



TRAUMA-INFORMED RESTORATIVE DIVERSION

*Standard Protocols and Procedures
for Youth Diversion Teams*

**A Developmentally Appropriate, Relationship-
Centered Approach to Accountability and Repair**

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Manual Scope and Applicability

This revised manual edition represents a significant evolution of the Youth Diversion Team model, expanding upon its foundational principles and lessons learned from Connecticut's Juvenile Review Board model. While it builds on both legacies, it offers more than procedural clarification. It strengthens the model's trauma-informed restorative foundations by clearly distinguishing restorative justice practices from intervention-based approaches, emphasizing the role of those affected, and embedding accountability within a relational framework, rather than a punitive one.

The manual enhances practice integrity by introducing structured conversation frameworks and emphasizing the importance of language that upholds dignity while encouraging meaningful engagement. It outlines core principles that support youth in taking responsibility in developmentally appropriate and non-punitive ways. These principles differentiate restorative practices from intervention-based services, ensuring that responses are grounded in restorative justice rather than influenced by clinical, correctional, or punitive models.

The manual guides Youth Diversion Teams in facilitating processes where youth who have caused harm engage directly with those affected, take active accountability for their actions, and collaboratively create restorative agreements that promote personal growth and community healing. To support this work, the manual provides clear, adaptable guidance that helps teams maintain consistency in training, volunteer preparation, and community messaging. Together, these enhancements elevate the model from a set of procedures to a dynamic, principle-driven process capable of transforming youth justice at individual and systemic levels.

Statement of Purpose

This manual outlines the trauma-informed restorative justice protocols and procedures adopted by the Connecticut Youth Services Association for Youth Diversion Teams. It is designed to support fidelity to best practices by providing clear expectations and structures that equip diversion staff and volunteers to guide youth in taking responsibility, repairing harm, and fostering healing for all those affected. These frameworks also help create conditions that support youth in developing insight, building relational skills, and growing in ways that reduce the likelihood of future harm. The manual supports a meaningful alternative for youth who cause harm, diverting them from formal involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Intended Audience

These policies and procedures apply to all individuals involved in the Youth Diversion Team process, including diversion staff, trained volunteers, and personnel from referring or partner agencies, regardless of professional background. The protocols are to be followed when working with youth referred to the Youth Diversion Team as an alternative to arrest or juvenile court processing for an arrestable offense. This manual is designed to support equitable, trauma-informed, and restorative diversion practices that align with the standards established by the

Connecticut Youth Services Association, ensuring consistent implementation across programs and communities.

Program Eligibility

This manual applies to diversion-eligible youth between the ages of 10 and 17 who have been referred for arrestable offenses and meet the criteria for participation in a trauma-informed, restorative diversion process. See [*Part 4: Referral & Eligibility Requirements for Diversion*](#).

Program Context

The procedures outlined in this manual are designed for community-based settings as an alternative to formal juvenile justice processing. They are aligned with Connecticut policy frameworks, supporting a shift from punitive responses to a restorative, developmentally appropriate model grounded in accountability, dignity, and community healing.

Maintaining Fidelity to Core Principles and Practices

Agencies administering Youth Diversion Teams *do not* have the discretion to modify the core principles and required practices outlined in this manual. While Connecticut law does not currently prescribe the structure or operation of Youth Diversion Teams, this manual is intended to support the development of teams that reflect each community’s unique values, needs, and available resources, without altering the foundational restorative and trauma-informed standards. The model is designed to be adaptable and can be implemented across various communities. However, the core principles and required practices outlined in this manual *must* be applied consistently and without modification. See also Section [1.9.4: Ensuring Fidelity and Consistency Across Sites](#).

How to Use This Manual

This manual was created to ensure the consistent and principled implementation of the Youth Diversion Team model across diverse community settings. It draws on current research, best practices in trauma-informed restorative justice, and lessons learned from field implementation.

While the manual moves from foundational concepts to practical applications, it is also intended to serve as a flexible reference guide. Core ideas—such as accountability, dignity, and the power of language—are intentionally revisited in multiple sections. This strategic repetition reinforces key principles and ensures they are accessible when needed, whether the reader is preparing for an intake meeting, facilitating a Restorative Meeting, developing a Restorative Agreement, or completing case documentation.

Cross-references and adapted summaries help align daily practices with the overall values of the model. Readers are encouraged to use the manual in a way that best suits their needs, allowing them to navigate directly to the sections most relevant to their role, responsibilities, or stage of implementation.

Acknowledgments

We sincerely appreciate Erica Bromley, MSW—Youth Justice Consultant for the Connecticut Youth Services Association and owner of KADE Consulting, for her expert guidance in aligning this manual with Connecticut’s community-based diversion frameworks. Her extensive experience in juvenile justice reform, restorative practices, and youth service systems has been instrumental in shaping a resource that effectively bridges the gap between policy and practice. Erica’s leadership and her ongoing work with the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee have significantly informed our approach to fostering accountability, healing, and community safety through meaningful engagement with youth and those they have harmed.

We are indebted to Joe Brummer of Joe Brummer Consulting, LLC, for his significant contribution to shaping the trauma-informed restorative justice framework presented in this manual. His profound expertise in trauma-responsive practices and restorative philosophy helped clarify key distinctions between restorative responses and traditional interventions, ensuring alignment with trauma-informed restorative values and the Connecticut Youth Services Association’s Standard Protocols and Procedures. Joe’s contributions have meaningfully enriched our approach and deepened its capacity to support healing and accountability.

We would also like to recognize Justin Carbonella, Director of the City of Middletown’s Youth Services Bureau and past president of the Connecticut Youth Services Association. His thoughtful and practical ideas has shaped the facilitation of diversion trainings and advanced the restorative model as a trauma-informed diversion practice. In addition to his foundational contributions to the restorative structure outlined in the standard protocols and procedures of the 2023 manual, Justin authored the original draft of the Youth Diversion Team meeting script. Justin’s leadership in youth justice and his enduring commitment to community-driven solutions have been central to shaping an approach that is both responsive to local needs and grounded in restorative values. This manual is stronger and more relevant because of his insight, dedication, and decades of service to young people and their communities.

We gratefully acknowledge Rick Cain, Ph.D., for his direction of the process and limited impact evaluation of the Youth Diversion Team pilot program, conducted for the Connecticut Youth Services Association by Joe Brummer Consulting, LLC, in 2024. As writer and editor of this manual, Dr. Cain drew on his evaluation research and system-level experience, along with insights from the pilot evaluation study, to create a resource that is both evidence-based and attuned to the needs of practitioners.

We also wish to honor the dedicated staff members of the:

- Bridgeport Youth Diversion Team, Catalyst (formerly the Regional Youth Substance Abuse Project, RYSAP), Bridgeport, CT
- Juvenile Review Board, The Village for Families & Children, Hartford, CT
- Youth Diversion Team, Naugatuck Youth Services, Inc., Naugatuck, CT

- Youth Diversion Team, Norwich Human Services, City of Norwich, Norwich, CT
- Juvenile Review Board, Mental Health/Diversion Services Department, Town of Wethersfield, Wethersfield, CT
- Juvenile Review Board, Waterbury Youth Services, Waterbury, CT

Their thoughtful participation in the 2024 pilot evaluation provided invaluable insights into implementing the Youth Diversion Team model using the initial draft of the Connecticut Youth Services Association’s original Standard Protocols and Procedures for Youth Diversion Teams. Through candid reflection, they identified strengths, challenges, and resource needs—including both enabling and limiting factors—offering a grounded, practical perspective on what it takes to operationalize trauma-informed restorative practices in their communities. These insights directly informed the refinement of the protocols and procedures, ensuring that the resulting approach is rooted in real-world practice and shaped by the lived experiences of those implementing it.

Edit and Version History

This working document is periodically updated to reflect legislative changes, best practice developments, evolving mandates, and other pertinent information. This section outlines the revisions made to the manual to promote transparency, consistency, and accountability.

Maintaining a version history allows readers to track changes over time, understand updates to policies and procedures, and reference the version used during training or implementation. This practice supports collaboration among contributors and ensures continued alignment with current standards and effective program practices.

If you have comments or suggestions for improving this manual, please get in touch with Erica Bromley, MSW, Youth Justice Consultant for the Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA), at ebromley@ctyouthservices.org.

Date	Summary of Changes
2023-06	Initial release of the Youth Diversion Team <i>Standard Protocols and Procedures for Youth Diversion Teams</i> Manual
2024-07	Minor trauma-informed and restorative language updates to appendices and text
2025-07	<p>This version reflects a comprehensive revision and expansion of the <i>Standard Protocols and Procedures for Youth Diversion Teams</i> manual. The 2025 update builds on insights from the 2024 pilot evaluation study and incorporates extensive feedback from diversion staff, subject matter experts, and stakeholders across Connecticut.</p> <p>Key updates include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearer distinctions between trauma-informed restorative justice practices and traditional interventions• Enhanced guidance for referral, intake, meeting facilitation, and follow-up processes grounded• Stronger integration of developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and relationship-centered approaches• Revised language and structure to improve clarity, usability, and alignment with field-tested practices• Inclusion of practical examples and success stories drawn from pilot site experiences

Part 1. Program Introduction and Foundational Standards

Part 1 of this manual introduces the Youth Diversion Team program by outlining its purpose, structure, and policy context. It provides a historical, legal, and philosophical foundation for consistent and principled implementation across local sites.

The section begins with a brief history that traces the evolution from Juvenile Review Boards to the current statewide Youth Diversion Team model, which is informed by principles of trauma and restorative justice. Later sections detail the program's mission and objectives, emphasizing accountability, restorative practices, and ensuring community safety. Key professional standards include restorative justice practices, trauma-informed approaches, and positive youth development. These principles ensure consistency within the team and guide all staff, volunteers, and partners.

The manual explains the composition of the Youth Diversion Team and outlines the processes for recruiting, selecting, appointing, and retaining volunteers. It then addresses the training needs for diversion staff, volunteers, and personnel from referring agencies. Furthermore, it reviews the program's intentional use of inclusive and relational language, reflecting the restorative values and emphasizing the importance of engaging those harmed.

Finally, the manual situates the Youth Diversion Team model within Connecticut's broader legal framework, distinguishing it from court-based diversion. It highlights the relevant statutes, referral criteria, and partnerships that support successful implementation.

1.1 Introduction

The Youth Diversion Team is a community-based, trauma-informed restorative program for youth ages 10 to 17 who have committed offenses that would otherwise lead to arrest and formal court involvement. Instead of facing punitive consequences through the traditional juvenile justice system, these young people are offered a meaningful alternative that emphasizes accountability, healing, and relationship repair. Rooted in trauma-informed and restorative justice principles, the Youth Diversion Team promotes understanding, supports youth in making responsible amends, and helps them prevent long-term involvement in the system.

A defining strength of this approach is its intentional focus on local, relational support. Youth Diversion Team members are selected for their experience working with young people and their ability to build trust. The youth who caused the harm is also encouraged to involve supportive individuals who can speak to their strengths and potential. This emphasis on connection reinforces the restorative goal of accountability within a caring, community-centered framework.

While traditional juvenile justice systems have incorporated punitive responses such as arrest, expulsion, or suspension—often with the intention of enforcing accountability and deterring future offenses—these approaches may not fully address the underlying causes of behavior. They can lead to unintended long-term consequences and have shown limited success in reducing recidivism. When accountability is primarily framed as punishment rather than as an opportunity for personal responsibility and repair, it can limit growth, weaken the potential for genuine accountability, and leave the harm unresolved.

Adolescents are developmentally more likely to engage in risky or impulsive behaviors due to their still-developing brains, particularly in areas such as judgment, foresight, and impulse control. These vulnerabilities extend into the late twenties and are often compounded by trauma, which can further compromise emotional regulation and decision-making skills. While young people must be held accountable, neuroscience and psychological research suggest that their reduced capacity for foresight and self-regulation may diminish their culpability compared to adults. These insights underscore the need for restorative responses that are trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and focused on supporting long-term growth.

Systemic inequities further compound these challenges. Punitive measures often intensify the complex behavioral health needs of youth who enter the system ([Branson et al., 2017](#); [McCarthy, Schiraldi, & Shark, 2016](#); [National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017](#)). Many have experienced trauma, and up to 80 percent of incarcerated youth meet criteria for a mental health diagnosis ([Underwood & Washington, 2016](#)). Instead of fostering rehabilitation, traditional responses frequently worsen these needs. Additionally, youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented in the system and experience disproportionately adverse outcomes ([McCarthy, Schiraldi, & Shark, 2016](#); [Center for American Progress, 2017](#)).

Diversion programs aim to prevent formal court involvement by redirecting youth through community-based support, services, and case management. They may address housing

instability, food insecurity, limited educational access, joblessness, and unmet mental health needs ([Vera Institute of Justice, 2022](#)). When designed with individualized care, family engagement, and strengths-based support, these programs can help youth avoid further involvement in the system and build more stable futures.

While general diversion programs address underlying risk factors, restorative justice diversion programs go a step further by directly addressing the harm caused and the context in which it occurred. Restorative justice defines wrongdoing not solely as a legal violation, but as harm to individuals, relationships, and the community ([Rodriguez, 2005](#)). These programs guide youth in acknowledging their actions, taking responsibility, and actively working to repair harm. In this model, accountability involves more than accepting consequences—it means making things right and working to prevent future harm ([Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015](#)). Importantly, restorative justice frames accountability as a shared responsibility. While youth must take ownership, the community is also called to examine and address systemic factors that may have contributed to the behavior. This collaborative process fosters healing, growth, and long-term community safety.

Trauma-informed strategies are more effective because they recognize that youth who cause harm often have histories of trauma. Trauma includes the emotional, psychological, physical, and neurological responses to real or perceived threats to safety, life, or well-being. It can disrupt development and impair mental, physical, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual health. Because trauma is subjective, what overwhelms one person may not affect another in the same way. When a young person's sense of safety is compromised, they may rely on maladaptive coping strategies or exhibit reactive behavior. A trauma-informed lens helps diversion programs better meet these needs and reduce reoffending. This approach does not excuse harmful actions—it provides critical context for understanding them and offers a more compassionate and effective path forward.

Given these realities, there is a pressing need for community-based responses to youth behavior that are trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and developmentally appropriate. In restorative diversion programs, such as the Youth Diversion Team model, accountability is redefined as a healing process that involves the youth, their families, those harmed, and reflection on the broader community. This model offers a meaningful alternative to formal court processing by supporting youth development, strengthening community ties, and promoting accountability through restorative practices.

Youth are guided to understand the impact of their actions—not only on others but also on themselves. This dual awareness is central to restorative justice, which views accountability not merely as accepting consequences, but as developing insight into how one's behavior has shaped relationships, self-concept, and future opportunities.

Restorative processes integrated alongside tailored services support them in making amends and building healthier relationships. This combined approach ensures that youth are not navigating accountability in isolation. Instead, they receive developmentally appropriate, strengths-based

support that honors their lived experiences and acknowledges the complex social, emotional, and cultural factors influencing their behavior.

This is critically important because it fosters *internal* motivation to change, rather than compliance rooted in fear or shame. Youth are more likely to engage meaningfully when feeling respected, supported, and understood. In turn, this promotes genuine repair of harm, growth in empathy, and increased resilience. These elements are essential to restoring relationships, reducing future system involvement, and helping youth move forward confidently and purposefully.

The Youth Diversion Team model demonstrates that accountability and healing can coexist. The model fosters a strong sense of identity, belonging, and community responsibility by addressing trauma, prioritizing relationships, and creating safe and inclusive spaces. It reflects a commitment to repairing harm and addressing its root causes, while promoting the well-being of all involved.

Participation is voluntary, and successful completion prevents formal court involvement. Ultimately, this collaborative and inclusive approach offers youth a structured opportunity for growth, accountability, and reconnection. It also protects them from the lasting harms of punitive justice models.

1.2 History of the Youth Diversion Team Model

What is now known as the Youth Diversion Team model has its roots in what was formerly called the Juvenile Review Board (JRB)—a term that remains in use in many parts of the state. Established more than 55 years ago, JRBs represent one of Connecticut’s longest-standing efforts to divert youth from involvement in the formal justice system.

Today, approximately 90% of Connecticut’s diversion programs are administered by Youth Service Bureaus, with the remaining 10% overseen by other community-based organizations. While the first JRB was established in Enfield in 1968, the model has since undergone significant expansion. Currently, 90 local JRBs—some of which now operate as Youth Diversion Teams—serve 135 communities across the state, forming the foundation of a statewide system of restorative justice for youth.

1.2.1 The Shift to Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice

The original JRB model was not initially grounded in trauma-informed or restorative justice principles. The name *Youth Diversion Team* reflects the model’s core values and intentional use of language. This shift is more than cosmetic—it represents a fundamental transformation in practice, grounded in developmental, trauma-informed, and restorative principles. These programs recognize that language can reinforce harm or promote dignity, and they choose terms that reflect collaboration, healing, and developmentally appropriate support.

The model’s transformation to *Youth Diversion Team* reflects this shift in practice and philosophy. Trauma-informed and restorative programs deliberately avoid terms that carry

punitive or stigmatizing connotations. For example, words like *juvenile* and *delinquent* are often experienced by youth as criminalizing, dehumanizing, or morally shaming. In contrast, the term *youth* is more developmentally appropriate, strengths-based, and affirming.

Similarly, *diversion* in this context signifies more than just avoiding court involvement. It reflects a conscious, proactive commitment to guiding young people away from punitive systems and toward community-based processes that foster accountability, personal growth, and meaningful harm repair. Through this lens, diversion is not merely a procedural alternative but a relational and restorative opportunity.

It is essential to transition from using the term *board* to *team*. A board often implies a formal, hierarchical group that reviews and evaluates, whereas a team suggests collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual support. Trauma-informed and restorative frameworks emphasize the importance of power-sharing, trust, and connection—qualities that are better represented by a team. This principle also applies to the term *panel*, which implies evaluation and authority. For a deeper exploration of the values and implications behind language choices—including terms like *board* and *panel*—see [Section 1.10: Language That Upholds Trauma-Informed Restorative Values](#).

Within a *Youth Diversion Team*, staff, volunteers, the youth who caused harm and their families, and those directly affected work together to understand the impact of the incident, identify needs, and develop a restorative plan for accountability and repair. This collaborative structure fosters a more empowering, relational, and healing environment for everyone involved.

As awareness of trauma-informed and restorative justice practices grew, the Connecticut Youth Services Association took early steps, beginning in late winter and early spring of 2020, to provide foundational training and capacity-building opportunities for stakeholders involved in the JRB process. The Association acknowledged that meaningful change depends on a shared understanding and a common language. To support the evolution of the JRB model towards a more restorative and trauma-informed framework, the Association developed and offered a series of introductory webinars and in-person training sessions.

The webinars, [Restorative Justice 101](#) and [Restorative Justice 201](#), have served as entry points for education and dialogue about the principles of trauma-informed restorative justice. These sessions, which began in 2020 and continue to this day, have trained nearly 2,000 individuals across the state. The webinars, facilitated by Joe Brummer of Joe Brummer Consulting, LLC, and Justin Carbonella, Director of the Middletown Youth Services Bureau and past President of the Connecticut Youth Services Association, created a foundation for a system-wide shift in practice.

Ongoing training efforts have played a crucial role in the statewide transformation toward a Youth Diversion Team model, which is rooted in trauma-informed, restorative approaches to accountability. For more information, please see [Section 1.9: Training](#).

1.2.2 Launching the Youth Diversion Team Framework

Most JRBs in Connecticut operate under the leadership of Youth Service Bureaus, which are local agencies dedicated to the well-being of youth and families. For information about the relevant policies, please refer to [Section 1.11: Legal and Policy Context](#). This makes them well-positioned to pilot and implement this new approach. These agencies form a statewide network with the shared capacity to reimagine and scale a more unified, values-aligned diversion system.

In 2022, the Connecticut Youth Services Association realized the limitations of previous diversion models and launched an initiative to transform the Juvenile Review Board model. This new approach aimed to establish a consistent, trauma-informed, restorative justice framework. This initiative represents a significant shift from a primarily procedural and punitive focus to one centered on healing, accountability, and community involvement in trauma-informed restorative practices.

Youth Diversion Team programs are administered and facilitated by staff from local Youth Service Bureaus and other designated organizations. These teams work closely with referring agencies, such as law enforcement, the Juvenile Court, schools, and school resource officers, who refer youth when an offense has occurred that could otherwise result in arrest. This local collaboration ensures that diversion efforts remain grounded in trauma-informed and restorative principles, allowing each program to align with the community's values, needs, and strengths.

Trained diversion staff guide each case from intake to completion. They start with a comprehensive intake process that assesses the youth's readiness to engage sincerely in a restorative approach. During this stage, staff work collaboratively with the youth and their family to understand the circumstances of the incident and, where appropriate, explore its impact directly with those who have been harmed. The intake process outlines the diversion structure and encourages a collaborative discussion about meaningful and achievable ways to acknowledge and repair harm. It emphasizes accountability while promoting personal growth and resilience.

