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## PREPARING DETAINED JUVENILES FOR RE-ENTRY

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### Conflict Management Training and Mediation in Cook County's Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

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RESOLUTION SYSTEMS INSTITUTE | ABOUTRSI.ORG

AUGUST 2021



With Support From:



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Founded on the premise that collecting and disseminating reliable information about court ADR can raise the quality of court ADR, RSI has assisted state and federal courts with the design, administration, monitoring, and evaluation of mediation programs, as well as training ADR neutrals. Courts and individuals across the country call on RSI for advice and make use of RSI's [Court ADR Resource Center](#).

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## INTRODUCTION

Juvenile incarceration interrupts time spent at school and in the community and can result in a greater likelihood of dropping out completely when the juvenile is released. To address these issues, the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) developed a program for juveniles residing in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) who are preparing to re-enter their communities after detention. The program had two elements: conflict management training and mediation. By participating in conflict training and mediation before release, juveniles will be better prepared to return to the community.

To determine whether the program was achieving its goals, CCR hired Resolution Systems Institute to conduct an evaluation of the first ten months of the program, from September 2020 through June 2021. The evaluation used surveys to collect feedback on the trainings and to gain insight into whether the juveniles believed they had gained anything from the material. Participant surveys and mediator reports were created to assess the participants' experience with mediation, to better understand what was being discussed in mediation and to determine mediation outcomes.

The evaluation revealed that the majority of juveniles who attended the trainings learned new conflict management skills and more constructive ways to interact with others. Mediation, though rare, encouraged understanding between the parties and resulted in partial settlement.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING

The purpose of the three trainings was to teach juveniles how to identify conflict and develop skills to manage it. With this knowledge, they might return to their communities with the tools to respond more positively to conflict.

The JTDC is divided into pods. Due to Covid-19 protocols, juvenile residents exclusively spent time with the members of their pod. Each pod was trained separately as a cohort. The trainings took place one hour each Friday for three weeks. Each training covered a different topic:

- Personal conflict styles (Training 1)
- Emotional triggers and flooding (Training 2)
- Causes of conflict (Training 3)

If one of these trainings could not take place, the fourth Friday was reserved as a backup day. If the three trainings had already been completed, the pod voted on whether to have a wrap up session or a free period. Most pods selected the free period.

The program coordinator conducted all trainings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the trainings during the evaluation period took place via Zoom, with the training cohort in a room viewing one large screen.

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During the program’s first year, the training with the first cohort took place in September 2020. The last cohort’s training concluded in May 2021. A total of 86 juveniles attended the trainings. At the time this evaluation was written, trainings were set to start again in September 2021.

### Surveys

At the end of each training, the juveniles were asked three questions:

1. Did training help you ... (Scale: Not at all, a little, somewhat, a lot)
  - understand your conflict style? (Training 1)
  - understand better how to deal with conflict? (Training 2)
  - learn new skills to manage conflict? (Training 3)
2. What new idea did you learn from training? (open response)
3. Please rate today’s training (Scale: 1 to 5 stars)

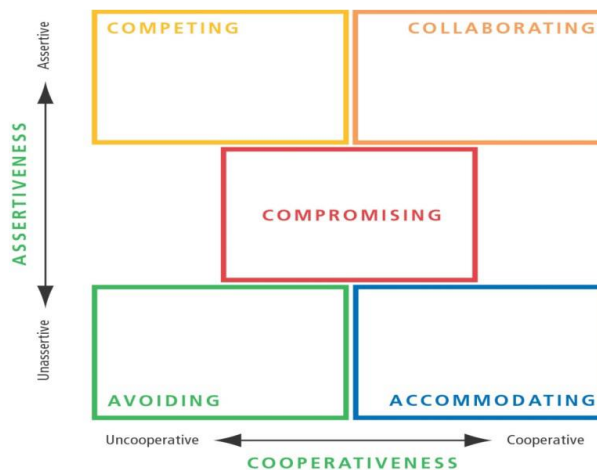
The juveniles’ responses indicate that they in large part liked the trainings and believed each of the trainings helped them understand something new about conflict management. The mean number of stars given to all three trainings was 3.78 out of 5. The mean helpfulness rating for all three trainings was 2.98 out of 4.

