

Juvenile Assessment Center
of Lee County
2117 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Fort Myers, FL 33901
(239) 344-5100
www.swfjac.org

September 2009

The JAC Perspective



*The Juvenile Assessment
Center of Lee County ...
assisting youth and their
families to seek the
treatment and programs
they need to lead productive,
crime free lives.*

CALENDAR

Lee County Juvenile Justice Council

September 3
1:30 p.m.

D'Alessandro Office Complex
2295 Victoria Ave., Room 165
Fort Myers

Prevention Network

September 11
10:00 a.m.

Lee County Human Services
2440 Thompson Street
Fort Myers

Circuit 20 Juvenile Justice Board

September 16
1:30 p.m.

Southwest Florida Workforce
Development Board
9530 Marketplace Rd, Ste 104
Fort Myers

**Law enforcement
should call ahead to**

**344-5161
or 344-5171**

**when bringing an
arrested youth
to the JAC.**



Talk to Kids: Cooperate With Law Enforcement

Some may recall the children's game "Red Light, Green Light" in which the goal is for the players to run from behind and tag the person who is "It." The players may run while the person who is "It" calls out "green light." However, when "It" shouts "red light" and turns around, the players must have come to a halt. Anyone caught moving must go back to the starting line. From an adult point of view the game seems simple. However, the game can be a challenge for young children, who are still learning how to self regulate their behavior and to control their impulses. Even the teenage brain is not fully developed in this ability. Self monitoring is one of the last skills to mature developmentally. Adolescents mature in this skill at different rates, and not in correlation to their intelligence.



Emotional impulses of an adolescent can often win out over calm, rational thought. The more emotionally charged a situation is, the less likely that an adolescent will make a good, logical decision, and one that is in their own best interest. Last month the JAC newsletter reported that the most prevalent charge for youth with school based arrests during the 2008-09 school year was for Disorderly Conduct. In many of those cases the youth were warned by a law enforcement officer to stop what they were doing – being disorderly, being disruptive, fighting - but the youth failed to do so. Adolescents do have the ability to see things from the perspective of others and, when not in the middle of an emotionally charged

(Continued page 2)

Repairing the Harm

This year the legislature revised zero tolerance laws for school based misconduct. Within the language of the new statute (F.S. 1002.20) the legislature encourages the use of restorative justice practices as an alternative to arrest for school based misconduct. What is restorative justice? Rather than focusing on a criminal offense as being a crime against the state, restorative justice is a philosophical framework that focuses on crime as an act against another individual or the community. Rather than holding the offender accountable to the state, a restorative justice framework holds the



offender directly accountable to the individual victim and to the specific community affected by the offense. Restorative justice emphasizes problem-solving rather than punishment of the offender. To the degree possible, it requires the offender to take direct responsibility to repair the harm that they have caused by their offense. A restorative justice framework encourages the victim, to the extent they are willing, and the community to become directly involved in shaping the offender's obligations. An example of a local program that utilizes restorative

(Continued page 2)

Cooperate With Law Enforcement (cont.)

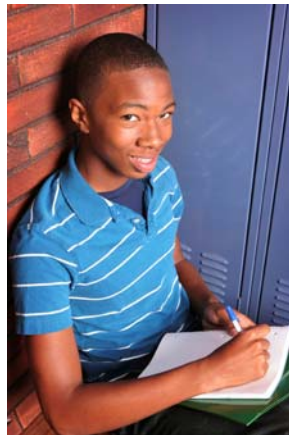
situation, to think about alternative ways that they could respond to situations. Parents and others working with adolescents can capitalize on these abilities by having them consider the law enforcement officer's point of view and coaching youth on how they should respond if approached by a law enforcement officer. It is

important to remind youth that, if they are ever stopped by a law enforcement officer, they should always remain respectful and polite and do as they are asked. Now that school is back in session, it might be as good a time as any to have this conversation again.

Repairing the Harm (cont.)

justice principles is the Lee County Neighborhood Accountability Board program, or NAB. It is a court diversion program for first-time, non-violent offenders. Rather than focusing on who broke the law, what laws were broken, and how the offender will be punished, the NAB's utilize a restorative conferencing model that focuses on who was harmed, what harm was done, what needs to be done to repair the harm, and what level of repair the responsible party can realistically accomplish. The conferences are facilitated by staff from the Lee County Department of Human Services, who administers the program. The conferences include the youth who committed the offense, their family members, the victim(s) (if they choose), and trained community volunteers. Conference participants agree upon a case plan which outlines how the youth will make amends. Examples of how youth repair the harm include performing community service, writing letters of apology, paying restitution, talking to youth programs about the harm caused by making bad choices, writing essays, or other creative media that encourages the youth to acknowledge and repair the harm that they have caused. The NAB program's next training for new community volunteers is

scheduled for September 25th. For more information go to http://dhs.lee-county.com/DHS/uploads/Training_Sept_2009.pdf or call 533-7947. The Lee County NAB program is also available to provide training and technical assistance in implementing school based accountability boards.



Saying "Sorry"

Youth who become involved with the local juvenile justice system are often required to write a letter of apology to acknowledge the harm that they have caused by their offense. A brochure on "Writing a Letter of Apology" is available on the JAC website for youth who need some assistance in getting started. It is available at www.swfljac.org/Apology.pdf.

Responding to Autism

Sometimes a youth with autism has been arrested and has come through the JAC. According to the publication "Autism & First Responders" from the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities-USF (CARD), in criminal justice situations a person with autism may not understand rights or warnings, may become anxious in new situations, may not understand the consequences of their actions, and, if verbal, may produce false confessions or misleading statements. The publication suggests that, given time, space, and a display of calming body language, an autistic person may deescalate their behavior. Additional information for first responders about interacting with someone who is autistic is available at http://card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu/cardpubs/CARD_EmergencyResponder.pdf.

Save the Date

The 20th Circuit Juvenile Justice Board will host a Roundtable on October 13th. The morning session will focus on changes to the school based zero tolerance laws and promising approaches for addressing school based offenses through alternatives to arrest. The afternoon session will focus on promising practices in addressing truancy. Watch for more information in October.

The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.