At intake, either screenings, assessments, or both are used to identify each youth's strengths, challenges, and existing supports, and to determine the most appropriate services. These services are tailored to be developmentally appropriate, strength-based, and aligned with the goals of the diversion program. Diversion staff engage the youth and their family in narrative conversations and may also use validated, evidence-based tools to assess risk and protective factors. These tools support the identification of service needs, help explore the youth's interests, and evaluate available support systems, including relationships with positive adult figures. Staff must also implement any specific screening instruments or protocols required by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families.

Once intake is complete, diversion staff schedule and facilitate a *restorative dialogue*, referred to as the *Restorative Meeting*—a structured meeting focused on the incident, its effects, and the needs of those impacted. Individuals who experienced harm are invited to share their

perspectives and describe how the event impacted them. Each party—the youth who caused harm and those directly affected—may bring one supporter to the meeting.

Volunteers trained in the Youth Diversion Team trauma-informed and restorative principles help maintain a safe, respectful, and balanced environment. These volunteers may include professionals from social work, mental health, education, juvenile probation, or the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. Including individuals from specific agencies or roles is unnecessary. Involvement must be appropriate for the case, and they must understand the principles of trauma-informed restorative justice practice.

Volunteer participation provides unique professional insights that help identify service needs, which can be thoughtfully integrated with restorative practices. These supports address the youth's underlying needs while upholding core restorative principles: accepting responsibility, actively working to repair harm, and engaging in personal growth to prevent future harm.

Ultimately, what matters most is assembling a Youth Diversion Team comprised of the right individuals, grounded in trauma-informed restorative values, with established connections to the youth whenever possible, who are connected to the community, and committed to fostering healing, accountability, and growth. Having representatives from certain sectors or organizations is not required.

The *restorative dialogue* culminates in the development of a *restorative agreement*—a collaboratively created diversion plan outlining the youth's actions to accept responsibility, repair harm, and actively rebuild trust. This agreement emphasizes accountability and healing over punishment. If the youth completes the agreement's terms, they avoid court involvement, and no formal record is created. While most agreements are fulfilled within three to six months, cases *must* remain open for at least six months for continued support and follow-up. For more information about Restorative Agreements, please refer to [*Section 3.9.3: 4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions*](#), as well as [*Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement*](#).

Although most JRBs and Youth Diversion Teams continue to operate within existing local infrastructures, Connecticut's statewide implementation reflects a deliberate shift toward restorative and trauma-informed values. This approach marks a shift away from punitive responses and toward practices that foster community, promote personal growth, and provide meaningful opportunities for accountability and healing. While no enabling statute governs diversion programs, current Connecticut law recognizes and supports the Youth Service Bureau model and its work in diversion (see [*Section 1.11: Legal and Policy Context*](#)).

Beginning in fall 2022, the Connecticut Youth Services Association revised the former *JRB Protocol and Procedures Manual* into the first version of the *Standard Protocols and Procedures for Youth Diversion Teams*, making it trauma-informed and restorative. This is when it was first suggested to change the diversion program's name from Juvenile Review Board to Youth Diversion Team to reflect better its trauma-informed, restorative, and developmentally appropriate focus.

In partnership with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, the Connecticut Youth Services Association selected organizations administering JRBs to participate in a pilot project, ensuring a mix of sites with heavy and light caseloads from Connecticut's metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Participating organizations were expected to conduct their diversion work following restorative justice principles and practices, utilizing a trauma-informed, culturally informed, and developmentally informed lens, as described in the revised policy and procedures manual.

These organizations reviewed the revised manual in spring 2023; a finalized version was distributed to them in June 2023. It was proposed that experienced teams could adopt most of the updated protocols and procedures immediately. The manual also encouraged teams to use the document as a discussion tool, adapting or developing local policies and procedures in alignment with the new framework. It was further recommended that organizations use this document in discussions with their diversion team members and modify or create policies and procedures based on the information in the manual.

The Connecticut Youth Services Association provided advanced diversion staff with training sessions to coincide with the implementation of the pilot program. These advanced training sessions aimed to deepen staff's understanding of trauma-informed restorative justice and victim engagement. Joe Brummer of Joe Brummer Consulting, LLC, and Justin Carbonella, Director of the Middletown Youth Services Bureau and past President of the Connecticut Youth Services Association, created and facilitated the training. Additionally, an experienced consultant provided specialized training in victim engagement.

1.2.3 Process Evaluation Study and Findings

With the launch of the pilot program in summer 2023, the Connecticut Youth Services Association began discussing an evaluation framework for the pilot project. Starting in Winter 2024, the Connecticut Youth Services Association, in partnership with Joe Brummer Consulting, LLC, initiated an evaluation consisting of both a process evaluation and a limited impact evaluation.

The process evaluation examined various aspects of fidelity in how the pilot sites implemented the Youth Diversion Team program, which is based on the revised manual. It assessed how pilot sites promoted awareness of the program and how it was utilized by youth and their families, volunteers, and referring agencies.

Given the program's brief operational history, the limited impact evaluation focused on closed diversion cases to provide preliminary evidence of the program's effectiveness. Specifically, it examined the program's ability to address incidents that could otherwise result in arrest and its role in fostering community connections to help prevent future offenses.

The evaluators used a descriptive research design based on the Utility Standards Methodology. This approach was chosen to:

- Inform implementation efforts
- Support program growth
- Identify professional development needs to enhance practices
- Highlight opportunities for strengthening the program through additional resources

The evaluation of the Youth Diversion Team played a pivotal role in shaping the continued development and refinement of Connecticut's trauma-informed, restorative justice diversion model. The findings highlighted both strengths to build upon and important areas for growth, ultimately guiding the evolution of policies, training, and implementation tools.

Staff and volunteers demonstrated their strong commitment to supporting youth and families.

Key strengths include:

- Effective case practices, such as early family engagement, consistent communication, and individualized case management, have been linked to positive outcomes.
- The staff's dedication to establishing and maintaining the Youth Diversion Team model was evident in their collaboration across agencies, participation in professional development, and efforts in community engagement.
- Many staff members brought prior experience from the Juvenile Review Board model and demonstrated a keen interest in adapting their practices to align with trauma-informed restorative justice principles.
- Volunteers from various sectors contributed valuable expertise, creating a trauma-informed and community-focused environment.
- The collective efforts of everyone involved have significantly influenced improvements across the state, laying the groundwork for a more consistent and equitable implementation of services throughout Connecticut.

At the same time, the evaluation revealed significant variation in the implementation of restorative justice practices across sites. A common challenge was the misinterpretation of restorative diversion as a form of clinical or intervention-based service, rather than a genuinely restorative process. Additional concerns included persistent difficulties engaging those who had been harmed, inconsistent training and participation among volunteers, lack of clarity around referral eligibility, and fragmented messaging about trauma-informed restorative justice across stakeholder groups. These and other findings underscore the need for greater consistency, shared understanding, and alignment with core trauma-informed restorative values.

These findings directly informed several key improvements to the Youth Diversion Team model:

- A comprehensive revision of the Connecticut Youth Services Association's *Standard Protocols and Procedures for Youth Diversion Teams* manual now provides more explicit

guidance on case eligibility, referral criteria, and developing restorative agreements that are genuinely linked to harm, accountability, and repair.

- Launching the *[Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice in Youth Diversion: Four-Day Intensive Training](#)*—a practical, skills-based training experience—equips staff to apply restorative justice principles effectively within a trauma-informed framework, fully aligned with the revised manual.
- Creating guidelines for diversion staff to use in developing public-facing and stakeholder materials ensures a consistent and coherent message about the program’s purpose. It clarifies what trauma-informed restorative diversion is, what it is not, and why it matters for youth, families, and communities.

As a result of these efforts, the Youth Diversion Team program is emerging as a stronger, more coherent, and better-equipped program to deliver high-quality restorative diversion opportunities to youth and communities across Connecticut.

1.3 Youth Diversion Team Purpose, Mission, and Goals

This section outlines the program’s purpose, mission, and goals, emphasizing accountability, repair of harm, and meaningful community connection without deepening a young person’s involvement in the justice system. It also clarifies when diversion is appropriate in school-based incidents and explains how training, collaboration, and technical assistance support the consistent and effective implementation.

1.3.1 Purpose

The Connecticut Youth Services Association acknowledges that while young people may make mistakes, minor offenses can be addressed outside the court system. A trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate approach—grounded in restorative justice principles—fosters understanding, accountability, and repair without entangling youth in the justice system. The Youth Diversion Team model offers a supportive pathway that emphasizes accountability, healing, and meaningful community connection.

1.3.2 Mission

The mission of the Youth Diversion Team program is to provide a community-based, developmental, trauma-informed, and restorative response to minor youth offenses. The program supports youth in taking responsibility, repairing harm, and reconnecting with their communities, without creating lasting involvement in the justice system.

1.3.3 Goals

Each Youth Diversion Team referral pursues two primary goals:

1. To address the specific incident involving youth who have committed arrestable offenses, whether before or after arrest.

2. To establish meaningful community connections that support youth and reduce the risk of future legal involvement.

These goals are achieved through individualized case management, developmentally appropriate programming, consistent support, and supervision. To ensure meaningful restorative impact, diversion assignments should be clearly and directly connected to the harm caused. When youth understand this connection, they are more likely to engage in the process, take responsibility, and experience genuine opportunities for accountability, growth, and repair.

1.4 Diversion Eligibility in School-Based Incidents

School incidents that may lead to an arrest are appropriate for diversion. When problematic non-arrestable behaviors occur at school, they should be addressed as a matter of discipline, not law-breaking. Regarding truancy, if a student is experiencing difficulty attending school regularly, the Connecticut State Department of Education recommends that schools and families collaborate with their local Youth Service Bureau to utilize community-based services through a standardized referral process. Youth Service Bureaus aim to provide tailored support and services that meet the specific needs of students and their families ([Connecticut State Department of Education, 2024](#)).

1.5 Program Implementation Support

Youth Diversion Teams are led by trained diversion staff responsible for guiding the restorative process from referral through case closure. To ensure consistency and integrity across programs, all diversion staff must attend foundational and advanced training opportunities aligned with this manual. Even for experienced team members, ongoing learning is essential as restorative and trauma-informed practices deepen through reflection, feedback, and shared knowledge.

Diversion staff are also encouraged to promote training opportunities to referring partners, volunteers, and other key stakeholders to strengthen shared understanding and commitment across the system. In addition, staff should remain open to coaching and technical assistance, especially when they believe they “don’t need it.” Support offered through technical assistance and coaching is not a sign of weakness, but a commitment to fidelity, growth, and community trust in the Youth Diversion Team process.

1.6 Core Framework and Professional Standards

This section outlines the foundational framework and professional standards that guide every aspect of the diversion process. Clearly defining the program's guiding principles ensures a consistent and principled approach across communities. It provides essential guidance for staff, volunteers, and agency partners, enabling them to maintain the integrity of the Youth Diversion Team model while prioritizing the needs of the youth responsible for the harm, those directly affected, and the broader community.

1.6.1 Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice Core Framework

The following principles guide all aspects of restorative diversion practices. They embody the values and intentions that differentiate trauma-informed restorative justice from punitive or purely intervention-based approaches.

- **Creating the Conditions That Foster Accountability.** Accountability emerges when youth are supported, not pressured, to recognize their actions, understand their impact, and make things right. Restorative diversion fosters this by encouraging honest reflection, empathy for those who have been harmed, and meaningful steps toward repair and personal growth.
- **Accountability Without Shame.** Youth are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions in a manner that fosters personal growth rather than punishment. Accountability is framed as a learning opportunity rooted in empathy, integrity, and meaningful connection, and is never used as a source of shame or humiliation.
- **Repair of Harm.** The ultimate goal is to restore trust and rebuild relationships wherever possible. The process focuses on the experiences and needs of those harmed by creating a space for acknowledgment, validation, and the meaningful repair of harm.
- **Community Healing and Reintegration.** Restorative diversion aims to strengthen the bonds between individuals and their communities. Instead of isolating or excluding youth, the process emphasizes belonging, restoration, and collective well-being. Healing is viewed as a shared endeavor, not a private burden.
- **Youth-Centered and Strengths-Based.** Youth are recognized as capable of growth and change, rather than being seen solely through the lens of deficits or risks. Restorative diversion highlights each young person's strengths, aspirations, and capacity for repair. Language and practices are designed to avoid stigmatizing labels.
- **Voluntary Participation and Respect for Autonomy.** All participants, including the youth responsible for the actions, those affected, diversion staff, and volunteers, engage voluntarily. Informed consent is crucial. Respecting autonomy builds trust and empowers participants to take an active role in their healing and accountability.
- **Cultural Humility.** Practices are grounded in understanding participants' diverse racial, cultural, and community backgrounds, demonstrating cultural humility to ensure the process is inclusive, fair, and responsive to everyone's varied lived experiences.
- **Safety, Trust, and Transparency.** Every stage of the diversion process is approached from a trauma-informed perspective. Physical and emotional safety are prioritized, and efforts are made to reduce anxiety through clear communication, structured predictability, and transparent expectations. Trust is built over time through consistent behavior.

- **Collaboration and Shared Responsibility.** Restorative justice is not done *to* or *for* participants but *with* them. Decisions and solutions are co-created, drawing on the collective insights, values, and needs of everyone involved. Team members collaborate with all involved to co-create empowering and healing agreements, rather than imposing or dictating outcomes.
- **Confidentiality Within Limits.** Respecting privacy is essential for building trust. Information shared during restorative diversion is handled carefully. Participants are informed about the limits of confidentiality, especially concerning safety or legal reporting obligations.

1.6.2 Professional Standards

The following professional standards serve as guiding expectations for all individuals involved in the Youth Diversion Team process. These standards operationalize the Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice Diversion Core Framework and ensure that every participant is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness by:

- **Upholding the Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice Diversion Core Framework.** Team members must anchor their work in the Core Framework, consistently prioritizing the repair of harm, youth accountability, and community well-being over punitive or clinical goals. Members should avoid replacing restorative processes with non-restorative interventions.
- **Maintaining Role Integrity and Boundaries.** Each Youth Diversion Team member has a clearly defined role, whether as diversion staff, volunteers, or personnel from referring agencies. Members must remain within their designated roles, avoiding dual relationships, personal agendas, or unsolicited advice that could blur boundaries or disrupt the process.
- **Promoting Voluntary, Informed Participation.** Professional conduct includes ensuring all participants understand the process. Members must never coerce involvement or make guarantees about outcomes. Participation must be based on informed consent and a shared understanding of the process.
- **Acting with Cultural Humility and Self-Awareness.** Youth Diversion Team members are expected to approach each case humbly, recognizing how race, culture, language, power, and systemic inequities may impact participation. Members should reflect on their assumptions and avoid imposing dominant cultural norms.
- **Ensuring Physical and Emotional Safety.** All members must create an emotionally and physically safe environment by using nonjudgmental communication, managing their tone and body language, and intervening respectfully if conflicting dynamics arise. Preparation and debriefing are integral parts of this responsibility.
- **Modeling Developmentally Supportive Behavior.** Recognizing the impact of adult behavior on adolescent brain development, Youth Diversion Team members must model

the respectful, regulated, and empathetic conduct they expect from youth. Consistent and intentional modeling helps shape behaviors that support youth's long-term growth and well-being.

- **Communicating Transparently and Respecting Confidentiality.** Team members must communicate clearly and honestly while respecting confidentiality within established limits. No information should be disclosed outside the process without proper authorization, except in cases of mandated reporting or when there are immediate safety concerns.
- **Demonstrating Accountability and Collegial Conduct.** Youth Diversion Team members must remain open to feedback, take responsibility for missteps, and engage in reflective practice. Disagreements should be handled respectfully and privately. Members are expected to uphold the credibility of the diversion program through professionalism at all times.

1.7 Composition of the Youth Diversion Team

A successful Youth Diversion Team relies on collaboration between professional staff and volunteers, each fulfilling a unique but complementary role. Although their responsibilities differ, both groups actively participate in the diversion process, contributing to healing, accountability, and growth. This section outlines the essential roles and contributions of staff and volunteers in supporting a restorative and trauma-informed approach.

1.7.1 Staff Participation

Staff who coordinate and facilitate the diversion process are not just administrators but also active members of the Youth Diversion Team and participants in each case. Their involvement extends beyond logistical and procedural oversight; they play a central role in every stage of the process, from referral through intake, facilitating the Restorative Meeting, developing the Restorative Agreement, to case closure. As a consistent presence throughout the diversion journey, staff are essential to ensuring continuity, procedural fidelity, and support for all parties involved.

The diversion program staff brings a wide range of training and background experiences that directly support effective program delivery. These areas of expertise may include addictions, case management, criminal justice, mandated reporting, marriage and family therapy, mental health, probation work, social work, trauma, and trauma-informed treatment with youth, and suicide prevention. This diverse foundation equips staff with the skills and insight necessary to navigate the complex needs of each case with competence and care.

Staff members are responsible for guiding the process in alignment with the trauma-informed restorative justice practices outlined in this manual. Through effective facilitation, they maintain structure and neutrality during meetings while supporting youth, those harmed, and volunteers in achieving meaningful outcomes. By bringing professional expertise, historical context, and a

commitment to the program's core values, they help ensure consistency and uphold the integrity of the diversion model across all cases.

Additionally, youth diversion staff are responsible for informing referring agency personnel about program policies, eligibility updates, and any procedural changes (see [*Part 4: Referral & Eligibility Requirements for Diversion*](#)).

1.7.2 Volunteer Participation

Volunteers are essential to the Youth Diversion Team. They offer diverse perspectives, professional experiences, and specialized knowledge from various fields, including education, mental health, social work, law, and youth development. Their contributions help ensure that community values, voices, and relationships are carefully considered and included when promoting accountability and healing.

Volunteers are not passive observers but active contributors to each Restorative Meeting and process stage. Their participation signals to the youth who caused harm, their families, those affected by the incident, and the broader community that the diversion process is rooted in care, growth, and reintegration rather than punishment or exclusion. Volunteers embody restorative values such as respect, empathy, fairness, and shared responsibility through their presence and conduct.

They listen, ask questions, offer insights, and help shape restorative agreements that promote accountability and healing by providing valuable, hands-on expertise, particularly in identifying intervention-based services that can be thoughtfully integrated into restorative practices within these agreements.

Typically, volunteers become involved at the start of the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting, but their participation can continue throughout various phases of the process based on the needs of the case and the expertise they offer. Some volunteers may provide valuable insights to staff during the case preparation, while others may stay engaged until the case is closed.

When volunteers accept a case, they are expected to commit to consistent participation throughout its duration. This consistency is critical not only for relational trust and continuity of support but also models key behaviors for youth still in their formative developmental stages. A dependable adult presence shows what it means to follow through on commitments, maintain respectful relationships, and take responsibility for one's role in a community. In doing so, volunteers help create a process that is not only restorative but also instructive.

Given the sensitive and complex nature of many diversion cases, volunteers must approach their role with humility, purpose, and a clear understanding that their participation serves the youth and the community, not personal interests. A spirit of service, not self-promotion, is essential to maintaining the integrity of the Youth Diversion Team.

Volunteers are expected to attend trainings and be prepared, emotionally present, and fully aligned with the program's trauma-informed and restorative justice principles. Their presence is

meaningful not only because of their expertise but also because of the compassion, wisdom, and accountability they bring to every interaction.

1.8 Volunteer Recruitment, Selection, and Appointment

The Youth Diversion Team relies on a diverse and committed group of volunteers who embody trauma-informed and restorative values. To maintain the integrity of the process and support youth, families, and those who have been harmed, all volunteers must complete a structured recruitment, vetting, and appointment process.

1.8.1 Selection and Recruitment

Recruitment efforts focus on attracting individuals with professional experience relevant to youth development, education, mental health, social work, law, or community leadership. Outreach is conducted through local partnerships with schools, civic groups, and community organizations to ensure a broad, inclusive pool. Ideal candidates demonstrate empathy, humility, reliability, and a willingness to grow their understanding of trauma-informed restorative practices.

1.8.2 Application and Screening

All prospective volunteers should complete a written application, followed by an interview with the Youth Service Bureau director or another designated program leader. The screening process assesses:

- Commitment to trauma-informed and restorative justice principles
- Emotional maturity and cultural responsiveness
- Relevant experience or community involvement
- Availability to participate consistently throughout the life of a case
- Willingness to complete the required training

1.8.3 Reference and Background Checks

To safeguard the integrity of the program and those it serves, the Youth Service Bureau director, other designated program leader, or their designee will:

- Contact personal and/or professional references to assess the applicant's character and suitability
- Conduct required Department of Children and Families and criminal background checks per local policy

1.8.4 Provisional Appointment and Observation

Qualified applicants may receive a provisional appointment that allows them to observe or participate in a limited number of cases under supervision. This phase provides opportunities to:

- Complete the required training

- Gain familiarity with Youth Diversion Team procedures
- Demonstrate alignment with program values
- Receive structured feedback from the facilitator or current team members

1.8.5 Confirmation and Appointment

After successful provisional participation and team feedback, a volunteer may be approved for ongoing involvement. When required, the Youth Service Bureau director or Youth Diversion Team administrator may submit the nominee for formal confirmation by an elected or governing body, if applicable.

