

# Effective Police Interactions with Youth

## Curriculum Overview

The Effective Police Interactions with Youth curriculum:

- (A) increases the capacity of law enforcement agencies, and particularly patrol officers, to communicate effectively with the youth in the communities they serve in ways that improve mutual respect and understanding;
- (B) enhances the decentralization of decision-making by encouraging the use of appropriate discretion by front-line officers in handling encounters with youth in a way that improves the well-being of the community; and
- (C) increases the capacity of law enforcement agencies to respond of the issue of disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system.

Although officers are trained in “human relations,” there is often little pre-service or in-service training on the differences in policing adults versus adolescents for the front line officer. There are significant differences that need to be shared with police. Relevant new research findings on brain development during the teenage and early adult years can help officers understand youth behavior. Many police officer trainees in Connecticut have shared that this material should be taught to all new officers.

Effective Police Interactions with Youth focuses on the interplay between line officers and juveniles when they meet in the community in non-dangerous situations and ensures that patrol officers have the knowledge they needed to differentiate problematic adolescent behavior from typical adolescent behavior, as well as skills to de-escalate situations involving agitated or defiant youth and prevent situations from escalating in the first place.

Effective Police Interactions with Youth was designed by a curriculum expert with extensive input from Connecticut police officers on the Police/Juvenile Task Group, volunteers who are primarily police officers, but also represent the state Office of Policy and Management, the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST), the Connecticut State Police, and the Office of the Chief State’s Attorney. The curriculum has been evaluated using an experimental design with pre- and post-testing and a control group, and has been shown to increase knowledge and improve police attitudes towards youth. This evaluation is the subject of an article in Police Quarterly, June 2010. The evaluation report itself is available at [www.ct.gov/opm/dmc](http://www.ct.gov/opm/dmc).

Effective Police Interactions with Youth provides about 5 hours of instruction delivered via classroom instruction by two certified police trainers who are experienced youth officers or School Resource Officers (SROs). The training is divided into five sections: an introduction, three major training topics, and a summary. A one-page depiction of the training structure and content, and a detailed description of each training section follow.

## Training Structure

### Introduction

#### Why We Are Here

- Welcome and introductions
- Training purpose
- Video – *Super Troopers*
- Contest
- Training goals
- Training benefits
- Photo activity
- Positive approach
- Video – *Youth Speak Out*

### Topic 1

#### Equal Treatment of Diverse Youth

- Youth population statistics
- Youth behavior data
- DMC study results
- Police as gatekeepers
- Factors affecting police decisions
- Video –
- Patrol officers and DMC
- Choose least restrictive action

### Topic 2

#### Why Youth Do What They Do

- Police culture and youth culture
- Video – *Youth Culture*
- Adolescent development
- Brain development and youth decision-making
- Video –
- What every youth needs
- Video – *Youth Voice*

### Topic 3

#### Police/Youth Relations

- Police in non-enforcement roles
- Youth attitudes toward police
- Video – *Hangin' Part 1*
- Communication 101
- Adolescents and stress
- A better approach to interacting with youth
- Building rapport with youth
- Video – *Hangin' Part 2*

### Summary

#### Putting It All Together

- Video – *Out of Control*
- Connecting with families
- Collaborating with youth officers
- Action steps for patrol officers
- Video – *Police Speak Out*
- Wrap-up and class closing

# Introduction: Why We Are Here

**Time: 75 Minutes**

## Topic Overview

The purpose of this section is to set the stage for learning by providing participants and instructors with opportunities to get to know one another through dialogue and interaction. Participants will become familiar with the agenda, the goals of the training program, and what they can expect to learn. They will participate in activities designed to get them thinking about youth behavior and police/youth interactions.

## Key Content Points

- Class agenda and logistics
- Purpose and goals of the training
- Statistics on youth behavior
- Benefits of better police/youth interaction
- Police perceptions of youth
- Youth perceptions of police

## Outline

1. Lecture: Welcome, Introductions, Training Purpose and Goals
2. Video: “Super Troopers”
3. Activity: Contest
4. Lecture: Training Goals
5. Discussion: Training Benefits
6. Activity: Police Perceptions of Youth (Photos)
7. Lecture: A Positive Approach
8. Video: “Youth Speak Out About Police”
9. Summary: Why We Are Here

## Materials Needed

- LCD projector and screen
- Pens or pencils and paper for each participant
- Easel, flipchart paper, and markers for use by instructor(s)
- CD: “Super Troopers”
- CD: “Youth Speak Out About Police”
- Handout: Agenda
- Handout: Photos of youth
- Prizes for contest

# Topic 1: Equal Treatment of Diverse Youth

**Time: 90 Minutes**

## Topic Overview

In this topic, participants will compare population and youth behavior statistics with national and state data on disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system (DMC). Participants will be introduced to some basic concepts associated with DMC, learn how DMC is measured, and discuss possible causes of DMC statewide and in local communities. Participants will identify considerations for making discretionary decisions in situations involving juveniles and discuss ways patrol officers can help eliminate DMC.