### Findings

#### **Training 1: Conflict Management Styles**

This training used the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument as a guide to discussing the many ways in which people approach conflict, with an emphasis on the benefits of collaborating.

#### **Thomas-Kilmann Mode Instrument: Conflict Management Styles**



For this session, 43 juveniles completed a survey. They gave the training a moderately high rating, with a mean rating of 3.63 of 5 and 63% giving it 4 or 5 stars.

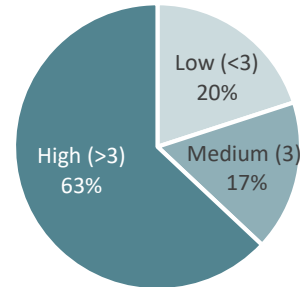


Most of the surveyed juveniles had a learning experience from the training, with 74%<sup>1</sup> saying the training helped them somewhat or a lot to understand their conflict style.

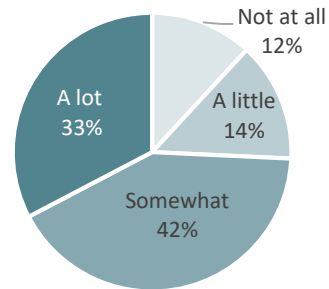
In the post-training survey for this session, 36 juveniles wrote comments. In response to what they learned, 17 of the juveniles indicated that they learned new ways of approaching conflict. Their comments included:

- “Learn everything don't got to be fighting just collaborating”
- “Instead of being confrontational I can try to be compromising”
- “talking stuff out before doing a conflict”
- “I learn not to run from the problem and to always be head up.”
- “How to handle a conflict situation without anger and fighting”
- “I learned how to use different coping skills when I am angry or finna get into an argument”

### Training 1 - Ratings



### Training 1 - Helped Me Learn



Twelve others had more general comments, saying they learned about conflict or about conflict styles. Representative comments are:

- “Different styles to resolve conflict or raise conflict”
- “Everyone has a different response with handling a resolutions.”
- “That conflict isn't the only way to solve promblems”
- “you don't always get your way”

Seven said they did not learn anything.

### Training 2: Emotional Triggers and Flooding

Through this training, the juveniles learned about emotional triggers that lead to stress responses and color the way people view others and react to a situation. They also learned about what happens with emotional flooding and how to manage flooding in others.

For this training, 35 juveniles completed a survey. They gave the training a high rating, with an average score of 3.86 of 5 and 71% of the juveniles giving it 4 or 5 stars.

<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding, the pie chart shows 75%.



Survey responses indicate the juveniles believed they learned from this training, with 80% indicating the training helped them somewhat or a lot to understand better how to deal with conflict.

28 juveniles wrote comments. The most common theme was that they learned about their emotional triggers and/or how to control their anger, discussed by 14 juveniles.

Comments included:

- “I learned you can't always get mad and blow up if people trigger you. You got to keep calm.”
- “This program help people with theres trigger emotion and control them”
- “How to better react to emotional triggers”
- “I learned how to control myself”
- “learn how to hold anger”

Other comments included:

- “I learned about flooding, and how to deal with it in myself and others.”
- “It helped to open my eyes to learn new ways to deal with conflicts and tell me about the human brain.”
- “It helped me see what I can do in real life, lma do better next time.”

Five juveniles said they did not learn anything.

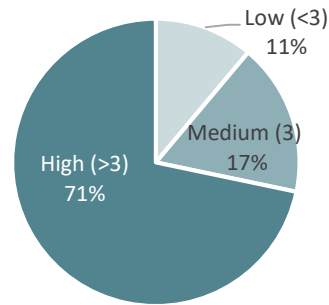
**Training 3: Causes of Conflict**

This training was designed to help juveniles identify areas where conflict occurs and learn strategies for managing those areas of conflict.