1.8.6 Formal Appointments (When required)

If a formal appointment by elected officials or a public body is required, the Youth Service Bureau director or the Youth Diversion Team administrator:

- Vets the nominee based on the established criteria
- Submits the name for confirmation whenever possible

1.8.7 Ongoing Evaluation

All volunteers are subject to periodic review to ensure:

- Consistent participation and follow-through
- Continued alignment with restorative values
- Respectful, effective engagement with youth, families, and others affected

1.8.8 Terms of Appointment and Reappointment

New volunteers should be appointed to a probationary term of six to twelve months, depending on the frequency of Youth Diversion Team meetings. This trial period provides an opportunity to assess the individual's availability, alignment with the program's restorative values, and constructive participation.

At the end of the probationary period, the volunteer's performance should be formally reviewed by the Youth Service Bureau director, Youth Diversion Team case manager, or another designated leader. Subsequent reviews should occur with at least 30 days' notice and be repeated every two years thereafter.

Volunteers may be reappointed for two-year terms by a simple majority vote of the team during a Restorative Meeting. However, all volunteers serve at the discretion of the Youth Service Bureau director or designated agency leader and may be removed at any time for cause, with or without a team vote.

1.9 Training

This section outlines training requirements, onboarding expectations, and guidance for ongoing development. It also reinforces that restorative justice practices are distinct from intervention-based approaches.

To ensure the consistent and high-quality implementation of trauma-informed restorative justice diversion, all diversion staff, volunteers, and referring agency personnel must complete role-specific training appropriate to their level of involvement. While not everyone requires the same depth or frequency of training, all participants must be equipped to uphold the values and integrity of the Youth Diversion Team model.

Regardless of education or prior experience, all persons involved with the Youth Diversion Team program are required to complete the core training components. While professionals with backgrounds in social work, education, mental health, counseling, probation, law enforcement, or school-based roles—including school resource officers—bring valuable perspectives, their expertise must align with, not override, the protocols outlined in this manual. Prior experience is an asset, but it must support rather than substitute the trauma-informed, restorative procedures presented here.

1.9.1 Training for Diversion Staff

Diversion staff hold central responsibility for implementing trauma-informed restorative justice diversion with integrity, consistency, and care. To fulfill this role effectively, all staff must complete the core training series during onboarding and engage in regular professional development throughout their service.

- Training for diversion staff should prepare them to:
- Facilitate restorative processes that support youth accountability, healing, and reintegration.
- Apply trauma-informed practices that prioritize safety, regulation, and connection.
- Uphold the values and procedures of the Youth Diversion Team model across all interactions.
- Navigate complex dynamics with clarity, humility, and a non-adversarial stance.
- Maintain confidentiality, appropriate boundaries, and strong team collaboration.
- Adapt communication to meet the developmental, cultural, and situational needs of youth and families.

In addition to core training, diversion staff should receive:

- Ongoing coaching, reflective supervision, and opportunities for peer learning.
- Periodic updates on best practices in restorative justice, adolescent development, and trauma-informed care.
- Support in addressing burnout, vicarious trauma, and role-related challenges.

While professional experience in related fields can be beneficial, it must be integrated within—and not placed above—the restorative framework and protocols of this model. Staff are expected to actively unlearn punitive, deficit-based, or interventionist habits that conflict with the relational, healing-centered aims of this approach.

Critical Reminder: Sites experiencing staff transitions must ensure that all new personnel receive expedited onboarding and complete the training series immediately upon assignment or as soon as possible. Delays in training compromise program integrity and participant outcomes.

1.9.2 Training for Volunteers

To participate meaningfully and uphold the model's integrity, all volunteers must complete the core training before engaging in active involvement. Volunteer training prepares individuals to:

- Understand the principles and goals of trauma-informed restorative justice diversion.
- Participate respectfully in structured, restorative conversations.
- Support youth accountability, reflection, and repair of harm.

- Maintain confidentiality and uphold professional boundaries.
- Recognize their role within a collaborative, non-adversarial team process.

While volunteers may bring valuable life or professional experiences, these should support, not substitute, the training and procedures outlined in this manual. Volunteers must be trained to align with restorative values and avoid defaulting to punitive or interventionist mindsets.

To ensure ongoing competency, volunteers should receive periodic refreshers and opportunities for reflection and coaching. These offerings help maintain consistency, reinforce best practices, and foster long-term volunteer engagement.

1.9.3 Training for Referring Agency Personnel

Personnel from schools, law enforcement, juvenile courts, and other referring agencies play a vital role in initiating the restorative diversion process. Their ability to clearly and accurately communicate the program's intent helps set the tone for youth and families.

Training for referring personnel should prepare them to:

- Understand the purpose, structure, and values of the Youth Diversion Team.
- Accurately explain the goals and expectations of the diversion process to youth and caregivers.
- Distinguish restorative justice diversion from traditional punitive or intervention-based models.
- Recognize youth eligibility criteria and appropriate use of referrals.
- Initiate the process with sensitivity, clarity, and cultural responsiveness.

A clear and consistent message at the referral point helps youth and families enter the process with shared expectations and greater trust. To support this, referring personnel should receive:

- Role-specific training tailored to their level of involvement.
- Periodic updates from Youth Diversion Team staff to reinforce core principles, protocols, and referral procedures.
- Opportunities to clarify questions and strengthen collaboration with Youth Diversion Team members.

By aligning their messaging and actions with restorative values, referring partners help ensure a strong foundation for meaningful engagement and successful outcomes.

1.9.4 Training Programs

Restorative Justice 101. This webinar deconstructs the juvenile justice system, examining why and how it is often harmful, and how we replicate many of its elements in our diversion processes. Participants discuss how restorative justice addresses the shortcomings of our justice

system and enables us to operate in a manner consistent with research on the development of young people's minds. They also explore how trauma interrupts development and impacts children's behavior. This workshop provides participants with a deeper understanding of restorative justice and its distinctive approach, while still achieving the desired outcomes.

Who should complete this training?

- Diversion Staff
- Volunteers
- Referring Agency Personnel

Restorative Justice 201. Expanding on the learning from Restorative Justice 101, this webinar helps participants learn the skills that support restorative justice. Participants learn and experience specific communication skills, the use of the circle process, and how these practices interact with the adolescent brain. Particular strategies for bringing this work to the diversion process are also discussed.

Prerequisite: *Restorative Justice 101*.

Who should complete this training?

- Diversion Staff
- Volunteers
- Referring Agency Personnel

Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice in Youth Diversion. This immersive, four-day in-person training equips Youth Diversion Team staff with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to implement trauma-informed restorative justice practices grounded in the updated Connecticut Youth Services Association Youth Diversion Teams manual. The training ensures adherence to standards and supports consistency and fidelity across sites by providing a comprehensive overview of trauma-informed restorative approaches. Participants explore the philosophy, principles, and practical application of trauma-informed restorative justice to promote positive outcomes for youth facing arrestable offenses. They examine how trauma, adolescent brain development, and systemic inequities influence youth behavior and engagement with the justice system. Through group discussions, interactive exercises, role-plays, and real-world case scenarios, participants develop core competencies in determining case eligibility, conducting restorative intake sessions, engaging with those harmed, facilitating restorative meetings, and creating meaningful accountability agreements. The training emphasizes relationship-building, shared learning, and confidence-building to help staff develop processes that support healing, accountability, and growth for youth and communities impacted by harm.

Prerequisites: *Restorative Justice 101, 201*.

Who should complete this training?

- Diversion Staff (with a focus on facilitators and case managers)

1.9.5 Ensuring Fidelity and Consistency Across Sites

This training section promotes the consistent implementation of Youth Diversion Team policies and procedures across all participating sites.

To maintain the integrity of trauma-informed restorative justice diversion, all training must adhere to the standards outlined in this manual, whether delivered independently by a site or through collaborative efforts. Sites may not modify core practices to fit preexisting intervention models or individual staff preferences, as such changes risk undermining the restorative purpose and consistency of the program.

Key expectations for maintaining fidelity include:

- Using this manual as the primary source for structuring diversion decisions and procedures.
- Demonstrating integration of training content into daily practice, particularly within the Youth Diversion Team processes.
- Commitment to continuous quality improvement through:
 - direct observation,
 - structured self-assessments, and
 - soliciting feedback from all parties involved with cases (i.e., youth, families, harmed parties, volunteers, and referring agency personnel).
- The routine use of Connecticut Youth Services Association technical assistance and coaching is considered an essential support rather than an optional service (see [*Section 1.5 Program Implementation Support*](#)).

By upholding these expectations, sites can ensure that all youth and families, as well as those who have been harmed, experience a consistent, equitable, and restorative process, regardless of their location.

1.10 Language that Upholds Trauma-Informed Restorative Values

In restorative justice, our language has a significant influence on how individuals and communities perceive and engage with the process. The terms we apply in a restorative process are more than just labels; they reflect the culture we wish to create—one based on respect, healing, and mutual accountability.

As we seek to align our practices with trauma-informed restorative values, we must recognize that language is never neutral. The words we select can uphold hierarchical, punitive structures or encourage mutual respect, dignity, and healing. Youth Diversion Teams should reflect on how

traditional terminology—often rooted in legal or institutional contexts—may inadvertently perpetuate a “power over” dynamic that undermines restorative goals.

By using thoughtful and intentional language, we can foster an environment where youth, their families, those who have been harmed, and communities can collaboratively participate in the work of repair and growth.

Because youth are at a formative stage of development, the language adults use, particularly during intake and Restorative Meetings, also serves as a model of respectful communication. Thoughtful word choices can help young people internalize the values of empathy, responsibility, and connection.

The following guidance provides practical steps for adopting language and systemic practices that embody the restorative principles of accountability, inclusion, and shared humanity.

1.10.1 Youth Who Caused Harm vs. Responsible Youth

This manual uses the phrases “*youth who caused harm*,” “*youth responsible for causing harm*,” and, in some contexts, simply “*youth*” instead of “*responsible youth*” to avoid assigning an identity label based solely on behavior. Referring to someone as “responsible” can reduce their identity to a single action, which contradicts restorative values.

The goal is to describe what occurred without defining the person by it. This people-first language supports a restorative approach that sees each youth as more than the harm they caused and affirms their capacity for accountability and growth.

However, “*responsible youth*” is also a legacy term. Some existing documents and forms, such as the *Responsible Youth Questionnaire*, retain their original titles for continuity and recognition. References to participants will utilize people-first language in referring to the manual, even when the original title of the form is mentioned. These updates may fully reflect restorative language.

1.10.2 Considerations for Individuals and Communities Harmed

In restorative justice, the traditional term *victim* does not fully encompass the wide range of individuals and communities affected by harm. Restorative practices adopt a broader perspective, acknowledging that harm rarely impacts one person. The consequences can ripple outward, influencing family members, friends, and entire communities. At times, a specific individual may experience direct harm. In other instances, harm might affect property, public spaces, or the broader community without directly impacting a particular individual. Additionally, families or caregivers of the youth may perceive that they have been harmed, as well as the youth themselves.

Here are some examples:

Harm to an Individual. The youth:

- Punched another student during an argument, causing physical injury and emotional trauma.
- Sent threatening messages to a peer online, leading to anxiety and fear for the individual (and potentially their family).
- Damaged a teacher's car parked at school.
- Stole money from a close relative.

Harm to a Group of Individuals. The youth:

- Spray-painted derogatory messages on the walls of a school, causing fear and anger among students and staff who identify with the targeted group.
- Instigated a fight at a party, injuring multiple attendees and causing physical and emotional trauma to many others.
- Stole from a small family-run store, causing financial and emotional stress for the owners and employees.

Harm to the Broader Community (not affecting any single individual directly). The youth:

- Vandalized a religious building, targeting a group of people and causing fear and pain in their faith community.
- Knocked over headstones in a cemetery, causing distress in the broader community.
- Brought a weapon to school, disrupting the safety and well-being of the entire school community.

Harm to the Youth's Family. Families or caregivers of the youth may feel wronged by their actions, embarrassed, angry, grieved, or anxious, and they may be asked to make amends or support efforts for behavioral change. This additional layer of harm highlights the shared need for healing within the family unit and reinforces the importance of restoring the relationships among all parties involved.

Harm to the Self. Along with the harm inflicted on others, youth who cause harm often suffer damage to their self-image. They may struggle with feelings of guilt, shame, regret, fear, or disconnection from their values and sense of identity. Recognizing and addressing this internal harm is integral to restorative processes, supporting the youth's accountability, healing, and reintegration into the community.

In alignment with this philosophy, the manual intentionally uses language that reflects the complexity of harm and prioritizes the human experience of all those affected, directly or indirectly. Terms such as "*individuals harmed*," "*those who were harmed*," "*those affected*," "*people*," and "*communities affected by harm*" are used contextually to uphold restorative values.

While the term *victim* may appear in specific contexts, such as legal proceedings or settings where it is traditionally used, the preferred language within this manual aims to support a more inclusive, healing-centered approach. Members of the Youth Diversion Team are encouraged to adopt similarly reflective and inclusive language in their practice, emphasizing healing, relationship-building, and the inherent dignity of all participants.

1.10.3 Considerations Regarding the Terms Panel and Board

In some diversion programs, staff and volunteers who participate in the Youth Diversion Team process have historically been referred to as *panel* or *board* members. This terminology often originates from programs modeled after Juvenile Review Boards, where the term *board* was used to describe a formal body responsible for reviewing youth cases. While these labels remain used in some programs, they can unintentionally suggest a hierarchical or adjudicative structure, implying authority, judgment, or decision-making power over youth.

In contrast, the Youth Diversion Team operates within a restorative justice framework that prioritizes shared responsibility, mutual respect, and collaborative problem-solving. The language used to describe participants should reflect this relational approach. Terms such as *Youth Diversion Team members*, *diversion staff*, or *volunteers* more accurately convey the roles of trusted guides, supporters, and community contributors, rather than those of judges or decision-makers.

Because youth often enter the diversion process in a vulnerable position, creating an environment grounded in dignity, inclusion, and empowerment is essential. Language that emphasizes hierarchy or judgment, even unintentionally, can undermine restorative efforts and retraumatize youth.

This manual refers to the following as participants to highlight the collaborative, team-based nature of the diversion process:

- **Diversion staff** offer professional expertise informed by education, fieldwork, and a commitment to ongoing trauma-informed and restorative justice practices.
- **Volunteers** contribute professional experience and community-based knowledge, particularly in identifying supportive services that can be integrated into restorative agreements aligned with restorative practice.
- **Referring agency personnel**, such as school representatives, law enforcement officials, or other professionals, play a crucial role in introducing youth and families to the diversion process.

When everyone involved in the Youth Diversion Team process uses language that reflects restorative values (e.g., describing the Youth Diversion Team as a supportive resource rather than an authority figure), they help set a tone of collaboration and trust from the beginning. Encouraging these partners to use consistent, trauma-informed language helps avoid confusion or intimidation and reinforces the team-based nature of the process.

1.11 Legal and Policy Context

Currently, no Connecticut law currently prescribes how Youth Diversion Teams must be structured or operated. This allows communities the flexibility to design teams that reflect their unique characteristics, including local values, available resources, and cultural or geographic context. This adaptability is one of the model's greatest strengths, encouraging meaningful engagement from staff and volunteers while enabling implementation that aligns with each community's demographics, history with youth justice, and access to services.

However, this flexibility does *not* extend to altering the core principles, practices, and procedures outlined in this manual. Agencies administering Youth Diversion Teams are expected to fully adhere to the trauma-informed and restorative justice standards described herein. The model is intentionally designed to be "one-size-fits-all" in terms of its foundational restorative values, trauma-informed framework, and required protocols. These non-negotiable elements ensure program fidelity, safeguard the integrity of the process, and protect the youth, families, and communities served. For additional context, refer to the section titled [*Maintaining Fidelity to Core Principles and Practices*](#) in the front matter.

Although no enabling statute currently mandates or defines the Youth Diversion Team, the model has deep roots in Connecticut, evolving over 55 years from its earlier form as Juvenile Review Boards.

The closest statutory foundation for the Youth Service Bureau diversion model is found in Connecticut General Statutes §10-19m, which establishes a Youth Service Bureau as a:

" . . . multipurpose youth service bureau for the purposes of evaluation, planning, coordination and implementation of services, including prevention and intervention programs for delinquent, predelinquent, pregnant, parenting and troubled youths referred to such bureau by schools, police, juvenile courts, adult courts, local youth-serving agencies, parents and self-referrals."

That statute goes on to say that the Youth Service Bureau:

" . . . shall be the coordinating unit of community-based services to provide comprehensive delivery of prevention, intervention, treatment and follow-up services."

Furthermore, it provides that the Youth Service Bureaus deliver the following services:

" . . . (1) Individual and group counseling; (2) parent training and family therapy; (3) work placement and employment counseling; (4) alternative and special educational opportunities; (5) recreational and youth enrichment programs; (6) outreach programs to insure participation and planning by the entire community for the development of regional and community-based youth services; (7) preventive programs, including youth pregnancy, youth suicide, violence, alcohol and drug prevention; and (8) programs that develop positive youth involvement."

These are all services provided by the Youth Diversion Team to comply with the clear legislative mandate to:

“ . . . meet the needs of youths by the diversion of troubled youths from the justice system as well as by the provision of opportunities for all youths to function as responsible members of their communities.”

While the diversion model has historically operated without a specific enabling statute, it has been widely recognized as an effective alternative to formal court processing for low-level, first- and second-time arrestable offenses. It is currently a focus of Connecticut’s Legislature and will remain the first option for juvenile court diversion.

Current diversion practices are based on long-standing partnerships between Youth Service Bureaus and various administrative agencies, including schools, police departments, the Juvenile Court, and community organizations. The history of these collaborative efforts highlights the broader goal of reducing youth involvement with the juvenile justice system by promoting community-based responses.

Connecticut’s policy direction has recently increasingly emphasized trauma-informed and restorative approaches. This shift is reflected in state agency guidance, training investments, and interagency partnerships—especially those led by the Department of Children and Families and the Connecticut Youth Services Association, with support from Connecticut’s Legislature.

While comprehensive legislation specifically addressing youth diversion is still under consideration, future laws may formalize and expand the use of trauma-informed restorative diversion practices throughout the state. If new legislation is enacted, it is expected to reflect Connecticut’s broader commitment to these principles. Given the state’s intentional investment in this model, new laws will likely reinforce the core values already integral to the Youth Diversion Team approach, particularly its focus on local adaptability, youth-centered accountability, and community-based support that remain trauma-informed and restorative.

In the meantime, diversion programs operate within a changing legal and policy environment that encourages innovation while relying on the established authority of Youth Service Bureaus and the strong commitment of state agencies to trauma-informed restorative justice.

Part 2. Foundational Concepts in Restorative and Trauma-Informed Diversion

Part 2 establishes the conceptual foundation for understanding how the Youth Diversion Team program integrates restorative justice with a trauma-informed approach. Together, these frameworks guide the program's design and implementation—restorative justice provides a structure for accountability and harm repair. At the same time, trauma-informed care ensures that this process is safe, supportive, and developmentally appropriate for youth.

Traditional diversion programs have often focused on efficiency and risk reduction, sometimes overlooking youth development, the voice of those harmed, and meaningful, accountable community engagement of the youth who caused harm. By examining these limitations, this section clarifies why a shift to restorative practices is necessary and urgent.

Restorative justice offers a values-based alternative, emphasizing accountability, harm repair, and including those directly affected by the offense. Rather than centering punishment or compliance, it prioritizes responsibility and relationships. At the same time, the manual recognizes that many young people in the diversion process have experienced trauma that shapes their behavior, development, and capacity for engagement.

Understanding Trauma explores how trauma—both individual and collective—affects brain development, emotional regulation, and interpersonal dynamics. *A Trauma-Informed Approach* builds on this by outlining the core principles of trauma-responsive practice: safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness.

Restorative justice and trauma-informed practice enhance one another. *Trauma-informed restorative justice* combines accountability with empathy, ensuring that responses to harm do not cause further trauma but instead promote healing for everyone involved. Using either framework alone is not enough; together, they create a more humane, just, and effective process.

The *Foundations of the Restorative Meeting* section introduces the restorative circle format used in the Youth Diversion Team process. This structure promotes open dialogue, truth-telling, and collaborative problem-solving while remaining sensitive to the needs of youth and families who have experienced trauma.

Finally, Part 2 emphasizes the importance of including the voices of those harmed by a youth's actions. Even minor offenses can have severe emotional or social impacts. Centering these perspectives helps balance the process and deepens its meaning, contributing to healing, accountability, and stronger community relationships.

2.1 Traditional Diversion Programming

Diversion theory suggests that redirecting individuals away from arrest, prosecution, and incarceration—and toward supportive, community-based alternatives—can significantly reduce recidivism compared to traditional justice system responses ([Wilson & Hoge, 2013](#)). Effective diversion programs often address the root causes of criminalized behavior, such as housing instability, food insecurity, limited educational access, unemployment, and unmet mental health needs ([Vera Institute of Justice, 2022](#)).