## Key Content Points

- Youth population data
- Youth behavior statistics
- Minority youth and the juvenile justice system
- Police options for handling situations involving youth

## Outline

1. Lecture: Youth Population and Behavior Statistics, Definition of DMC, Rates of System Contact, Police as Gatekeepers
2. Activity: Factors Affecting Police Decisions
3. Lecture: Differences in System Processing, Decision Points Showing DMC
4. Activity: Patrol Officer Options, Decision-Making Considerations
5. Discussion: Eliminating DMC, Least Restrictive Alternative, Services for Youth and Families
6. Summary: Things to Remember

## Materials Needed

- LCD projector and screen
- Easel, flipchart paper, markers
- Pens or pencils and paper for each participant
- Poster: Definition of DMC
- Tape or putty to hang poster
- Handout: Youth Population Data
- Handout: How to Calculate a Relative Rate Index (RRI)
- Handout: Factors Affecting Police Decisions (4 versions)
- DVD:
- Reference: DMC Study

## Topic 2: Why Youth Do What They Do

**Time: 60 Minutes**

### Topic Overview

In this topic, participants will discuss aspects of youth culture and its importance to the adolescent development process. Participants will learn that adolescents cannot think and make decisions the same way adults do, and that they may have difficulty getting their intellect and emotions to work well together. Participants will learn about biological and social influences that affect the ability of adolescents to make sound decisions and to understand the consequences of their actions, particularly as it relates to the law.

### Key Content Points

- Youth culture
- Adolescent development
- Adolescent decision-making

### Outline

1. Lecture: Police Culture and Youth Culture
2. Video: “Youth Culture”
3. Lecture: Adolescent Development, Brain Development
4. Video:
5. Lecture: Adolescent Decision-Making
6. Small Group Discussion: Youth Making Poor Decisions
7. Lecture: What Every Youth Needs
8. Video: “Youth Voice”
9. Summary: Things to Remember

### Materials Needed

- LCD projector and screen
- Easel with flipchart paper and markers
- Pens or pencils and paper for each participant
- CD: “Youth Culture”
- DVD:
- CD: “Youth Voice”

## Topic 3: Police/Youth Relations

**Time: 60 Minutes**

### Topic Overview

In this topic, participants will discuss youth attitudes toward police and identify strategies for improving police/youth relations. Participants will learn de-escalation techniques such as identifying behavioral cues that an adolescent is losing control; maintaining a professional demeanor; avoiding counter-aggression; and helping youth regain self-control. Participants will identify strategies for using verbal and non-verbal communication to build rapport with young people and prevent youth behavior from escalating in the first place.

### Key Content Points

- Youth attitudes toward police
- Building positive police/youth relations
- Helping agitated youth regain self-control
- Communication techniques that work

### Outline

1. Discussion: Police in Non-Enforcement Roles, Youth Attitudes Toward Police
2. Video: “Hangin’ – Part 1”
3. Lecture: Communication 101, Adolescents and Stress
4. Activity: Interacting with Youth
5. Lecture: Better Interactions with Youth through Communication
6. Role Play: A Better Approach
7. Video: “Hangin’ – Part 2”
8. Summary: Things to Remember

### Materials Needed

- LCD projector and screen
- Easel with flipchart paper and markers
- Pens or pencils and paper for each participant
- CD: “Hangin’ – Part 1”
- CD: “Hangin’ – Part 2”
- Handout: Interacting with Youth (4 Versions)

## Summary: Putting It All Together

**Time: 45 Minutes**

### Topic Overview

In this topic, participants will revisit the goals of the training by viewing and discussing a video scenario that draws together strategies for helping youth and their families. Participants will share ideas about how patrol officers and youth officers can work together better. Finally, they will identify concrete action steps they can take back to the job to make a positive impact on young people and interact more effectively with them.

### Key Content Points

- Interacting with family members
- Collaborating with youth officers and school resource officers (SROs)
- Concrete action steps to take on the job
- Review of key training points

### Outline

1. Video: “Out of Control”
2. Lecture: Connecting with Families
3. Discussion: Collaborating with Youth Officers
4. Activity: Effective Police Interactions with Youth
5. Video: “Officers Speak Out About Youth”
6. Summary: Class Closing
7. Evaluation: Collect Forms
8. Training Credit: Distribute Forms

### Materials Needed

- LCD projector and screen
- Easel with flipchart paper and markers
- Pens or pencils and paper for each participant
- CD: “Out of Control”
- CD: “Police Speak Out About Youth”
- Handout: Effective Police Interactions with Youth
- Handout: Training Evaluation
- Handout: Parting Gift (Field Notebook)

