plan format
- System for selecting service referrals
- Gathering and reporting data is essential to track:
 - ▣ Service provider & justice system accountability
 - ▣ Resource allocation
 - ▣ Youth and department progress

Summary: Benefits of Comprehensive Risk Assessments

- The “best” risk assessment tool for you depends on a variety of factors
- Connecting youth to the appropriate interventions that target ONLY specific needs at the proper intensity may lead to:
 - ▣ Improved chance of reducing risk = reducing re-offending
 - ▣ Better use of services = improved youth functioning
 - ▣ Cost-Savings
- Gathering and reporting data is key
- **Caveat: The goals are unlikely to be attained without appropriate implementation**