Diversion programs aim to prevent formal court involvement by redirecting youth through community-based support, services, and case management. When grounded in individualized practice, family engagement, and strengths-based support, these programs reduce further system involvement and help youth build more stable, hopeful futures.

In 2021, the Tow Youth Justice Institute released an Issue Brief titled *JJ Reform and the Importance of the Community-Based Diversion System*, which supports several benefits of diversion programs ([Tow Youth Justice Institute, 2021](#)). The brief highlighted the following findings:

1. Court involvement for low-risk youth often does more harm than good, diverting limited resources from interventions that should focus on youth whose behavior poses a public safety risk.
2. Most low-risk youth grow out of their behavior and stop reoffending without system intervention.
3. Diversion is a more cost-effective public safety strategy than court processing for low-risk youth.

Punitive measures often worsen the complex behavioral health needs of youth involved in the justice system ([Branson et al., 2017](#); [McCarthy, Schiraldi, & Shark, 2016](#); [National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017](#)). Many of these youth have experienced trauma, and up to 80 percent of incarcerated youth meet the criteria for a mental health diagnosis ([Underwood & Washington, 2016](#)). Instead of fostering rehabilitation, traditional punitive responses often exacerbate these underlying issues. Additionally, youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented in the system, frequently facing worse outcomes as a result ([McCarthy, Schiraldi, & Shark, 2016](#); [Center for American Progress, 2017](#)).

According to the [Tow Youth Justice Institute \(2021\)](#), diversion presents a promising solution to address racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system. Disparities often arise from differing discretionary practices by law enforcement, court officials, and other practitioners when interacting with individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Automating diversion for certain low-level offenses can promote consistency and fairness, ensuring that similarly situated youth are given the same opportunity to avoid formal system involvement. This

approach reduces disparities in decision-making and fosters equity by minimizing the influence of implicit bias and subjective judgment.

Traditional diversion programs are designed to prevent youth from becoming further involved in the formal juvenile court system. By redirecting youth through structured programming, support, and case management, these programs provide a pathway for accountability that avoids legal sanctions, court oversight, or the threat of confinement. This approach allows youth to take responsibility for their actions while avoiding the long-term consequences of a criminal record.

When thoughtfully designed, diversion programs can address contributing factors such as unmet mental health needs, poverty, or lack of access to education by referring youth to appropriate community-based services. Youth typically need to complete the terms of a diversion agreement to have their case dismissed, with the terms tailored to reduce future risk.

Moreover, diversion programs should be regularly evaluated for effectiveness and adapted as necessary to meet the evolving needs of youth and communities. Continuous feedback and data collection can ensure that diversion programs remain responsive, relevant, and effective in supporting youth development and preventing recidivism.

While traditional diversion offers a valuable alternative to formal system involvement, it does not inherently incorporate a restorative approach. Restorative approaches center youth development and healing, foster meaningful accountability, repair harm, and actively involve those directly affected by harm, including victims and the broader community.

2.2 Principles of Restorative Justice

In our traditional legal system, justice is often equated with “taking one's punishment.” Traditional systems focus on enforcing broken rules and punishing lawbreakers; they are typically transactional. Accountability for injustice is often viewed as the sentence served or punishment imposed on the offender, with little input from those who have been harmed. In this context, punishment is “passive.” It shifts the person who caused harm to perceive themselves as the victim because the institution's power is operating to harm them ([Pranis, 2018](#)).

This dynamic is especially significant for a youth at a critical stage of moral and identity development. When accountability is reduced to passive punishment, youth may miss the opportunity to understand the real impact of their actions, develop empathy for those affected, and take meaningful steps toward repair. Instead of fostering growth, the process may reinforce a sense of alienation or victimhood, thereby undermining the outcomes that diversion programs are designed to support, such as taking responsibility, making positive changes, and forming connections.

While traditional diversion programs focus on addressing underlying risk factors and preventing system involvement, restorative justice diversion programs go a step further by directly addressing the harm caused and the context in which it occurred. Restorative justice programs define wrongdoing not solely as a legal violation, but as harm to individuals, relationships, and

the community ([Rodriguez, 2005](#)). These programs guide youth in acknowledging their actions, taking responsibility, and actively working to repair the harm. In this model, accountability involves more than accepting consequences—it means making things right and working to prevent future harm ([Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015](#)).

The accountability process within Youth Diversion Teams is guided by restorative justice principles that balance the needs of the youth who caused harm, those harmed, and the broader community (see [Section 1.6.1: Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice Diversion Core Framework](#)). Accountability is framed as both individual and collective: while the youth must take ownership of their behavior, the community is also called to reflect on and address the systemic, social, or economic conditions that may have contributed to the harm (see [Section 3.6: Collective Accountability](#)). This shared approach enables Youth Diversion Team staff and volunteers to support youth in actively addressing the impacts of their actions, preventing further harm to themselves, their families, those directly affected, and the wider community. Through services, interventions, and ongoing support—aligned with restorative justice practices—the Youth Diversion Team program promotes personal growth, a strengthened sense of identity, and deeper community connection, all within a trauma-informed framework.

Restorative justice is a relational approach that seeks to transform harm by rebuilding and repairing relationships. It views crime as a violation and disruption of relationships, rather than simply as a breach of a law or rule. Howard Zehr, the author of *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, explains that restorative justice is a process that brings together everyone affected by an offense to identify the harm done, address needs and responsibilities, and work toward healing and making amends ([Zehr, 2015](#)). The [Community Justice Network of Vermont \(2022\)](#) defines restorative justice as a collaborative and inclusive process focused on building understanding, promoting accountability, and creating opportunities to repair harm.

Table 2.1 offers insight into the change in views between our traditional retributive and restorative justice systems.

Table 2.1: How is Restorative Thinking Different?	
Retributive Justice	Restorative Justice
Focused on rules/laws broken	Focused on the harm caused
Accountability equals punishment served with or without admission of guilt	Accountability means addressing the harm
Offender Focused	Balance between offender, victims, community
Transactional Process	Transformative Process
Offender defined by crime	Offender seen holistically
Focused on the behavior	Focus on the roots of behavior
Focus on establishment of guilt/innocence	Focus on needs and obligations of all involved
Focused on “What’s wrong with you?”	Focused on “What happened to you?”
Adapted from <i>Building a Trauma-informed Restorative School: Skills and Approaches for Improving Culture and Behavior</i> (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2020, p. 40)	

Restorative justice is a response to wrongdoing that emphasizes repairing harm and recognizes the importance of maintaining positive relationships with others as a fundamental human need. It aims to address the underlying causes of crime by meeting the unmet needs of the offender and can also involve transforming unjust systems and structures. All stakeholders impacted by the wrongdoing—those harmed, offenders, and community members—have a voice in justice. Restorative justice approaches occur in safe spaces, encourage vulnerability, and involve open sharing without judgment.

In a restorative justice framework, accountability refers to taking responsibility and actively repairing the harm to prevent it from happening again ([Pranis, 2018](#)). According to the principles of restorative justice, rehabilitation cannot be achieved until the offender recognizes the harm inflicted on victims and communities, even in their absence, and takes steps to make amends ([Bazemore & Umbreit, 1997](#)).

[Kay Pranis \(2018\)](#) identifies five “active” elements in the process of being accountable. The first three elements are achieved through restorative dialogue, and the last two result from a

restorative process. The elements are discussed in detail in [*Part 3: Conversation Frameworks for Accountability and Repair*](#). They are:

1. Acknowledge that one's actions caused harm.
2. Acknowledge one's role in those actions.
3. Understand the full impact of one's actions on others.
4. Take steps to repair the harm.
5. Identifying and changing patterns that led to the harm.

There are many ways for youth to repair harm, such as cleaning up property damage, writing a letter of apology, or making other reparations that meet the needs of the youth, those directly affected, and the community, all of which are decided collaboratively. The program may also provide support, such as educational assistance, or help older youth achieve independence, including assisting them in building developmental relationship skills and finding employment.

While it is crucial to provide the necessary programming, support, and supervision, it is equally essential to ensure that these efforts are aligned with the objectives of a restorative justice diversion program. There must be a connection between the actions for which the youth are held accountable and the action items in the Restorative Agreement; otherwise, the restorative message may not be clear to the young person ([Farrell, Betsinger, & Hammond, 2018](#)). If this connection is unclear or absent, the youth may perceive the agreement as arbitrary or punitive rather than meaningful, which can reduce their engagement in the process and limit the potential for genuine accountability, learning, and harm repair.

[*Sections 3.3: Supporting Responsibility and Active Accountability, 3.7: Distinguishing Restorative Practices and Intervention-Based Services, and 3.8: Requirements for Restorative Alignment*](#) provide the foundational insight and guidance necessary to ensure a strong connection between the actions for which the youth are held accountable and the specific items included in the Restorative Agreement. These sections explain the importance of youth acknowledging the harm they have caused and taking concrete steps to repair it—actions that support the restoration of relationships, rebuilding trust, and fostering meaningful reflection. These principles are further operationalized in [*Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement*](#), where they are translated into specific, actionable components that address the harm done to those affected and the broader community.

2.3 Understanding Trauma

Understanding trauma is essential for supporting youth in the Youth Diversion Team process. Trauma impacts how individuals perceive the world, regulate their emotions, and interact in relationships.

Trauma is pervasive and affects individuals and communities across all ages, identities, and backgrounds. While many people encounter stressful situations, trauma arises when someone

experiences or perceives a profound loss of control, safety, or power during an event, whether directly, as a witness, or through learning about it secondhand. Its impact is shaped by how a person experiences and processes the event, not just the event itself.

Trauma is commonly defined as severe distress resulting from overwhelming mental or emotional pain, physical harm, or both. It can also be caused or intensified by discrimination, marginalization, and generational or historical oppression. Some individuals may continue to live in a prolonged survival state long after the threat has passed, especially when traumatic memories are stored in ways that keep them easily activated.

Trauma is generally categorized into three main types:

- **Acute Trauma:** Often referred to as “shock trauma,” resulting from a one-time event such as a natural disaster, serious accident, or personal violation like assault or robbery.
- **Chronic Trauma:** Stemming from prolonged or repeated experiences, such as ongoing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
- **Complex Trauma:** Involves exposure to multiple or compounding traumatic events, frequently starting in early childhood. It includes neglect, emotional abuse, and toxic stress that may keep the nervous system in a state of persistent hypervigilance.

These categories are not always distinct. Trauma may be physical, emotional, or psychological, and its effects may accumulate over time or arise from a single, overwhelming incident. Regardless of its form, trauma can disrupt emotional regulation, relationships, and a person’s capacity to function in daily life.

Its signs are not always visible. For instance, trauma may manifest subtly, affecting individuals, families, and entire communities ([Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \[SAMHSA\], 2022](#)). While some people recover over time, others continue to struggle with chronic stress responses, particularly if protective factors, such as strong support systems or prior resilience, are limited.

An individual’s personal history and developmental stage strongly influence how trauma is processed. The brain interprets trauma through the lens of previous experiences and biological sensitivity. Two people may face the same situation and respond in vastly different ways. Traumatic experiences during childhood, when the brain is still developing, are especially likely to leave long-term imprints.

Developmental trauma refers to repeated interpersonal trauma during early life, such as abuse, neglect, or prolonged exposure to instability. These experiences can impair emotional regulation, decision-making, attention, and learning ([van der Kolk, 2005](#)). One common source of developmental trauma is child maltreatment, defined as any act or omission by a caregiver that results in harm, potential harm, or threat of harm ([Smith, 2010](#)).

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study ([Felitti et al., 1998](#)) provided a foundational understanding of how childhood trauma affects long-term health and behavior. Surveying adults

about abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, the study linked multiple adverse experiences in childhood with higher risks of mental illness, substance use, chronic health conditions, and unfavorable social outcomes. Later research has confirmed that trauma during key developmental windows can impair memory, learning, and physical and emotional growth ([Anda et al., 2006](#)).

Additionally, trauma can be transmitted across generations. Families and communities may pass down trauma responses, coping patterns, and stress physiology through stories, behavior modeling, and even biological changes (i.e., epigenetics). At the same time, strong relational connections and positive environments can buffer these effects and promote resilience ([Perry & Winfrey, 2021](#)).

Youth Diversion Team members should be aware of how trauma may manifest within the juvenile justice system. [SAMHSA \(2014\)](#) defines trauma as the experience of one or more physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening events or circumstances that result in lasting adverse effects on an individual's mental, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual well-being. Today, addressing trauma is increasingly recognized as a foundational part of behavioral health care and a critical step toward recovery and healing ([SAMHSA, 2022](#)).

Trauma often shows up most profoundly in the context of relationships, especially when trust has been broken or a sense of safety has been compromised. To understand a trauma-informed approach, it is important to recognize how experiences may influence individuals involved in the Youth Diversion Team process, affecting their behavior, perception, and ability to engage. The following paragraphs provide insight into how it can impact the youth and families participating, as well as staff and volunteers, in the diversion process.

In the Youth Diversion Team process, harm is not just about rule-breaking or procedural violations; it is about real people experiencing real impacts, often leading to emotional, psychological, and social ruptures. Whether the offense involved a peer, a family member, a teacher, or a neighbor, even a minor incident can erode trust, create distance, or leave individuals feeling isolated or betrayed. These effects can linger long after the incident and must be acknowledged as central to the healing process. Restorative justice offers a path not just to repair behavior, but to rebuild trust through open dialogue, meaningful accountability, and the opportunity for all voices to be heard. When those harmed are invited—never pressured—to participate in the process in safe and supported ways, they are given space to express their truth, seek answers, and help shape the conditions for repair.

Addressing trauma in restorative diversion also means preparing for how harm affects the body, mind, and relationships. The process must account for the fact that participants may arrive carrying anxiety, fear, confusion, or a deep sense of disconnection—emotions that may intensify when discussing the incident or facing those involved. Youth responsible for harm may fear being reduced to their mistake, while those harmed may feel vulnerable reopening wounds in front of others. Trauma-informed practice requires that Youth Diversion Team staff and volunteers recognize these dynamics and take proactive steps to support physical and emotional

safety. This includes careful preparation, compassionate communication, and flexible participation options for those who have been harmed. Ultimately, when the process is handled with care and intention, restorative diversion becomes not just a response to wrongdoing, but a step toward reweaving the threads of trust and belonging that trauma often frays.

2.4 A Trauma-Informed Approach

A trauma-informed approach recognizes the widespread impact of trauma, seeks to avoid re-traumatization, and emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for all participants.

The Youth Diversion Team approach focuses on promoting ownership and accountability while prioritizing community, relationships, and the development of young people. A trauma-informed Youth Diversion Team is mindful of avoiding practices that could inadvertently retraumatize individuals by recreating conditions similar to their past traumas. Such situations can force them to relive distressing experiences. Additionally, integrating trauma-informed methods into Youth Diversion Team programs can improve their effectiveness in reducing youth involvement in the juvenile justice system and addressing unmet needs.

Youths referred to the program may have experienced trauma that influences their behavior and coping strategies. A trauma-informed lens ensures these behaviors are not misinterpreted as defiance or irresponsibility but rather understood within the context of each youth's lived experience. This understanding allows the Youth Diversion Team to uphold accountability while promoting healing and avoiding further harm. Trauma-informed practices build trust, safety, and relational connection—critical conditions for young people to engage meaningfully in repairing harm, accessing supportive services, and reconnecting with their communities.

When individuals experience trauma, their sense of safety and well-being can be compromised, leading to coping mechanisms that may appear disruptive or disengaged. Youth Diversion Team programs offer a valuable alternative to punitive models by addressing the youth's underlying behavioral health needs and ensuring public safety. Applying a trauma-informed lens to accountability allows teams to collaboratively identify meaningful ways for youth to repair harm to others and themselves. Programs may also provide services, interventions, and support to youth and their families to prevent future incidents while promoting a strong sense of personal identity and community belonging.

During the restorative meeting, it is essential for the youth who caused harm to listen and understand how their behavior caused harm to others and to determine what they can do to repair that harm. For example, a youth who vandalized a neighbor's property may initially appear defensive or withdrawn. A trauma-informed facilitator would recognize that this reaction could stem from past experiences, such as being harshly punished or humiliated at home, and respond in a way that fosters emotional safety.

Instead of escalating the situation, the facilitator might gently guide the youth to hear the neighbor's account of the emotional and financial impact of the incident. This approach allows the youth to connect their actions to real consequences in a supportive environment. Over time,

with proper guidance, the youth may transition from defensiveness to empathy, offering to help repair the harm or engage in another form of restitution. By considering both the physical and mental effects of trauma, a trauma-informed approach helps individuals rebuild connections and trust that may have been broken by abuse or betrayal.

Repairing harm can also become a strengths-based process for the youth, intentionally designed by the Youth Diversion Team to promote long-term growth and development. Through meaningful engagement, youth begin to recognize that they have strengths that can be used to repair harm and foster community connection. This process helps shift their self-perception from one of deficiency to one of capacity and purpose. It fosters empathy and self-awareness as youth reflect on how their unique abilities, such as creativity, responsibility, or communication, can make meaningful contributions to repairing harm, especially for those directly affected.

At the same time, it honors the youth's need for autonomy. People who have experienced trauma require the freedom to make their own decisions; otherwise, diversion programming risks retraumatizing them by imposing artificial requirements as conditions for receiving services. A trauma-informed Youth Diversion Team guides youth toward authentic accountability while intentionally creating space for voice and choice.

To effectively guide youth through repairing harm and fostering long-term growth, the Youth Diversion Team adopts these core principles of trauma-informed practice, ensuring that the approach addresses immediate needs and builds a foundation for lasting healing and empowerment.

Being trauma-informed means adopting a worldview—a way of thinking and acting—that recognizes the pervasiveness of trauma and responds with care. It involves acknowledging that many people carry the effects of trauma, even if those effects aren't immediately visible. A trauma-informed approach focuses on preventing further harm and supporting healing by:

- **Anticipating** how trauma survivors might respond to words or actions.
- **Dismantling** harmful rules, systems, and policies that may perpetuate trauma.
- **Creating environments** that foster safety, trust, and resilience.
- **Treating everyone** with respect, kindness, and the ability to make meaningful choices.

[Section 1.6: Core Framework and Professional Standards](#) outlines the guiding principles of the Youth Diversion Team program and offers practical guidance on implementing a trauma-informed approach throughout the diversion process. It provides guidance for staff, volunteers, and agency partners, ensuring a consistent approach across communities while prioritizing the needs of youth, those affected, and the broader community.

Understanding trauma and applying trauma-informed principles is essential for every individual involved in the Youth Diversion Team program. The young people, their families, and those harmed participating in the diversion process often carry complex experiences that may not be

immediately visible but profoundly shape how they respond to conflict, accountability, and engagement. When team members are equipped with a trauma-informed lens, they can foster environments that support healing, avoid re-traumatization, and promote long-term growth for the youth and everyone involved.

In 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration published a working concept of trauma and a trauma-informed approach titled *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. This framework comprises four key assumptions and six guiding principles that have become foundational for how behavioral health organizations—and multidisciplinary teams, such as the Youth Diversion Team—support trauma recovery ([SAMHSA, 2014](#)).

The Four Assumptions (the “Four R’s”) are especially useful for helping Youth Diversion Team members approach their work with sensitivity and purpose:

1. **Realize** the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery.
2. **Recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system.
3. **Respond** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.
4. **Resist re-traumatization** of clients and staff.

These assumptions are not abstract—they directly apply to how teams interact with youth and families, shape meeting environments, and contribute to decision-making. When all involved with the Youth Diversion Team process realize the effects of trauma, recognize signs of distress or shutdown, respond with empathy, and resist causing additional harm through blame or coercion, they build trust and open space for accountability and healing.

The **Six Guiding Principles** form a flexible yet robust framework that Youth Diversion Team members can use to build trauma-informed, restorative environments:

1. **Safety:** Ensure physical and psychological safety through trauma-informed interactions and environments.
2. **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Maintain trust through open and consistent decision-making processes.
3. **Peer Support:** Foster trust, hope, and collaboration through shared experiences in recovery.
4. **Collaboration and Mutuality:** Affirm that healing happens in relationships and through shared power.
5. **Empowerment, Voice, and Choice:** Emphasize individual strengths and give people control over their recovery journey.

6. **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:** Actively address systemic inequities through inclusive policies and services.

These principles are essential tools that influence the intake process, the tone set by facilitators during restorative meetings, how volunteers ask questions, and how youth are encouraged to take ownership of their actions without feeling ashamed. They also ensure that all participants feel seen, respected, and safe. For further guidance, please refer to [Part 5: The Intake Process](#) and [Section 7: Guidelines for Conducting the Restorative Meeting](#).

At the systems level, SAMHSA's trauma-informed framework was developed in recognition that many individuals with behavioral health challenges receive services across sectors—child welfare, education, juvenile justice, health care, and the military. The framework was created to foster cross-sector communication, build shared understanding of trauma's impact, and prevent service environments from unintentionally worsening individuals' capacity to cope. For the diversion staff, it emphasizes the importance of fostering a diverse group of experienced volunteers. For the Youth Diversion Team, this highlights the significance of collaboration and consistency in their approach. When all team members understand and apply these trauma-informed principles, they help create a unified, compassionate system of care that supports youth in repairing harm and reclaiming their potential.