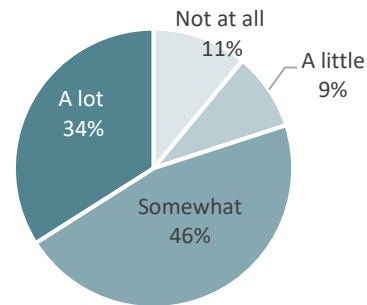
For this training, 29 juveniles completed the survey. They gave the training a high rating, with an average score of 3.89 of 5 and 64% of the juveniles giving it 4 or 5 stars. Half gave this training 5 stars.

The juveniles also indicated that the training was a learning experience, with 76% saying the training helped them somewhat or a lot to learn about how to manage conflict.

**Training 2 - Ratings**



**Training 2 - Helped Me Learn**

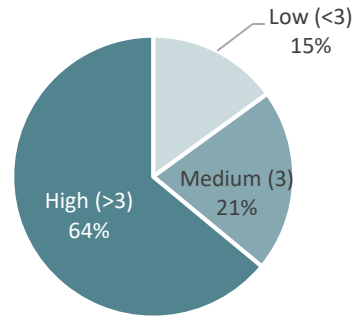




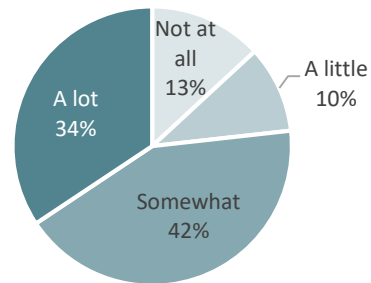
Of the 29 juveniles who completed the survey, 26 wrote comments about what they learned. Their comments were more varied for this training than for the previous two, with the most common idea being communication. Ten juveniles indicated they learned more about communicating with others. Their comments included:

- “That you don’t always have to fight or get angry and punch something there are other things you can do like talk about the situation or if you have coping skills use those cuz it could help.”
- “learning about how to deal with miscommunication”
- “I can talk to someone if I think they came off the wrong way instead of coming off disrespectful or in a bad way.”
- “I learned to try and talk something so it won't lead to violence”
- “I learned about miscommunication. It help experience something.”

**Training 3 - Ratings**



**Training 3 - Helped Me Learn**



Others comments about what they learned included:

- “How to be kool with my peers better”
- “I learn more ways how to understand how to controll my attitude when I'm not in the mood to talk to anybody.”
- “Different mindsets that people have.”
- “Sometimes things don't always go your way”
- “Conflict is not the reason to every problem”

Six said they did not learn anything, with one stating: “Most of the stuff I already knew. We just went over it.”

**MEDIATION**

During the evaluation period, mediation was offered to juveniles in each pod at the end of their training. When a juvenile requested mediation, the CCR Program Coordinator contacted the family member with whom the juvenile would like to mediate to obtain their consent to

mediate. Once both parties had consented, a date and time was determined, with input from JTDC staff that would have to coordinate the mediation on their end.

The mediation was conducted via Zoom. The juvenile was offered a private room at JTDC, with a caseworker sitting outside the door. The mediator and family member participated remotely and separately from one another.

The mediators were specially trained to conduct re-entry mediations. They had to complete JTDC's training requirements, including The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Training. PREA Training focuses on preventing, detecting, and eliminating sexual abuse of individuals in custody. Mediators also completed an advanced mediation skills training specific to working with residents of the JTDC.

During the mediation, the juvenile and family member had the opportunity to discuss issues surrounding the juvenile's return home, including both the juvenile's and the family member's behavior to each other, school attendance, the juvenile's activities outside of school, drug use and so forth.

If one of the parties did not show up for the mediation, the other party could agree to a one-party session. During this session, the mediator worked with the participants to determine what was important to them about their return home, identified needs and interests, and reality tested plans for moving forward.

### Findings

Four juveniles requested the opportunity to mediate. Two participated in mediation. One participated in a one-party session with the mediator when the family member did not show up for mediation. The fourth juvenile did not show up for their mediation. In that instance, the mediator held a one-party session with the juvenile's grandmother. The mediations took an hour and a half to two hours to complete. The one-party sessions took approximately one hour.

### **Outcomes**

The two mediations resulted in a partial settlement. During both mediations, the parties discussed the juveniles' behavior after returning home. In one, they also discussed school. In the other, the discussion included the juveniles' continued positive relationship with their grandmother.