2.5 Standard Universal Precautions

In addition to understanding trauma at the systems level, Youth Diversion Team members must also apply trauma-informed principles during every individual interaction. This means engaging with each youth and family member, and those harmed, in a way that consistently promotes safety, dignity, and empowerment—even when trauma histories are not explicitly known.

One helpful parallel comes from health care: medical professionals follow standard universal precautions with every patient because they cannot always know who may be carrying an infectious disease. The same principle holds in trauma-informed work. We must assume that any individual with whom we interact may be carrying the effects of trauma, whether disclosed or not. Applying standard precautions helps prevent re-traumatization and builds trust and emotional safety for all participants ([Brummer & Thorsborne, 2020](#)).

This means adopting a baseline set of respectful, non-invasive practices for Youth Diversion Team members when interacting with others. These include:

- **Never touch others without their consent**, even when the intention is to comfort or support.
- **Avoid raising your voice** during conversations.
- **Refrain from using sarcasm**, as it can easily be misinterpreted or experienced as mockery.

- **Do not speak about youth or families in their presence without including their voices**—honor their right to be part of any conversation that affects them. *This means not excusing any individual—the youth, their family, or those harmed—from attending the meeting to engage in a closed-door discussion that includes them.*
- **Avoid surprises in the process**, such as unexpected visitors or changes in format; always explain what to expect beforehand. See sections [5.11: The Inclusion of Both Parties in the Youth Diversion Process](#), [5.12: Preparation for the Restorative Meeting Process](#), and [5.13: Explaining the Restorative Meeting Process](#).
- **Avoid using lectures or shaming strategies**, as they often reinforce power imbalances and can hinder meaningful engagement.
- **Never define youth by their worst actions**—instead, recognize their potential and support their growth (see [Section 1.10.1: Youth Who Caused Harm vs. Responsible Youth](#)).

By consistently applying these precautions, everyone involved in the Youth Diversion Team process can help create a predictable and respectful environment that promotes safety and facilitates honest dialogue. These practices are courteous and essential for building the foundation for successful restorative processes. Youth are more likely to take responsibility, express empathy, and commit to repairing harm when they feel safe, seen, and treated with respect. For team members, this means striking a balance between accountability and care and ensuring that every step of the process conveys the message: *you matter, your voice matters, and you are capable of growth.*

2.6 Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice

The Youth Diversion Team supports shared accountability by helping youth understand and repair the harm they have caused within their communities while fostering a strong sense of personal identity and connection. The program recognizes the value of relationships in content and delivery, ensuring that all process aspects are grounded in a trauma-informed, relational approach. This collaborative model fosters healing, supports youth development, and promotes long-term community safety.

Trauma-informed restorative justice enhances traditional restorative justice by recognizing how trauma, particularly complex or unresolved trauma, can influence a young person’s behavior, relationships, and capacity to engage in accountability processes. Rather than solely focusing on repairing harm, a trauma-informed approach ensures that restorative practices are structured to avoid re-traumatization, build psychological safety, and support healing for all participants. Facilitators are trained to recognize trauma responses, adapt their language and pacing, and create an environment where youth are more likely to engage meaningfully. The goal remains accountability, but it is pursued through compassionate understanding rather than coercion, promoting long-term behavioral change by helping youth feel heard, supported, and connected.

This is particularly important because adolescents are not simply smaller versions of adults; they are in a distinct developmental stage characterized by neurological immaturity and heightened vulnerability to trauma. Critical areas of the brain responsible for impulse control, emotional regulation, and future planning continue to develop. When trauma, especially chronic or unaddressed, disrupts this development, it can lead to behaviors rooted in survival instincts or emotional overwhelm, often misinterpreted as willful defiance or delinquency.

Recognizing this reality shifts the focus from punishment to developmentally appropriate accountability. A trauma-informed restorative approach acknowledges that many youths do not fully comprehend the consequences of their actions in the moment. Instead of imposing harsh penalties that may deepen system involvement, it fosters their natural capacity for reflection, empathy, and change, provided they receive the proper support, structure, and emotional safety.

In short, understanding the intersection of trauma and adolescent development leads to responses that are not only more just but also more effective. Trauma-informed restorative justice promotes healing, reduces recidivism, and cultivates the kind of personal responsibility that punitive systems too often fail to achieve.

Restorative justice diversion programs are particularly effective at meeting the developmental and relational needs of young people while also reducing the likelihood of future offenses. The Youth Diversion Team model reflects a shift toward a trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive approach to diversion. Rather than relying on service referrals or fundamental accountability checklists, it engages youth, their families, and those directly affected by harm in a structured restorative process that fosters understanding, accountability, repair, and reintegration. Rooted in restorative principles and designed to protect youth from the lifelong consequences of involvement in the system, this collaborative and voluntary process promotes healing and justice for all parties. Completing a diversion agreement prevents the case from going to court and allows the youth to state that they have never been arrested, truthfully.

2.7 Foundations of the Restorative Meeting: The Circle Process

Humans have shared space, passed down traditions, resolved conflicts, negotiated treaties, and maintained community through the *circle process* for tens of thousands of years. These practices, rooted in Indigenous traditions from North America, Africa, New Zealand, and Australia, are based on the belief that everyone affected by a harmful event should have a voice in its resolution. The circle format—participants seated in an unbroken physical circle—symbolizes connection, equity, and shared responsibility. A designated elder or circle keeper typically guided the process, ensuring safety, balance, and accountability. Circle meetings occur in safe, structured spaces that promote honest dialogue and inclusive participation.

According to [Boyes-Watson and Pranis \(2015\)](#), circle processes include a structured beginning, middle, and end. The opening phase fosters relationship-building and emotional safety, preparing participants for meaningful dialogue. This aligns with neuroscience research on regulation and

stress ([Perry & Winfrey, 2021](#)), which suggests that people think more clearly and empathetically when they feel connected and secure. The middle, the *Restorative Meeting*, maintains core elements of the circle process:

- Shared responsibility for dialogue and outcomes.
- Structured, sequential conversation that ensures equitable participation.
- Commitment to healing, accountability, and community reintegration.
- Emphasis on emotional safety and relational trust.

The ending phase of a restorative circle is just as intentional as the beginning and middle. It provides closure, affirms the contributions of each participant, and reinforces the agreements made during the dialogue. This phase often includes a reflective round where participants can share final thoughts, insights, or feelings about the process. Ending well helps solidify a sense of completion and mutual understanding, supports emotional regulation, and strengthens commitment to follow through on restorative agreements. According to Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2015), this closing practice honors the circle's relational values and creates a respectful transition back to everyday life.

Those present include the youth who caused harm, their family members, and, if they choose to participate, the individuals who were harmed, along with a support person for each party (see [Section 3.5: The Role of Trusted Supporters](#)). The restorative meeting is facilitated by a diversion staff member and supported by trained volunteers who bring expertise in child development, youth behavior, family dynamics, and juvenile law. The dialogue follows a structured sequence, guided by prompts that foster trust and reflection (see [Section 3.9: Question Sets that Shape the Restorative Meeting](#)), progressing from relationship-building to co-creating a restorative agreement, and concluding with appreciation rituals. For a complete overview of the Restorative Meeting, see [Part 7: Guidelines for Conducting the Restorative Meeting](#), [Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement](#), and [Appendix D: The Youth Diversion Team Meeting Script](#).

Contemporary restorative circles continue to draw from these traditions. Instead of a traditional circle keeper, a trained facilitator guides participants through a consistent four-phase process:

- **Getting Acquainted:** Establishing emotional safety through introductions and trust-building questions.
- **Restorative Dialogue:** Inviting each person to share their perspective on the incident and its impact.
- **Making Agreements:** Collaboratively identifying steps to repair harm and move forward.
- **Closing and Appreciation:** Ending with reflections that reinforce mutual respect and accountability.

Although not all diversion settings allow for a literal circle, the process remains grounded in circle-based values. It is adapted to fit the physical space, community needs, and participants involved. Even without a circular arrangement, the structure preserves symbolic balance by ensuring each participant has an equal opportunity to speak. However, whenever possible, a literal circle should be used.

The facilitator upholds respectful dialogue, maintains emotional safety, and guides the group toward meaningful resolution. Ultimately, the meeting is participant-driven—their voices and relationships shape the process and its outcomes. What matters most is not the placement of chairs but the commitment to relational integrity, shared accountability, and restoration over punishment. This flexible, inclusive approach honors Indigenous restorative principles while adapting them to contemporary diversion settings.

The Restorative Meeting offers a structured, relationship-centered approach to accountability and healing. It honors the traditions of Indigenous restorative practices while providing a flexible and inclusive framework that meets the realities of modern community diversion work.

For more detailed guidance on the specific phases of the meeting, facilitator roles, and participant engagement, refer to [*Sections 5.13: Explaining the Restorative Meeting Process, 6.7: Room Setup and Seating Arrangements*](#), and [*Part 7: Guidelines for Conducting the Restorative Meeting*](#).

2.8 Restorative Engagement of Those Harmed

The Youth Diversion Team process must focus on genuinely understanding the experiences of those directly harmed by the offense. While the crimes addressed are often minor, their consequences can still have a significant impact on individuals and the broader community. This section highlights why the perspectives of those harmed are crucial, how including all voices in the diversion process shapes the outcome, and what it means to center their needs in a trauma-informed and restorative way, all while supporting the youth responsible and acknowledging the broader community's impact.

While some may argue that the goal of the diversion process should be to correct the youth's behavior, restorative work begins by centering on the harm experienced by others resulting from the youth's accountable actions. This is not to diminish the youth's behavior but to ensure the process addresses what makes the wrongdoing meaningful: the real impact on people's lives.

This perspective also explains why the presence and participation of those directly affected, especially those who have been harmed, is essential. Without their input, diversion risks becoming a performance of accountability rather than the real thing. Restorative justice recognizes that justice is not achieved by satisfying procedural requirements or fulfilling service referrals but by repairing relationships and restoring trust.

Harm can strain or sever relationships with peers, family members, school staff, or members of the broader community. Trust may be broken, communication disrupted, and social belonging

compromised. Feelings of betrayal or isolation can particularly damage youth and those harmed. The Youth Diversion Team should be mindful of these relational impacts and create space for restoring trust, rebuilding connection, and reestablishing a sense of community where appropriate.

The youth who caused harm, and sometimes their families, cannot fully understand the impact of their actions or their capacity to make things right without hearing from those directly affected. Likewise, those harmed cannot begin to heal without the opportunity to speak their truth and witness the youth's effort to take meaningful responsibility.

The impact of restorative justice is most profound when it incorporates the perspectives of all parties involved: the youth who caused harm, their families, those who have been harmed, and the broader community. Healing and accountability go hand in hand. The process fosters shared understanding rather than blame by creating space for all voices to be heard. Balancing these perspectives is not always easy, but it is necessary for meaningful change to occur and for a genuine foundation of mutual healing to be built.

2.8.1 Considering the Needs of Those Harmed

Youth Diversion Teams primarily address minor offenses but may also take on more complex cases depending on the nature and impact of the incident and the referral source. Even minor offenses can have a profound effect on those directly affected, the youth who caused the harm, their family, and the broader community.

For this reason, it is essential to carefully consider the perspectives of all parties involved at every stage of the diversion process. From the initial referral through the intake meeting, the Youth Diversion Team meeting, and any follow-up steps, encouraging open and respectful dialogue is key to supporting accountability, healing, and growth. This inclusive approach strengthens relationships, fosters empathy, and helps restore trust among all those affected, reinforcing the community's shared responsibility in the process of repair and transformation.

To implement this effectively, diversion staff and volunteers must understand how the incident and the harm caused may impact individuals. These effects are not always visible and may surface or intensify during restorative processes. By recognizing and responding to these impacts across four key areas—physical, emotional, psychological, and financial—the Youth Diversion Team can help ensure that the process does not retraumatize participants, instead fostering meaningful engagement, safety, and healing.

Physical. Harmful experiences can result in direct bodily injuries, such as bruises, cuts, or soreness, that may require medical attention or rest. Even when no visible injuries are present, the body often holds the impact of trauma. Individuals may experience muscle tension, fatigue, headaches, or other stress-related symptoms. The nervous system may also become dysregulated, triggering a fight, flight, freeze, or shutdown response—especially when the incident is discussed during intake or in a Youth Diversion Team meeting. The Youth Diversion Team should be

prepared for these responses and adjust pacing, environment, or language to support physical safety and regulation.

Emotional. Those harmed may experience anger, rage, disorientation, guilt, or shame for their responses during the incident, numbness, grief, fear, regrets, and even concerns about it happening again. These emotional reactions can surface not only from the original event but also as they reflect on the experience during intake and while engaging at the Youth Diversion Team meeting.

Psychological. After an incident, individuals may begin to think differently, perceiving others as threats even when there are none. For instance, a person who has been assaulted may start to avoid crowds, while someone who has been robbed might become overly protective of their belongings. If irreplaceable items of personal significance were damaged, the individual may need to go through a grieving process.

These psychological effects can resurface when individuals revisit the event during the restorative process, adding another layer of stress and discomfort. It's also important to understand that those harmed might struggle with unclear memories or a limited understanding of what happened. Trauma can impact perception, memory, and feelings of safety, making it difficult for people to communicate their experiences or reactions.

Financial. While some losses are irreparable, others may be appropriate for restitution. Surveying those harmed by financial losses can help us understand how the harm could be addressed and what might help make things right. Addressing the financial impact during the intake process and the Youth Diversion Team meeting may require sensitivity and care to ensure these concerns are fully recognized and explored. Some needs may be addressed later through creative or non-monetary forms of accountability, as guided by the restorative agreement (see [Sections 3.7: Distinguishing Restorative Practices and Intervention-Based Services](#) and [3.8: Requirements for Restorative Alignment in Agreements](#), and [Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement](#)).

2.8.2 Giving Voice to Those Directly Harmed

The individuals directly affected by an incident can vary greatly, depending on its nature. Whether during the intake process or the Youth Diversion Team meeting, the goal is to create a safe and supportive space where those impacted feel comfortable sharing their experiences with those present.

When individuals can share their experiences in their own words, without interruption or judgment, the process becomes more than a procedural step. It becomes a foundation for healing. This simple act can offer meaningful validation to those harmed and challenge assumptions, especially those held by the youth who caused harm.

The impact of the diversion process is most profound when it encompasses the perspectives of all parties involved: the youth responsible for the harm, their families, and those who have been

harmed. Hearing directly from those affected can significantly influence the youth by fostering empathy and raising awareness of how their actions impact others. This approach encourages a shift from blame to a focus on understanding, accountability, and repair, which not only aids in healing but also reduces the likelihood of future harm. When young people are guided to make amends rather than face punishment and isolation, they are more likely to learn and grow from the experience. Ultimately, this benefits the entire community, as engaged young individuals take responsibility and contribute positively to those around them.

Restorative justice offers those harmed:

- An opportunity to give voice to their experience and receive empathy and support
- A chance to ask questions only the youth can answer
- An opportunity to transform or end their connection to the youth
- The ability to witness the youth being held accountable
- A voice and input on how the matter is addressed and resolved

It also offers youth who caused harm:

- A chance to understand the real-life impact of their choices
- An opportunity to repair trust and relationships rather than damage them further
- A path to take meaningful responsibility rather than passively accepting punishment
- Emotional support and structure to grow from the experience
- A sense of belonging and connection that can reduce the likelihood of future harm

In this way, restorative practice strengthens the web of relationships within a community, helping restore individuals and the social fabric that binds them.

2.8.3 Proactive Engagement of Those Harmed

Members of the Youth Diversion Team approach the involvement of those harmed with thoughtful care. Concerns such as re-traumatization, emotional safety, and the potential impact on their willingness to engage are taken seriously. Participation is always voluntary, and those harmed are invited, not required, to share in ways that feel safe and appropriate for them. This may include written statements, audio or video messages, attending the meeting in person or through a proxy. Even when challenging, their involvement is central to the restorative process. Creating a supported space for engagement helps ensure the experience is meaningful for everyone involved.

During the intake process and the Youth Diversion Team meeting, staff and volunteers must balance the concerns and needs of those directly harmed with those of the youth. Those harmed may raise questions about the youth's motives or sincerity. Meanwhile, the youth often carry emotional burdens—fearing judgment, rejection, or being reduced to their offense.

Crucially, it is *not* the youth who decides whether those who were harmed are included. That choice belongs solely to those who were harmed. The team's role is to offer them the opportunity with care and support, not to control or restrict their participation.

Diversion staff must clearly explain how both parties are thoughtfully prepared for the process, through individualized pre-meetings that provide space to ask questions and share concerns, emotional readiness assessments that take into account trauma, identity, and relational dynamics, and consistent communication that reinforces voluntary and informed participation. These steps help ensure all involved enter the process with clarity, appropriate expectations, and a sense of psychological safety. For guidance, see [*Section 5.11: The Inclusion of Both Parties in the Youth Diversion Team Process*](#).

The goal is not to eliminate discomfort, but to navigate it with care and respect for everyone involved. Exclusion must never be the default. Trauma-informed, inclusive practice should guide every case.

A proactive—not merely protective—approach means creating the conditions for engagement without making assumptions about what either party wants or needs. The Youth Diversion Team's responsibility is to prepare, inform, and support individuals who have been harmed in making an informed decision about participating in the process. Importantly, no decision should be based on what is comfortable for diversion staff or volunteers. While safety concerns must be considered, declining to offer those harmed an opportunity to participate should not be justified by discomfort or a desire to avoid potential conflict.

Youth Diversion Teams should adhere to clear guidelines that promote meaningful engagement while minimizing harm. These considerations are crucial for ensuring emotional readiness and safety. They should plan thoughtfully to facilitate participation.

Key considerations include:

- **Fostering a Culture of Restorative Readiness:** Equip diversion staff and volunteers to center the voices and needs of those harmed while also addressing the restorative and intervention needs of the youth. All team members should receive training in trauma-informed, culturally responsive practices.
- **Providing Clear, Compassionate Communication:** Ensure harmed individuals receive accurate, timely information about the restorative process, have opportunities to ask questions, and can make informed decisions about whether—and how—they'd like to participate.
- **Offering Flexible, Voluntary Levels of Engagement:** Provide options for participation that feel safe and meaningful, such as direct participation, recorded video, written statements, support persons, or facilitated dialogue.
- **Ensuring Preparation and Ongoing Support:** Offer pre-meetings with facilitators (if not the diversion staff), the option for those directly harmed and the youth to bring one

support person, and restorative debriefs afterward to promote emotional safety and clarity.

- **Assessing Emotional Readiness and Appropriateness for Restorative Dialogue:** Each case must be evaluated individually. In situations involving significant harm, such as assault, it is crucial to assess the emotional readiness of the youth and those harmed before proceeding. While procedural timelines are essential, they should not override the need to ensure that all participants are emotionally prepared to engage in a meaningful and respectful dialogue. This requires thoughtful consideration, *consultation with relevant professionals*, and sound judgment grounded in trauma-informed principles.
- **Being Mindful of Power Dynamics and Identity Factors:** Consider how age, race, disability, immigration status, and other identity factors may impact comfort, trust, and participation. Proactively address these dynamics.
- **Protecting the Integrity of the Restorative Process:** The involvement of those harmed should enhance, not hinder, the youth's opportunity for accountability. Voluntary participation and mutual respect are essential.

Part 3. Conversation Frameworks for Accountability and Repair

Part 3 offers a foundational guide for facilitating conversations during the intake and Restorative Meeting. It clarifies three essential concepts—consequences, punishment, and accountability—to distinguish their distinct roles within the context of restorative justice. It then introduces core principles that support youth in taking responsibility in developmentally appropriate, non-punitive ways.

It also highlights the distinction between restorative justice practices and intervention-based services, underscoring the importance of basing all responses in restorative, rather than clinical or correctional, approaches. These frameworks are designed to help youth meaningfully engage with those affected, accept responsibility, take active accountability for their actions, and co-create agreements that foster personal growth and community repair.

At the heart of Part 3 is a structured framework consisting of three key question sets used during the Restorative Meeting:

- [Trust and Relationship-Building Questions](#): Create an environment of emotional safety and mutual respect.
- [Restorative Questions](#): Explore the impact of the youth’s actions and promote accountability.
- [4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions](#): Guide the group in creating a written agreement that supports meaningful repair and long-term success.

These conversation frameworks support a principled, participant-centered process that lifts the voices of the youth who caused harm, those harmed, and others involved, reinforcing the core values of responsibility, repair, and community connection. Facilitators use these question sets to guide sequencing, pacing, and necessary adaptations, ensuring clarity, equity, and full engagement (see [Section 3.9: Question Sets that Shape the Restorative Meeting](#) and [Section 7.4: The Meeting Script](#)). This approach strengthens the program’s commitment to meaningful and balanced outcomes (see [Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement](#)).

Before proceeding, readers are encouraged to review [Section 1.6.1: Trauma-Informed Restorative Justice Diversion Core Framework](#) and [Part 2: Foundations of Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices](#) to fully understand the guiding principles of this section.

3.1 Understanding Responsibility and Accountability in Restorative Practice

As we begin, it is crucial to understand that both responsibility and accountability are essential commitments for participation. Restorative justice diversion is a voluntary process grounded in truth-telling, reflection, and healing. At its core, it requires youth who have caused harm to engage with two foundational commitments: responsibility and accountability (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2020).

Accepting Responsibility. The youth acknowledges their involvement in the incident. This includes recognizing that their behavior caused harm, even if others were involved.

Taking Accountability. This builds on the responsibility of the youth. The youth understands the impact of one's actions on others and shows a willingness to make amends and take steps to repair the harm.

Together, responsibility and accountability are essential for meaningful restorative engagement. The youth must not only admit to what they did but also demonstrate a readiness to reflect on the harm and contribute to the healing process.

To proceed with restorative diversion, the youth must:

- Admit to the behavior or action that caused harm.
- Be open to exploring how their behavior affected others.
- Express a willingness to make amends.
- Participate voluntarily in the diversion process.

If, after supportive dialogue and reflection, the youth is unwilling or unable to meet these expectations, the case is not appropriate for restorative diversion. It must be returned to the referring agency. For example:

- Statements such as “It wasn’t me” or “I was there, but I didn’t do anything” may indicate a lack of readiness.
- Continued defensiveness or avoidance may suggest the youth is not yet prepared for restorative engagement.

The Youth Diversion Team relies on the youth's openness, honesty, and capacity for growth. Responsibility and accountability are not only prerequisites—they are the starting point for personal and communal healing.

Note: Accountability is introduced here as a foundational requirement for a youth's participation in restorative justice diversion. This section focuses on accountability in a practical sense—what it looks like when a youth is ready and able to take responsibility and engage in the process. In Section 3.2, we shift to a broader conceptual view, distinguishing accountability from consequences and punishment. This distinction helps clarify how restorative justice differs from traditional disciplinary approaches.

3.2 Understanding Consequences, Punishment, and Accountability

In restorative justice practice, it is essential to distinguish among three often-misunderstood terms: consequences, punishment, and accountability. While commonly used interchangeably, they represent very different approaches to addressing harm ([Brummer & Thorsborne, 2020](#)).

- A **consequence** is a *natural* or *logical* outcome that flows directly from a person's actions. It is not imposed as retribution but arises from the *reality* of the situation. For example, a youth who damages property may need to repair or replace it—a *logical* consequence.

A *natural* consequence may occur when a youth chooses to spend time with peers who have a history of negative influence, despite having previously promised a caregiver they would not, and their behavior leads to involvement in vandalism. As a result, the caregiver may feel a loss of trust and respond by placing limits on the youth's independence, such as restricting unsupervised outings. This is not intended as punishment, but as a natural response rooted in concern for the youth's safety, shaped by human connection and the effects of broken trust.

In both cases, the consequence flows directly from the youth's behavior and invites reflection, not retribution.

- **Punishment**, by contrast, is a *penalty imposed* by an authority figure, often unrelated to the harm caused. It typically focuses on control and compliance rather than healing or growth. Punishment may lead to fear or resentment, but it rarely promotes meaningful behavior change.
- **Accountability** involves *actively* taking ownership of one's actions, recognizing their impact, and committing to making things right. In restorative justice, accountability cannot be coerced. It must come from within and be supported through dialogue, relationship, and empathy.

Restorative justice diversion is not about punishment—it is about growth, healing, and reconnection. Through reflection and guided support, youth are encouraged to understand the real-life consequences of their behavior and to take voluntary, meaningful steps to repair harm. This approach promotes not only behavioral change but also deeper personal development and stronger community bonds.

3.3 Supporting Responsibility and Active Accountability

Participation in the Youth Diversion Team's restorative justice process demands more than simply showing up. It calls for taking responsibility and making amends—it requires *active accountability*.

Youth must *acknowledge* their role in the incident, *take* responsibility, *repair* the harm, and *commit* to preventing future harm (Pranis, 2018). Through a trauma-informed and relational approach, the Youth Diversion Team supports a developmentally appropriate process that fosters personal growth and community repair. This process involves five key goals, as outlined by Pranis:

1. **Acknowledging that one's actions caused harm.** (This means recognizing something that hurt others, even if it wasn't intentional.)
2. **Recognizing one's role in those actions.** (This involves taking ownership of choices and how they contributed to the situation, rather than blaming others or external factors.)
3. **Understanding the full impact of one's actions on others.** (This calls for developing empathy by listening to how others were affected and imagining what it was like.)
4. **Taking steps to repair the harm.** (This includes making meaningful efforts to restore trust, repair relationships, and address the needs of those harmed.)
5. **Identifying and changing patterns that led to the harm.** (This step requires honest self-reflection and a commitment to personal growth so that the behavior doesn't happen again.)

The *first* three goals are achieved through restorative dialogue at the Restorative Meeting, and the last *two* are achieved through the Restorative Agreement (the diversion plan) that emerges from it (Pranis, 2018).

Restorative accountability is a process, not a moment. It unfolds over time through understanding, ownership, and meaningful action. A single confession or apology does not define it; it is a developing sense of responsibility supported by relationships and reflection. For this reason, accountability *must* begin during the intake process, rather than waiting until the Restorative Meeting.

Here's why:

Throughout the diversion process, the intended outcome is for the youth responsible for causing harm to understand that taking accountability is an *intrinsic* process, arising from *within* oneself, rather than extrinsic, imposed by the juvenile court system, where it is often experienced as punishment. In this way, accountability in the restorative justice diversion process is *not* something imposed *on* the youth, but something the youth actively *chooses* to take ownership of. Some youth may struggle to connect their actions to the harm caused or may not yet understand what it means to "take responsibility" in a restorative sense. Others may do so more readily.

We want to reinforce that restorative accountability is an *intrinsic* process, one that must come from within the youth, rather than being externally imposed. Beginning this conversation during the intake meeting serves several important purposes, including the following:

- **Establishes Restorative Foundations Early:** Introducing restorative principles at intake signals that this process fundamentally differs from court-based responses. It clarifies that accountability is not imposed as punishment, but invited as a personal commitment rooted in reflection, relationship, and repair.
- **Fosters Youth and Family Engagement:** Engaging youth and families early in the process of thinking about what it means to make things right builds investment in the outcome. Intake staff help establish trust by listening openly, supporting family understanding of their role, and emphasizing the youth’s potential for growth and change.
- **Prepares for the Restorative Meeting:** Intake conversations introduce key restorative concepts, including the Four-Quadrant Agreement Process Questions. These early discussions help the youth reflect on the harm caused and consider what meaningful repair might involve, preparing them for deeper participation during the restorative meeting.
- **Supports Developmentally Appropriate Accountability:** Young people, particularly those still developing moral reasoning, often need time, support, and guided reflection to understand the impact of their actions. The intake meeting creates space to begin this process gently, meeting youth where they are and allowing room for growth to unfold over time.
- **Strengthens Relational Trust:** Intake is a critical opportunity to build respectful, nonjudgmental relationships between staff, youth, and families. These early relationships model the values of restorative practice and lay a foundation for the collaborative work ahead.

By beginning this work at intake, the Youth Diversion Team process sets the conditions for authentic, active accountability, rather than coerced compliance, leading to an internally motivated commitment to repair. This approach honors the youth’s capacity for growth while centering on the voices and needs of those who have been harmed.

The restorative diversion approach contrasts with the juvenile court, or “*the legal system*,” where accountability is *passively* accepting *punishment* for the harm caused, often causing them to “*feel victimized*.” Even within the Youth Diversion Team process—especially in its early stages—youth may initially carry this same sense of victimization until they acknowledge their role in the incident, accept responsibility for the harm caused, and demonstrate a willingness to make things right.

In a restorative youth diversion process, accountability is not about imposing punishment but about addressing harm through meaningful and collaborative action. Traditional punishments can leave the youth feeling misunderstood or further harmed, especially when consequences lack personal connection or context to the harm caused. Instead, restorative justice practices *frame consequences as solutions* to problems created by the youth’s actions, intentional or not, to foster responsibility, repair, and growth.

When someone's actions have negatively impacted others, the *consequence* is not something imposed on them, but rather the *natural outcome* of their behavior. If the youth recognizes they've caused harm, they may experience embarrassment, shame, or regret. Asking them to take action to repair the harm is not about retribution; it's about addressing the real problem their behavior created. The objective is to foster solutions that encourage behavioral change, promote healing, and facilitate growth, preventing future harm.

Even within the Youth Diversion Team process, youth may initially interpret accountability through a punitive lens, shaped by their prior experiences with authority or the legal system. However, as they acknowledge their role, take ownership of the harm, and participate in meaningful repair, the process naturally shifts from retribution to transformation. In this context, restorative consequences are *not* imposed *on* someone, but created *with* them, grounded in repairing harm, rebuilding trust, and restoring relationships.

3.4 Neuroscience, Emotional Safety, and Supporting Accountability

Participating in a restorative process can be especially challenging for youth because their brains are still developing the emotional regulation and cognitive skills necessary to understand responsibility and its relationship to accountability fully. Understanding this developmental stage creates space for compassion and patience during coaching and facilitation. It reminds staff and volunteers that wrestling with difficult emotions is a human experience, not exclusive to youth. This awareness can strengthen engagement with youth and families, fostering empathy and a more supportive environment.

The shift from punishment to restoration is more than a conceptual change; it also involves navigating complex emotional and neurological realities. For youth, being asked to take responsibility can activate deep fears of rejection or disconnection. These reactions are rooted in brain systems that interpret accountability as a threat, triggering the brain's natural defenses.

Taking responsibility for harm activates the amygdala—the brain's threat detection center—which links wrongdoing with the fear of disconnection. Because humans are wired for connection, the prospect of being cut off from others can feel like a survival threat. To protect against this pain, the brain often resorts to denial, minimization, or rationalization. These automatic defenses are not signs of defiance, but rather deeply ingrained mechanisms that preserve safety and a sense of belonging.

The brain structures responsible for empathy, impulse control, and long-term thinking—especially the prefrontal cortex—continue maturing well into a person's twenties. As a result, young people may struggle to connect their actions to the harm they've caused or to fully grasp what it means to "take responsibility" in a restorative context.

In adults, the emotional circuits of the brain, particularly the connections between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, are fully developed. These connections support reasoning, emotional regulation, and engaging in difficult conversations without becoming overwhelmed. This

neurological maturity enhances an adult's capacity to reflect, take responsibility, and maintain relationships, even when the process is uncomfortable.

However, we, as adults, are not immune to fear, shame, or a sense of disconnection. These responses are not signs of immaturity, but deeply human reactions rooted in our need for safety and belonging. We do not outgrow these emotional responses—we learn to recognize, manage, and move through them. This awareness reminds diversion staff and volunteers that resistance to accountability is not unique to youth; it is part of the human condition. Recognizing this truth fosters humility and empathy, allowing adults to meet youth with greater understanding and compassion.

Calm, emotionally available adults—those who are steady, patient, and attentive—help young people feel safe and seen; their presence models empathy and composure, especially in difficult moments. Rather than controlling, these adults respond with care, attending to the youth's emotional and developmental needs while encouraging responsibility and growth.

For most youth, responsibility and accountability are not intuitive. These concepts must be taught and practiced through explanation, guided reflection, and ongoing support from emotionally attuned adults.

Understanding these ideas during the intake process helps reduce stress and build trust. It allows diversion staff to engage the youth in low-pressure, relational conversations, fostering early connections. This foundation increases the likelihood that youth will enter the Restorative Meeting more openly, preparedly, and less defensively, better able to hear others' perspectives, and participate meaningfully.

Rather than relying on lectures or punishment, emotionally attuned adults demonstrate accountability through thoughtfulness and compassion. This relational approach helps the youth who caused harm to understand the real-life impact of their behavior, not through fear or guilt, but through a genuine human connection. When young people feel cared for, they begin to care in return.

Relational methods avoid force, coercion, and punitive measures that hinder emotional growth. They support reflection and accountability, guiding youth to consider their choices, take ownership, and make amends safely. This fosters trust and intrinsic motivation, encouraging youth to strive for improvement because it aligns with their emerging values and developing sense of self.

Diversion staff should use deliberate language, avoiding phrases that reinforce punitive thinking or intensify feelings of powerlessness. They should also coach volunteers to embody this restorative mindset during Restorative Meetings (see [*Part 7: Guidelines for Conducting the Restorative Meeting*](#) and [*Section 1.10: Language That Upholds Trauma-Informed Restorative Values*](#)). Through thoughtful, intentional language, accountability grows from within, not imposed from the outside.

3.5 The Role of Trusted Supporters

Acknowledging harm is difficult, but it should not have to be done alone. Supportive relationships provide youth with the safety and connection they need to make sense of their actions, begin the healing process, and develop healthier patterns.

When a young person is supported by someone who offers unconditional care and communicates, “*I’m here for you no matter what,*” they are more likely to summon the courage to take genuine responsibility. This steady presence fosters emotional safety, enabling them to confront the truth and make amends. To maintain balance and focus, and to ensure emotional safety for all participants, each party may invite one supporter to the restorative meeting.

During intake, to provide meaningful support, encourage the youth who caused harm and their family to identify *one* trusted individual—someone the youth respects and has a positive relationship with—who can accompany them to the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting. Similarly, the harmed person may bring *one* supporter who can help them feel safe, heard, and emotionally supported throughout the process.

This supporter could be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, coach, teacher, scout leader, pastor, or another trusted adult. A carefully chosen supporter can help the participants feel grounded and offer comfort; for the youth who caused harm, it may strengthen their ability to take responsibility within a restorative context.

While the presence of supportive individuals is important, limiting it to *one* support person per party helps maintain a calm and equitable space where all voices can be heard. When more than one person has been harmed or when multiple youth are responsible for causing harm, the facilitator will work with all parties in advance to determine appropriate support people. This ensures that everyone feels adequately supported without overwhelming the process.

To support the meaningful participation of supporters, staff should provide the youth who caused harm and their family, as well as those harmed (if participating in the Restorative Meeting), with the “*Restorative Questions*” to share and practice with their invited supporters before the meeting. These questions allow supporters to reflect in advance and arrive prepared to contribute constructively. This preparation helps ensure that every person present plays a supportive role in the youth’s process of accountability and repair.

3.6 Collective Accountability

Collective accountability emphasizes that restorative justice invites everyone impacted by harm to reflect on their role in both the harm and the healing (Pranis, 2018). This includes the individual who caused the harm and the broader community—families, schools, neighborhoods, and systems—which must consider how their structures or actions may have contributed to the conditions that allowed the harm. The collective must acknowledge its part, take steps to repair the harm where appropriate, and make meaningful changes to reduce the likelihood of future harm.

For example, a youth skipped school and vandalized property—behavior that may seem defiant at first glance. However, during intake, staff learn that the youth is experiencing unstable housing, academic struggles, and feelings of embarrassment. Repeated disciplinary removals and insufficient academic support have contributed to the youth’s disconnection from school. While these circumstances do not excuse the behavior, they help clarify the pressures and unmet needs influencing the youth’s choices.

Collective accountability affirms the restorative principle that if the collective contributed to the conditions that led to harm, it also shares responsibility for making things right. As diversion staff explore what has not been working for the youth, such as gaps in support, family stress, peer pressure, or limited opportunities for belonging, they can recommend services that address these root issues. These may include relational supports like mentoring, community engagement opportunities, family-based services, or culturally appropriate healing practices. Many of these needs may be identified during intake (see [*Section 5.8: Assessment of Strengths, Challenges, and Family Dynamics*](#)).

However, as we will examine in the next section, [*3.7 Distinguishing Restorative Practices and Intervention-Based Services*](#), intervention services—when aligned with restorative principles—can offer youth meaningful opportunities to take responsibility for their actions, make amends, build skills, and respond to future challenges in healthier ways.

3.7 Distinguishing Restorative Practices and Intervention-Based Services

Facilitators and team members must understand the distinctions between restorative justice practices and intervention-based services. Interventions may meet the needs that contributed to the problem. Restorative practices emphasize active accountability rather than mere intervention. They guide youth in taking responsibility, working actively to repair harm, promoting growth, and preventing future behaviors that caused the harm. To effectively support youth and address the root causes of harm, both restorative practices and intervention-based services must work in tandem, complementing each other to create a more holistic and impactful approach.

The rationale presented in this section does not need to be explicitly communicated to the youth, their families, or those directly affected during the intake process. Instead, having this internal clarity allows diversion staff to effectively present the process during the intake and for staff and volunteers at the Restorative Meeting.

The material in this section is designed to assist staff and volunteers in completing the 4-Quadrant Agreement Process. For operational guidance, refer to [*Section 3.8: Requirements for Restorative Alignment*](#). This material supports the development of the Restorative Agreement using the SMART (specific, strengths-based, measurable, restorative, timely) framework during the Restorative Meeting, discussed in [*Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement*](#). By following this guidance, the agreements formed will be restorative and supportive in nature.

Real accountability emerges when youth understand their actions, take ownership, and actively participate in making things right. To ensure restorative impact, all actions in the diversion

agreements must relate directly to the harm caused. When this connection is absent, the purpose of the diversion may be unclear to the youth, reducing opportunities for accountability and growth ([Farrell, Betsinger, & Hammond, 2018](#)).

Recall that a *consequence* is a *natural or logical outcome* that flows directly from a person's actions. It is not imposed as retribution but arises from the reality of the situation. For example, a youth who damages property may need to repair or replace it. This is not punishment—it is a meaningful response that helps the youth understand the impact of their behavior and take steps to make it right.

In some cases, particularly those involving financial harm, monetary restitution may be appropriate. However, restorative practices also recognize that financial circumstances vary, especially for youth and their families. When full restitution isn't feasible, creative, proportional responses that reflect the youth's capacity can still uphold restorative principles. Acts of service, time commitments, or meaningful contributions agreed upon by those harmed can provide a powerful form of non-monetary accountability, reinforcing responsibility without defaulting to punishment.

In a restorative context, consequences should adhere to five specific criteria to promote genuine accountability and repair by addressing the root causes of harm, rather than simply imposing punishment ([Brummer & Thorsborne, 2020](#)). The "consequences" of a youth's behavior must meet the following criteria:

1. **Consequences must solve problems:** They should address the root issue that led to the harm, rather than impose suffering. This ensures that the response is not punitive but constructive, promoting growth and understanding.
2. **Consequences must repair the harm:** They should be guided by the needs and responsibilities identified by those directly or indirectly affected, including individuals and the community. This aligns with restorative justice practices focusing on rebuilding trust and restoring relationships.
3. **Consequences must be age and developmentally appropriate:** They must ensure that expectations align with the youth's maturity and capacity. Tailoring responses to the individual ensures that the process fosters meaningful change and is not overwhelming.
4. **Consequences must be voluntary:** Coercion undermines accountability; meaningful repair comes from a place of personal commitment. Youth must willingly engage in the process to take responsibility for their actions.
5. **Consequences must take into account the needs of everyone involved, including those who were harmed, the broader community, and the youth who are responsible for their actions:** By addressing the emotional and practical needs of the harmed parties, considering the impact on the youth's family, promoting personal growth and accountability in the youth, and encouraging their reintegration into the community, the

consequences ensure that all individuals, as well as the larger community, are supported on their journey toward restoration and healing.

A central goal during the intake process and the Restorative Meeting is to help youth understand the impact of their actions on themselves, their families, those directly harmed, and the broader community. Restorative justice practices emphasize accountability, the repair of harm, and the restoration of relationships. In contrast, intervention services address the underlying needs.

When aligned, restorative justice practices and intervention services provide youth with meaningful opportunities to take responsibility for their actions, make amends, develop skills, and enhance their ability to handle future challenges in healthier ways. While restorative justice practices may incorporate interventions, such as counseling, skill-building, or support services, as part of a Restorative Agreement, their primary focus is on accountability and repairing harm, rather than just intervention.

The main difference is that restorative justice practices require youth to take responsibility and actively make amends. In contrast, intervention services often aim to fix or prevent the problem behavior without necessarily addressing the harm caused. In short, while restorative justice practices may utilize interventions, interventions alone do not constitute a restorative response. The real contrast lies between authentic accountability and services-only interventions that do not require the youth to repair the harm they caused.

During the intake process and the Restorative Meeting, staff and volunteers must recognize that restorative justice practices and intervention services serve different but complementary purposes within a restorative diversion framework. Recognizing this distinction ensures that both approaches are applied intentionally and effectively.

Diversion agreements must include supportive services alongside clear expectations for the youth to engage in meaningful accountability and harm repair. A common pitfall in restorative diversion programs is treating intervention services, such as therapy, skills training, or mentorship, as substitutes for restorative justice practice. While these services are critical in addressing risk factors, meeting needs, and reducing recidivism, they do not inherently fulfill restorative goals unless they are intentionally designed to foster responsibility and reparation.