School and behavior were discussed during the one-party session with the grandmother. There is no information on what was discussed during the other one-party session.

### **Surveys**

The juveniles indicated they had a good experience in mediation. Both indicated they were able to talk about what was important to them, that the mediator and the other party understood what was important to them, and that they understood better what was expected of them when they left JTDC. They also said the mediator treated them fairly and with respect. They



were both satisfied with the mediation. One of them said they learned “the importance of trust and understanding.”

The family members who mediated also had a good experience. They indicated they were able to talk about what was important to them, that the mediator and the juvenile understood what was important to them, and that the mediation helped them to understand the juvenile’s point of view. They also indicated that the mediation helped them to communicate their expectations to the juvenile. They both said the mediator treated them fairly and with respect. They were both satisfied with the mediation. One of them said they learned “not to be so judgmental with grandson, try to be a little more open minded.”

## CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

### Challenges

CCR’s big challenge with this program was the need to conduct it remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This not only affected training, but staff interactions and data collection.

Training via Zoom meant the trainer did not have the opportunity to have one-on-one interactions with the juveniles. These types of interactions often build rapport and strengthen ties between trainers and participants. It was also difficult to engage the juveniles during training when they were looking at a large screen rather than the trainer in person.

Training via Zoom also meant that juveniles had to request mediation in front of the others in their pod. This may have had a cooling effect on the juveniles’ interest in mediation. If the training had been done in person, the juveniles would have had the opportunity to request mediation with the trainer privately.

The measures JTDC put in place in response to the pandemic meant that CCR staff and JTDC staff communicated entirely by phone or email, making it hard to build relationships with the JTDC staff. This led to some miscommunications early on, particularly around the distribution of post-training surveys and their return to CCR. Due to the pandemic, a CCR staff member dropped off the paperwork for each pod prior to the first training. This included certificates of completion and post-training surveys, which JTDC staff distributed to the juveniles after each training. Initially, surveys were not distributed to the juveniles directly after the training. However, JTDC staff and CCR staff worked out protocols for distributing the surveys as the project continued.

Another issue with JTDC staff distributing the survey is that the juveniles’ responses were not confidential to staff. Staff collected the surveys, often with the juveniles’ name printed at the top, and scanned them before sending them to CCR. Some juveniles may have moderated their responses based on the knowledge that staff would be able to see what they wrote.



### Successes

CCR was able to provide remote trainings that were viewed favorably by most juveniles and provided them with new insights into conflict management. This success was built on good relationships developed between CCR staff and JTDC staff, who were relied upon more heavily for administrative support than they would have been in the absence of the pandemic.

Another success was designing the training so that there was a buffer week in case training could not occur during the originally scheduled weeks. This allowed CCR to provide all three trainings to all eligible JTDC pods when problems arose that interfered with the scheduled training, such as a pod’s loss of Zoom privileges.

Although only two mediations and two one-party sessions took place during the first year of the program, mediation appeared to foster understanding between the parties and provided a positive experience to participants.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to the juveniles involved, conflict management training at Cook County JTDC taught them new ways to approach conflict, how to respond to emotional triggers and flooding, and how to better communicate with others. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to determine whether the juveniles’ behavior changed due to the training, so it is not known whether the juveniles have used these newly learned skills to manage conflict.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Continue the trainings and, if possible, assess short- and long-term changes in attendees’ behavior.

Few mediations or one-party sessions took place during the first year. This may have had to do with the need for juveniles to publicly request mediation. The limited data available indicate that the participants believed they gained a better understanding of each other’s perspectives. The juveniles also believed they understood better what was expected of them when they returned home. Given this, mediation holds promise for helping juveniles and their families prepare for the juveniles to return home.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Continue to offer mediation. Consider having juveniles request mediation on the survey form for the final training. If possible, assess short- and long-term changes in participants’ relationship and the juveniles’ behavior.

## **CONCLUSION**

CCR’s Juvenile Re-Entry Mediation Program has demonstrated success in helping juveniles learn new ideas regarding conflict management. Due to the small number of mediations conducted, it remains to be seen whether mediation has the desired effects.