At the same time, identifying and addressing intervention-based needs is essential to support the youth's well-being and long-term success. Trauma-informed care and mental health supports should complement restorative processes. By working with families to implement appropriate interventions, the program ensures these services are integrated, not mistaken for accountability, and contribute to holistic youth development. See sections [*5.8: Assessment of Strengths, Challenges, and Family Dynamics*](#), [*5.9: Coordination with Existing Service Providers*](#), and [*5.10: Preparing for Restorative Justice Recommendations*](#).

Confusing restorative justice practices with intervention services can diminish the program's effectiveness. Simply addressing risk factors—without promoting accountability or restoring relationships—prevents youth from fully grasping the consequences of their actions or making

meaningful amends. To uphold the integrity of the restorative diversion model, Youth Diversion Team staff *must* ensure that volunteers understand this distinction. Doing so promotes consistent, intentional, and balanced decision-making, reinforcing the program's commitment to healing, growth, and long-term success.

3.8 Requirements for Restorative Alignment in Agreements

Practices in restorative agreements specifically require the youth to acknowledge the harm they have caused and take steps to repair it. They are closely linked to the consequences of the youth's actions and focus on restoring relationships while rebuilding trust. Restorative Agreements should encourage reflection and necessitate that the youth take meaningful actions to address the harm done to those directly affected and the broader community.

To avoid misclassifying services, every diversion agreement must meet the following requirements to be considered restorative:

1. **Clear connection to the harm caused:** The agreement must relate directly to the consequences of the youth's actions and focus on repairing harm.
2. **Active accountability:** The youth must engage in meaningful efforts to acknowledge the harm caused and take concrete steps to make amends.
3. **Community reintegration:** The agreement should facilitate rebuilding trust between the youth and those affected by their actions, promoting positive reentry into the community.

Examples of restorative justice actions in agreements include:

- **Victim-Offender Mediation:** Addressing the root causes and fostering personal commitment through voluntary dialogue.
- **Apology Letters:** A youth writes an apology that acknowledges the harm done and is appropriate to their age and developmental stage.
- **Community Harm Repair or Restitution:** Engagement with the community in a constructive, voluntary manner to repair harm.
- **Agreements Outlining How to Make Amends:** The youth will take specific actions to address the harm, such as participating in community programs.
- **Family-Group Conferencing:** Inclusive of the youth's family, allowing for a developmentally appropriate dialogue to repair harm.

In some cases, especially those involving financial harm, monetary restitution may not be possible or appropriate due to the youth's circumstances. In these situations, restorative agreements can include creative, non-monetary forms of accountability, such as offering time, service, or a meaningful contribution, as long as the actions are voluntary, proportional, and rooted in the needs of those who have been harmed. These responses can be equally impactful when thoughtfully developed and agreed upon by the participants.

Regardless of the form accountability takes, the key distinction between restorative action and intervention must remain clear.

Let's examine the dichotomy between intervention-based services and restorative actions. While both approaches can support youth development, they serve fundamentally different purposes. Restorative actions require the youth to acknowledge harm, take responsibility, and actively work to repair relationships. In contrast, intervention-based services are designed to reduce risk factors and promote personal growth; they do not inherently involve accountability or harm repair unless explicitly structured to do so.

It is critical not to conflate these two approaches. Intervention-based services may be valuable, but without a restorative framework, they fail to fulfill the core purpose of restorative justice fully. Diversion teams must carefully assess whether each element of a youth's agreement meets restorative criteria or belongs in a separate support plan.

Examples of intervention-based services and how to integrate restorative components:

- **Therapy or Anger Management:** These services support emotional regulation and personal growth. To align with restorative principles, they should include opportunities for the youth to reflect on the harm they caused and develop a concrete plan for repair.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Effective mentorship must include structured, restorative dialogue that offers positive support. Mentors should help youth examine the impact of their actions, fostering accountability and a deeper understanding of responsibility.
- **Employment Training, Life Skills Programs, and Community Service:** These programs can build youth capacity and promote community engagement. To be restorative, they must directly relate to the harm caused and include meaningful actions that repair relationships and rebuild trust.

3.9 Question Sets that Shape the Restorative Meeting

The Youth Diversion Team's meeting process uses three sets of meaningful questions to guide discussions. These predetermined questions focus on accountability, repairing harm, and promoting personal growth. These question sets are crucial components at intake and the Restorative Meeting. They include:

- Trust and Relationship-Building Questions
- Restorative Questions
- Four-Quadrant Agreement Process Questions

Diversion staff must review these question sets with the youth who caused harm and those directly impacted during their intake sessions. By the end of the intake process, the youth who caused harm and those directly affected must have a clearer understanding of the youth's accountability and the opportunities for making amends.

This process helps the youth and their family recognize the harm caused and understand the necessary support to make things right. For those impacted by the incident, the intake process affirms that their voices and experiences are essential, laying the groundwork for healing and the potential for repairing relationships.

Diversion staff are also responsible for preparing volunteers by familiarizing them with these three key sets of questions. This preparation ensures the diversion meeting remains centered on restorative goals, maximizing its potential impact.

3.9.1 Trust and Relationship-Building Questions

Trust and relationship-building questions are a vital part of the restorative process. They help create a more complete and compassionate understanding of the youth who caused harm, while also fostering connection and mutual respect among everyone present. Each participant in the meeting—including diversion staff, volunteers, the youth, and their family members—is invited to answer these questions. This shared experience helps establish a sense of humanity, emotional safety, and common ground.

These questions are intentionally designed to build trust and humanize the youth in the eyes of the Youth Diversion Team and others present at the Restorative Meeting, including those who were harmed. They are not optional or filler—they are essential tools that help everyone see the youth beyond the incident and create a relational foundation for the work ahead.

This getting-acquainted stage is vital for establishing both emotional and physical safety. By sharing their answers, participants model vulnerability, encourage connection, and create an environment where the youth and others feel safe, respected, and supported. This process ensures everyone knows they are welcome, valued, and recognized as more than their role or involvement in the incident.

- These are relationship-building questions, not optional or filler.
- They are intended to help participants understand the youth as a whole person and foster meaningful connection.
- Because of their importance, they must be asked exactly as written, without major rephrasing or skipping.

During the intake meeting with the youth and their family, diversion staff must introduce these questions as part of the restorative process. The youth is invited to choose two questions from the required list below. These selected questions will then be asked of everyone at the Restorative Meeting to help participants get to know one another and build rapport. These questions do **not** need to be shared during intake meetings with individuals who were harmed.

The questions include:

1. *When people first meet you, what do you think they see? What would you like them to see?*

2. *What is one important value you can see in our space today?*
3. *What is one word that someone you love would use to describe you?*
4. *What is one of your strengths? What would you like to improve on?*
5. *When you first get to know someone, what helps build trust?*

While these questions are required, facilitators and volunteers may also introduce additional, appropriate icebreaker questions—provided they support emotional safety, inclusivity, and relationship-building. These supplemental questions should be light, accessible, and affirming, helping to ease tension and build connection without putting anyone on the spot. Examples include:

- *What's your favorite snack or meal?*
- *If you could have any superpower, what would it be?*
- *What song always makes you feel better?*
- *What's one thing that always makes you laugh?*
- *If you could spend a day anywhere in the world, where would you go?*

Supplemental questions should be used in addition to, not in place of, the required Trust and Relationship-Building Questions.

At the start of the Restorative Meeting, the facilitator explains that the youth selected two *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions* during the intake meeting to help create a welcoming and emotionally safe environment. The facilitator then begins the Getting Acquainted process by reading the first question aloud and inviting each person to respond. Once everyone has answered, the facilitator reads the second question, inviting responses again.

For more information, see [*Part 7: Guidelines for Conducting Restorative Meetings*](#) and [*Appendix D: The Youth Diversion Team Meeting Script*](#).

Note: It does not matter whether a facilitator begins with the icebreaker questions or the *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions*; what is essential is that everyone's participation is valued and respected. This meeting aims to foster collective insight, shared responsibility, and support. While some participants may feel hesitant to share, these questions are crucial for building the trust and connection needed for a meaningful restorative process. When everyone's voice is included, it strengthens the foundation for understanding, accountability, and repair.

3.9.2 Restorative Questions

During the Restorative Meeting, the *Restorative Questions* encourage each participant to share their perspective on what happened, how they were affected, and what actions are needed to make things right. The objective is to help everyone involved develop a shared understanding of the situation and the harm caused—the *whole* story.

Without interruption, as participants listen to one another, empathy increases, and the complex circumstances or actions that contributed to the incident become more apparent. This approach to exploring harm promotes honest reflection, enhances understanding, and fosters accountability and healing. While these Restorative Questions may be slightly modified depending on the context, they generally include:

- “*What happened from your perspective?*” (This allows the individual to describe the incident in their own words, fostering a sense of agency and ownership over their narrative. It helps avoid blame or defensiveness by centering their viewpoint.)
- “*What were you thinking about at the time?*” (This encourages reflection on their mindset, motivations, or assumptions during the event, which can help others understand their reasoning, even if they caused harm.)
- “*What have you thought about since?*” (This allows the individual to express how their understanding or feelings about the incident may have shifted over time, revealing growth, regret, or continued confusion.)
- “*Who has been impacted, and how?*” (This opens a conversation about the ripple effects of the harm on directly affected, families, communities, and even the person who caused harm, fostering empathy and accountability.)
- “*What has been the hardest thing for you?*” (This question helps surface the emotional or relational consequences that may still be unresolved. It creates space for vulnerability and recognizes the complexity of their experience.)
- “*What needs to happen to make things right?*” (This empowers the individual to identify meaningful steps toward repair and accountability, rather than being assigned consequences from a place of authority.)

For the youth who caused harm, these questions create space for reflection on their choices, recognition of the impact of their actions, and consideration of meaningful steps toward repair. Family members or caregivers may also respond by surfacing their own emotional experiences and stepping into a supportive role in the youth’s growth and behavior change.

When those harmed or affected by the incident share their responses, it validates their experience, honors their voice, and opens the door for relational repair. This shared reflection fosters a sense of collective responsibility and accountability, reinforcing the community-centered values at the heart of restorative justice.

The Restorative Questions must be presented and reviewed during the intake meeting with the youth and their family, as well as during a separate intake meeting with those who were harmed. This ensures that all participants are familiar with the process, understand the purpose of the questions, and are better prepared to engage meaningfully during the meeting.

During intake, the diversion staff *must* practice answering the “*Restorative Questions*” with the youth and their families. This practice enables the youth and their family to reflect on the incident, consider the harm caused, understand its impact, and evaluate meaningful steps to repair the situation. Engaging with these questions in advance helps the youth recognize the direct and ripple effects of their behavior on those harmed, their own family, themselves, and the broader community. This reflection prepares them to take accountability and participate more meaningfully in the restorative process, setting the stage for personal growth, active responsibility, and relational repair.

When the youth and their parent or legal guardian decide who will attend the Restorative Meeting as a supporter, the diversion staff is responsible for providing the “*Restorative Questions*” in advance for the family to share with the supporter. Since the supporter will also be invited to respond to the questions during the meeting, receiving them beforehand allows for thoughtful reflection and preparation. If those who were harmed are attending the Restorative Meeting and will bring a supporter, a copy of the Restorative Questions should also be given to them.

3.9.3 4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions

The *4-Quadrant Agreement Process* is a visual and structured tool that comprises four questions, helping participants understand its collaborative nature (see Table 3.1). It encourages the youth responsible for the harm to reflect on accountability, repair, and reintegration from multiple perspectives. This collaborative approach supports a balanced and inclusive Restorative Agreement that considers personal growth, family healing, accountability to those directly harmed, and community restoration (see [*Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement*](#)).

Table 3.1: 4-Quadrant Process Questions with Example Action Items

<p><i>How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse assessment, evaluation, treatment • Behavioral health assessments, evaluation, treatment • Engagement in a positive youth development activity • Mentoring • Educational support or tutoring • Employment Services • Journal prompts 	<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in a harm circle and responding to additional obligations from it • Apology letter or video • Restitution • Mediation • Fundraising/Donation in the family's name to a suitable charity of the those harmed choose • Other reasonable requests of those harmed or their family
<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apology letter or video • Working off damages or lost employment time through chores or special projects • Addressing the concerns of the parent. This could include youth participating in support services to work on the root cause of the behavior. • Establish check-ins to gauge behavior improvement at home • Spending intentional time together as a family • Earning back trust from the family through specific tasks 	<p><i>How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation • Completing appropriate and meaningful community service hours (and, whenever possible, service that relates back to the initial reason for referral) • Presentation on an appropriate topic related to the offense • Completion of a report on an appropriate topic related to the offense through the use of research and/or meetings • Mentoring or coaching younger peers • Getting involved with their Youth Service Bureau

During the intake meetings with the youth and their family, the diversion staff member introduces and reviews the *4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions*. These questions include:

1. ***How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?*** (This includes reflecting on how the situation has affected their goals, relationships, and sense of self, and what they can do to move forward. This is also the place to identify additional supports or services—such as counseling, mentoring, or skill-building programs—that could help the youth sustain positive behavior and avoid future harm.)
2. ***How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?*** (This focuses on understanding the harm from the point of view of those affected and considering what steps the youth can take to acknowledge that harm and make amends.)
3. ***How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?*** (This looks at how the youth’s family members may have been affected emotionally, socially, or even financially, and how those relationships can be repaired.)
4. ***How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?*** (This includes anyone indirectly impacted—like a school, neighborhood, or peer group—and explores ways the youth can contribute positively to those spaces again.)

While these questions are presented during the intake, they are intended to open a conversation, not to finalize an outcome. Intake staff should make it clear that while these questions help gather ideas for repair, the actual agreement addressing what needs to be done to make things right will be co-created later during the *Restorative Meeting* using the *4-Quadrant Agreement Process*, which is designed to guide the youth in considering accountability, repair, and reintegration across multiple relationships.

During the Restorative Meeting, the facilitator will guide participants through the four questions (see [*Section 7.4: Meeting Script*](#)).

The facilitator begins by addressing the youth who caused the harm, followed by the parent(s) or legal guardian(s), and then invites responses from those who were harmed, before proceeding to supporters, if present.

These questions will be written on a large flip chart, whiteboard, or other media to support shared visibility, encourage meaningful contributions, and help the group track progress toward a thoughtful, Restorative Agreement.

Introducing these questions during intake prepares all participants to engage more fully in the upcoming meeting. It affirms that the agreement will be co-created, shaped by each person’s voice, experience, and perspective. Clarifying this distinction early on helps everyone understand that the journey toward accountability and repair is a collaborative and ongoing process. It

reinforces that “*making things right*” is a shared process grounded in mutual respect and restorative values.

The diversion staff member can demonstrate the quadrant process by showing sample ideas (see examples below) that may appear under each question. For instance, repairing harm to oneself might include participating in counseling or completing a personal reflection project; repairing the harm to the community might consist of volunteering or giving a presentation to peers.

3.10 How to Process the Question Sets

The effectiveness of the Youth Diversion Team's intake and Restorative Meeting processes relies heavily on the questions asked and the manner of communication used. Diversion staff, facilitators, and volunteers must remain calm, respectful, and emotionally stable throughout the process. Their tone, body language, and facial expressions should express genuine care and curiosity, avoiding any signs of frustration, judgment, or emotional detachment.

Because trauma can influence behavior and memory, individuals may not fully understand or recall their actions. Trauma responses, such as fight, flight, or freeze, can impair memory and lead to fragmented or delayed understanding. This does not mean the person is dishonest. Facilitators should avoid making assumptions and instead remain curious and supportive.

As individuals feel emotionally safe, their stories may shift or evolve. This is a natural part of reflection and healing, not a sign of inconsistency or deception. Youth Diversion Team members should respond to these changes openly, not skeptically. The goal is to understand, not to interrogate. Key guidelines when asking questions include:

- Avoid sarcasm, leading questions, or moralizing. These shut down trust and openness.
- Ask open, exploratory questions. Avoid language that implies guilt, demands justification, or minimizes the harm caused.
- Check your emotional state; if you feel exasperated, impatient, or triggered, pause and regulate yourself before continuing. A calm presence helps others stay regulated.
- Hold space sincerely. Even if you’ve heard the story, this may be the first time someone feels safe telling it authentically.

When asking questions about a situation, it is essential to do so calmly, respectfully, and without judgment. Open-ended questions, such as “*What happened from your perspective?*” “*What were you thinking at the time?*” and “*What thoughts have you had since then?*” encourage individuals to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences without fearing blame. These types of questions promote open dialogue and help reveal the complete story.

Avoid asking *why* questions, such as “*Why did you do that?*” These questions can seem judgmental or accusatory, often putting the individual on the defensive. Instead, focus on understanding the person's motivations and intentions, which are essential for clarifying how the

situation developed. Use calm, open-ended questions to explore each person's experience and perspective.

Consider using questions that invite reflection and foster a restorative tone, such as “*What were you hoping would happen when you did that?*” or “*What was going through your mind in that moment?*” These questions help reveal the underlying reasons for the behavior and provide a foundation for meaningful problem-solving. Throughout the discussion, maintaining a curious and non-judgmental attitude is key.

During the Restorative Meeting, each participant shares their story. This storytelling process offers unique perspectives, and understanding the *complete* narrative requires allowing all voices to be heard. Inclusive and straightforward prompts, such as “*What happened?*” or “*Who has been impacted, and how?*” can elicit diverse perspectives and clarify the sequence of events.

As the youth reflects on their actions, they should be encouraged to consider how others were affected. Questions such as “*Who has been affected by what happened, and how?*” “*What do you think it’s like for them when this happens?*” and “*What needs to happen to make things right?*” help shift the focus from self to others, fostering empathy and accountability—two essential components of the restorative process.

As participants hear multiple perspectives, they start to grasp the emotional complexity of the situation. This often results in a shift from rigid narratives of blame (“*You did this!*”) to a more nuanced understanding (“*Oh, that’s what you were experiencing. I didn’t realize.*”). This process helps build relational bridges where there were once emotional divides.

Importantly, this understanding is not one-sided. The youth responsible may begin to understand the true consequences of their actions. At the same time, those who were harmed may begin to see the context behind those actions, not as excuses but as humanizing details. This exchange enables everyone to develop the ability to view one another as whole, individual people.

Something transformative can happen when people share their experiences in a group setting and everyone listens attentively, including the youth responsible for causing harm. Empathy begins to emerge. This mutual understanding lays the groundwork for accountability, repair, and, when possible, reconciliation.

The possibility of involving those harmed in the Restorative Meeting is introduced gently and respectfully during intake (see [*Section 5:11: Facilitating the Inclusion of Both Parties in the Youth Diversion Team Process*](#)). The diversion staff explains that, in restorative justice, the voices and experiences of those affected by an incident matter. When appropriate and safe, individuals who have been harmed may participate in the Youth Diversion Team process to share how they were impacted and what might help repair the harm. This preparatory conversation helps reduce anxiety, build readiness, and strengthen the youth and family’s understanding of restorative justice as a process centered on human dignity, mutual respect, and the possibility of repair. If you’re ready to explore the steps for developing a Restorative Agreement, please refer to [*Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement*](#).

Part 4. Referral & Eligibility Requirements for Diversion

Part 4 outlines the eligibility criteria for referrals to the Youth Diversion Team and defines the responsibilities of personnel from referring agencies and Youth Diversion Team staff (diversion staff). Referring agencies may submit cases involving youth who have committed arrestable offenses, whether before or after arrest.

Referring agency personnel are responsible for initially determining, in collaboration with diversion staff, whether a case is suitable for diversion. This section guides support for effective communication between referring agencies and diversion staff, promotes consistency and clarity across Youth Diversion Teams statewide, and ensures a uniform approach to case evaluation and referral processes.

To make appropriate referrals, referring agency personnel must understand the eligibility criteria and the role and purpose of diversion staff. Diversion staff evaluate each referral based on established criteria and assess their capacity to manage the case through to completion. They are also responsible for informing referring agencies of program policies, eligibility updates, and procedural changes. Clear, proactive communication from diversion staff enables referring agency personnel to make informed decisions and accurately convey program expectations to youth, families, and other stakeholders.

Referring agency personnel and diversion staff should focus on diverting youth from formal involvement in the justice system, especially those without a history of serious offenses. Restorative diversion programs help reduce unnecessary contact with the system and promote positive development among young people. This approach encourages understanding and accountability while minimizing long-term consequences. Even an arrest, without a conviction, can create a lasting record that may impact a youth throughout their adulthood.

Aligned with a commitment to early intervention, referring agency personnel and diversion staff must assess whether a youth's behavior warrants formal justice involvement or whether a trauma-informed restorative diversion process is more appropriate. A restorative approach encourages youth who have caused harm to fulfill their responsibilities by showing genuine, active accountability. This process involves repairing harm, rebuilding relationships, and fostering personal growth and community healing to prevent future harmful behavior.

4.1 Eligibility Criteria

To ensure appropriate referrals, the following criteria help determine whether a youth qualifies for diversion. Cases that meet the eligibility criteria should be referred for further review by diversion staff.

Youth's Age. The youth is between the ages of 10 and 17.

Offense Type. The youth has committed a misdemeanor offense that does not involve a firearm or an offense deemed appropriate by police discretion. Some programs may also consider low-level felonies on a case-by-case basis. Fights may be eligible for Youth Diversion Team referral unless factors such as serious injury are involved.

Incident Severity and Consequences. The incident involved an arrest or could lead to an arrest.

Residency Requirements. The youth must live within the Youth Diversion Team's jurisdiction. In some instances, non-resident youth who have committed an offense within the Youth Diversion Team's jurisdiction may also qualify under an inter-agency agreement. For youth attending schools outside their community, the Youth Diversion Teams from both the town of residence and the town of the school should determine the most suitable location for diversion.

Referral Source. The referral must come from an approved entity, such as law enforcement or juvenile courts. In some instances, a referral can come from a school, only if it is for an arrestable offense. For guidance, see *Section 4.2: Types of Referring Agencies*.

Accountability. Accountability is a core requirement for participation in the diversion program. A youth must demonstrate a willingness to take responsibility for their behavior. If they are unable or unwilling to do so, the case may be deemed inappropriate for diversion. At times, a youth may appear reluctant to engage or take responsibility. It is the responsibility of the diversion staff to actively support and guide the youth in understanding the impact of their actions and in accepting responsibility for them.

Prior History. The youth may still be eligible if they have previously been involved with the justice system or diversion programs. If applicable, their previous history will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

4.2 Types of Referring Agencies

The most common agencies that refer youth to the Youth Diversion Team are police departments, courts, and schools. A police referral does not always indicate that a youth was arrested; in some cases, police refer youth without making an arrest. As outlined in the [note](#) below, truancy and defiance of school rules, as well as other family with special needs (FWSN) behaviors (e.g., runaway, beyond control, indecent or immoral conduct), are inappropriate grounds for referral to the Youth Diversion Team; instead, these cases should be referred to the Youth Service Bureau.

Law Enforcement. Law enforcement officers are often the first point of contact for youth entering the justice system. They currently have the discretion to handle juvenile offenders and may refer them to diversion services instead of arresting them.

Note: In cases of law-breaking, law enforcement has the authority to refer any case directly to the juvenile court if they believe it requires court intervention. This is an essential role for law enforcement. However, in most situations, the Juvenile Court will conduct a risk screening, review the case further, and, when appropriate, divert the case back to the community, often the Youth Diversion Team. The administrator or case manager of the Youth Diversion Team may also be consulted to discuss the possibility of a referral.

Juvenile Court. The Juvenile Court may refer lower-risk youth, based on risk screening, to the Youth Diversion Team to avoid court involvement, provided the youth takes responsibility for their actions and accepts the diversion option.

Schools and School Resource Officers. School officials and School Resource Officers may refer students for arrestable offenses (either before or after arrest). Resource Officers assess diversion options and collaborate with diversion staff.

Note: Youth Diversion Team referrals should be reserved for arrestable offenses; other problematic behaviors, such as defiance of school rules, should be addressed through school discipline procedures. Truancy is not a sufficient reason to refer students to diversion or juvenile court. When a student struggles with regular attendance or disobeys school rules, schools and families collaborate with the community's Youth Service Bureau to connect with community-based services. Youth Service Bureaus provide a system of support and services tailored to the specific needs of students and their families. More information is available at the following links:

- [Truancy and Defiance of School Rules Form](#)
- [Youth Service Bureau Referral Guide for Truancy and Defiance of School Rules](#)
- [Families with Special Needs \(FWSN\) Referral Forms](#)

Other Community Organizations and Families. These may include inquiries from child welfare agencies and mental health professionals. All inquiries, whether from professionals or families, should be directed initially to the local Youth Service Bureau, rather than the Youth Diversion Team. The Youth Service Bureau will determine whether the case should be handled through its services or referred to the Youth Diversion Team if appropriate. The Connecticut Youth Services Association provides a list of local Youth Service Bureaus. Click [here](#) to find your local Youth Service Bureau.

4.3 Referring Agency Responsibilities

The referring agency will determine, to the best of its ability, whether a case is eligible or appropriate for diversion to the Youth Diversion Team. It is critical for referring agency

personnel to fully understand the eligibility criteria and the diversion staff's purpose and function to ensure that all appropriate referrals are made.

4.3.1 Understanding the Eligibility Criteria

Referring agency personnel must clearly understand the Youth Diversion Team program's eligibility criteria, guidelines, and purpose to ensure appropriate case referrals and effective communication with youth, their families, and key stakeholders. This includes:

- Being familiar with the Youth Diversion Team's mission, goals, and trauma-informed restorative approach, including participating in appropriate training
- Understanding what would qualify for diversion
- Knowing when a case should not be referred (e.g., serious juvenile offense or violent offenses)
- Being aware of the available support services and interventions within the Youth Diversion Team
- Keeping up to date with any changes in program policies or procedures
- Communicating eligibility requirements to colleagues, families, and other stakeholders involved in the referral process

4.3.2 Evaluating Suitability for Diversion

Referring agency personnel must initially determine whether the case meets the program's eligibility criteria outlined in *Section 4.1: Eligibility Criteria*. Consider:

- The details of the incident, with a focus on the nature and severity of the offense.
- Whether the youth has previously participated in a diversion program and what the outcome was.
- The youth's willingness to take responsibility for their actions and the family's readiness to engage in the Youth Diversion Team program. See [*Section 4.3.3: Confirming the Family's Decision*](#).
- Any available information that may help diversion staff assess the referral and understand the needs of the youth and their family. This may include observations regarding behavior, family circumstances, or challenges related to school.
- Any available background information obtained from relevant stakeholders, such as law enforcement, school officials, parents, and individuals who have been harmed

Referring agencies may always refer to the diversion staff if they have questions about the appropriateness of a potential case.

4.3.3 Confirming the Family's Decision

Family participation is critical for successful diversion. Referring agency personnel must inform the family about the Youth Diversion Team diversion option, engage them in the referral process, and document their decision to accept or decline the referral. This includes:

- Clearly explaining the Youth Diversion Team diversion option to the youth and their family, outlining the benefits, expectations, and potential outcomes
- Emphasizing the family's vital role in supporting the youth's success in the program and ensuring they understand their involvement is key to achieving positive results
- Answer any questions or concerns the family may have regarding the program
- Providing the family with the necessary paperwork and guiding them through accepting or declining the referral

If the family accepts the Youth Diversion Team option, ensure they sign a waiver authorizing the release of their information. No Youth Diversion Team staff should handle pre-arrest or arrest information without an accompanying waiver/release. Please send the required information to their designated diversion staff representative for review. See *Section 4.3.4: Providing Necessary Information to Youth Diversion Team Staff*.

If the family rejects the Youth Diversion Team option, document the rejection and return the case to the referral source for further consideration if further action is necessary.

4.3.4 Providing Necessary Information to Diversion Staff

The role of the referring agency is crucial in providing the Youth Diversion Team with accurate, complete, and relevant information necessary for thorough case assessments. This involves providing all available details with transparency and clarity to support a comprehensive review. This involves:

- Gathering and compiling all pertinent case details, including incident reports, behavioral history, and previous interventions
- Ensuring transparency by providing factual, unbiased, and complete information to the Youth Diversion Team
- Communicating any known risk factors, such as family circumstances, school challenges, or past behavioral concerns, to help the diversion staff assess suitability for diversion
- Submitting documentation promptly to avoid delays in the diversion process
- Maintaining confidentiality while ensuring the Youth Diversion Team has the necessary background to make an informed decision

4.4 Diversion Staff Responsibilities

Diversion staff must carefully assess referrals, evaluate available resources, and engage with the youth and their family to facilitate a successful diversion plan. In addition to reviewing the eligibility criteria described in [Section 4.1: Eligibility Criteria](#), diversion staff are responsible for maintaining clear communication with referring agencies. The following responsibilities outline the key functions of diversion staff in managing referrals and supporting youth throughout the initial stages of the diversion process.

4.4.1 Assessing Referral Validity

The Youth Diversion Team must assess each referral to determine if the case meets the established eligibility criteria. This includes:

- Ensuring the referral includes a signed waiver and release of information form. For guidance, see [Section 5.6 Establishing Voluntary Participation: Parental Consent and Youth Assent](#) and [4.3.3 Confirming the Family's Decision](#).
- Reviewing eligibility criteria to ensure the case qualifies, is suitable for diversion, and the family agreed to have their case transferred to diversion. See Sections [4.1: Eligibility Criteria](#), [4.3.2 Evaluating Suitability for Diversion](#).
- Reviewing the nature of the offense to ensure it qualifies for diversion (e.g., infractions, violations, misdemeanors, and low-level felonies considered on a case-by-case basis)
- Ensuring the referral comes from an approved source (e.g., police, school, court, or other authorized entities)
- Determining whether the case aligns with the Youth Diversion Team's trauma-informed restorative approach and intended outcomes
- Verifying residency requirements to confirm eligibility based on where the offense occurred and whether agreements exist with other jurisdictions for non-resident cases

Refer to [Part 5: The Intake Process](#), for additional responsibilities to occur at intake, which include:

- Evaluating the youth's background, including prior behavioral concerns, family circumstances, school history, and any previous involvement with the juvenile court or diversion programs
- Confirming that the youth intends to take responsibility for their actions, as taking active accountability to repair the harm is a key requirement for diversion

4.4.2 Evaluating Resource Capacity

Diversion staff must assess whether they have the necessary resources, expertise, and capacity to manage and support the youth during the diversion process. This assessment should consider the severity of the offense and the team's ability to handle the case effectively. This includes:

- Assessing whether the team has the personnel and expertise needed to handle the case effectively
- Reviewing the availability of necessary support services, such as counseling, mentorship, and family assistance
- Considering the case's complexity, determine if it requires resources beyond what the Youth Diversion Team can provide
- Prioritizing cases when resources are limited, ensuring the most appropriate referrals are accepted based on urgency and suitability

Should the Youth Diversion Team decide not to accept a case, the information provided by the referring agency (excluding any additional documents acquired by the Youth Diversion Team) should be returned to the referring agency with a note explaining that the case was not accepted for diversion and the reason for this decision, based on the program's eligibility criteria and resource capacity. Any additional background information collected should be securely destroyed to maintain confidentiality. When appropriate, diversion staff may recommend alternative interventions or services to the referring agency.

4.4.3 Responsibilities to Keep Referring Agencies Informed

Diversion staff must keep the referring agencies well-informed to ensure a smooth referral process and appropriate cases are directed to the Youth Diversion Team. This includes providing referring agencies with up-to-date information on program policies, eligibility criteria, procedures, and available services.

Clear and consistent communication empowers referring agencies to make informed decisions and helps youth, their families, and other stakeholders understand the Youth Diversion Team's goals and expectations. By fulfilling these responsibilities, diversion staff can enhance the referral process and ensure that all parties are well-informed. This includes:

- **Communicating Program Policies and Eligibility Criteria:** Diversion staff must update referring agencies on program policies and eligibility criteria to facilitate informed referrals.
- **Explaining the Referral Process and Requirements:** Diversion staff must ensure that referring agencies understand the information and steps needed for a successful referral.
- **Clarifying the Youth Diversion Team's Mission and Approach:** Diversion staff must ensure that referring agencies know the Youth Diversion Team's mission and trauma-informed restorative justice approach.
- **Updating Referring Agencies on Diversion Qualifications:** Diversion staff must inform referring agencies about which offenses and behaviors qualify for diversion and when a case might not be appropriate for referral.

- **Providing Information on Available Support Services:** Diversion staff must update referring agencies on the services and interventions available for youth referred to the program.
- **Supporting Communication with Stakeholders:** Diversion staff must assist referring agencies in effectively communicating eligibility criteria and other important information to families, colleagues, and other involved parties. Additionally, diversion staff must keep referring agencies informed of training opportunities to ensure they stay updated on policies and best practices.

The Youth Diversion Team can achieve this by maintaining regular and open communication with the referring agencies. This can be accomplished through periodic updates, meetings, or newsletters to inform referring agencies about any changes in program policies, eligibility criteria, or procedures.

Diversion staff should also provide clear and accessible documentation and resources that explain the program's mission, approach, and available services. By ensuring that referring agencies are well-informed, they will be better equipped to make accurate referrals, communicate effectively with families and stakeholders, and ultimately support the successful diversion of youth from the justice system.

After completing the referral process, diversion staff initiate the intake process (see [Section 5: The Intake Process](#)). A primary goal of the intake process is to encourage the youth to take responsibility for their actions. During this phase, diversion staff also collect essential information, including necessary screenings and assessments, to prepare for the Restorative Meeting (see [Part 7: Guidelines for Conducting the Restorative Meeting](#)) and ultimately, to develop the Restorative Agreement (see [Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement](#)).

4.5 Case File and Documentation

Begin the case file as soon as a referral is received ([Refer to Section 5.2 Case File and Documentation](#)). Review the referral packet to determine program fit and team capacity. Contact the youth and their family, documenting all outreach efforts and responses. Record any participation challenges, such as missed calls or scheduling conflicts. Keep all notes brief, respectful, and focused on key details relevant to the case. Use this information to help prepare for the Restorative Meeting. For more detailed instructions, refer to Sections [10.2: Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process](#) and [10.3: Developing the Case File](#).

4.6 Referral Checklists

For checklists, refer to:

- [Checklists – Referring Agencies](#)
- [Checklists – Youth Diversion Team Referral Packet](#)

Part 5. The Intake Process

Part 5 of this manual outlines the intake procedures that establish the foundation for a successful restorative process by engaging the youth who caused harm, their families, and those directly affected. Diversion staff play a vital role in the intake process, serving as the bridge that prepares all parties for meaningful engagement in the Restorative Meeting. This responsibility requires strong communication skills, a trauma-informed restorative justice approach, and a clear understanding of how the Youth Diversion Team operates, as outlined throughout this manual.

Staff must be well-versed in referral criteria, the responsibilities of referring agencies, relevant juvenile court procedures, and the preparation of volunteers to ensure their effective and supportive participation. Each intake meeting provides an opportunity to reflect on what has occurred, explore contributing factors, and begin identifying needs, concerns, and potential avenues for repair. These conversations help determine whether the youth who caused harm is ready to engage in the process and what support may be needed to ensure a restorative agreement demonstrating active accountability.

Case documentation and file development begin with the referral and continue through every stage of the diversion process until the case is closed. All outreach efforts, communication attempts, and participant responses must be documented, especially when engagement barriers arise. This information supports a transparent, respectful, and relevant presentation of the case during the Restorative Meeting. All documentation must remain concise, trauma-informed, and focused on what is essential to understanding the case and guiding restorative responses.

Not all cases involve directly harmed individuals; when they do, not all will participate. However, their input can significantly shape the restorative dialogue. In their absence, staff should draw on available sources—such as impact statements, police reports, or community perspectives—to ensure the process remains centered on harm and repair. Regardless of who is present, intake procedures aim to establish emotional safety, promote accountability, and support a path forward grounded in restoration and healing.

5.1 Foundational Approach to Intake Conversations

Diversion staff do not need to be trauma or restorative justice experts to support this work. However, they should receive training in trauma-informed restorative justice, which prepares them to:

- Recognize and respond to the emotional and behavioral impacts of trauma on the youth, their families, and those who have been harmed
- Facilitate intake conversations in a safe, empathetic environment where all voices are heard and respected

A family-centered, strengths-based approach is also essential. It:

- Honors the unique circumstances and assets of everyone involved
- Encourages meaningful, responsible participation by youth and families
- Supports harmed parties in identifying what they need for healing

Diversion staff play a key role in ensuring that every intake is conducted thoroughly, respectfully, and consistently for the youth who caused harm, their families, and those directly affected. Staff should approach each participant with:

- Clarity and compassion
- Empathy and curiosity
- A commitment to creating a safe and respectful space for all

Cultural sensitivity and responsiveness are critical. Staff must understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of participants and adapt the intake process to meet the unique needs of each case. This includes:

- Offering choices that empower participants
- Encouraging active involvement in decision-making
- Fostering trust and agency throughout the process

Recognizing that the intake meeting is not a replacement for the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting is essential. Staff may feel pressured to cover a lot of ground, particularly when families or harmed parties are anxious or when time is limited. However, it is crucial to maintain the purpose and integrity of the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting. Instead, it serves as a preparation space, and should not:

- Replace restorative dialogue between the youth and those impacted
- Preempt the collaborative agreement process facilitated by the Youth Diversion Team

The intake process isn't always quick or straightforward. Instead of being just a single event, it's often a longer process that may take multiple steps. While some cases progress quickly, others

may require more time and support. These follow-up conversations help ensure everyone feels prepared, informed, and supported to participate meaningfully in the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting. Youth, families, or harmed parties may benefit from:

- Additional conversations
- Opportunities to reflect
- Time to process information and prepare emotionally or mentally

5.2 Case File and Documentation

Continue the documentation process that *began* with the referral. Be sure to record details of the intake process. Document all outreach efforts and any responses received. Note any participation challenges, such as missed calls, lack of response, or scheduling conflicts. Keep all notes brief, respectful, and focused on key information relevant to the case. Thoughtful documentation supports clear communication, helps identify potential barriers, and ensures everyone is well-prepared for the Restorative Meeting. For more detailed instructions, refer to Sections [10.2: Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process](#) and [10.3: Developing the Case File](#).

5.3 Initial Contact with the Parent or Legal Guardian

Diversion staff may learn of a referral either through a formal notice from the referring agency or directly from a parent or legal guardian who has already been informed, often by law enforcement, and reached out for support.

Initial contact with parents or guardians is crucial for establishing trust, clarifying expectations, and facilitating informed decision-making. Even if the referring agency has already provided some information, families may still have questions or misunderstandings. Diversion staff must provide a clear and consistent explanation of the Youth Diversion Team process and next steps.

There are two common scenarios for initial contact:

- When the parent or legal guardian contacts diversion staff initially, because the referring agency has requested or required it, staff should follow the standard intake engagement process, clearly explaining the diversion program, answering any questions, and documenting the interaction in a clear and concise manner.
- When the referral is received directly from the referring agency, outreach should happen promptly and may be conducted by phone or written letter, depending on what is most appropriate. Staff should provide a thorough introduction to the Youth Diversion Team process, outline what to expect, and document the interaction clearly and concisely.

Regardless of who initiates the conversation, these steps ensure that all families receive consistent information, equitable treatment, and a clear understanding of the path ahead.

Topics to address include:

- **Role of the Youth Diversion Team:** Explain the team’s purpose—to assess the case and recommend restorative and intervention-based responses.
- **Overview of the Process:** Outline steps from referral to the Youth Diversion Team meeting, including general timelines and the structure of follow-up meetings. Clarify how this process differs from juvenile court, referencing [Section 10.4: Legal Distinctions](#).
- **Youth and Family Responsibilities:** Describe expectations such as attending meetings, engaging in the restorative process, and completing the Restorative Agreement action items.
- **Possible Outcomes:** Discuss benefits, such as the youth being able to truthfully state they have never been arrested (see [Section 10.4.2: Disposition of Record](#)), personal growth, accountability, repair of harm, and family support. The withdrawal or refusal to participate will result in the case being returned to the referring agency.
- **Next Steps:** If the parent or guardian agrees to continue, schedule the intake meeting at a mutually convenient time.

A respectful and informative initial contact strengthens family engagement and lays the foundation for a collaborative and restorative diversion process.

5.4 Explaining the Six-Month Timeline and Ongoing Case Management

Diversion staff should clearly explain during the intake process that the Youth Diversion Team will keep cases open for a minimum of six months, *starting from the date of the intake meeting*.

Even when agreements are completed early, cases remain open to:

- Monitor sustained progress (e.g., school attendance, behavior, or academic achievement)
- Provide continued support to the youth and their family, and address challenges as they arise
- Ensure harm has been meaningfully acknowledged and repaired
- Support long-term positive behaviors
- Evaluate the overall impact of the diversion process

Families may understandably hope to conclude the process once the youth completes their Restorative Agreement, especially if that happens before the six-month mark. While this desire is respected, continued case management remains vital to the Youth Diversion Team process.

In some cases, Youth Diversion Team staff may maintain a lighter, informal connection even after the case is formally closed, particularly when other community-based services support the youth and family. This ongoing presence can help sustain momentum and ensure the gains made during diversion continue beyond the program.

5.5 Explaining Legal Distinctions, Confidentiality, and Voluntary Participation

During the intake meeting, provide a clear overview of the legal differences between the Youth Diversion Team and the juvenile court process. Discuss the limits of confidentiality and emphasize that participation is voluntary. Ensure that all necessary signatures are obtained. For guidance, please refer to [*sections 10.4 – Legal Distinctions, 10.5 – Voluntary Participation, 10.6 – Verification of Waiver of Rights/Release of Information, and 10.8 – Confidentiality.*](#)

Key Points to Emphasize:

- The Youth Diversion Team is a restorative alternative to juvenile court, not a legal proceeding.
- The process is non-adversarial, does not involve prosecution, and cannot result in incarceration.
- Legal rights associated with juvenile court, such as the right to remain silent, the right to legal representation, and the right to a trial, do not apply in this process.
- Participation is voluntary for all parties, including the youth, their family, and those who have been harmed.
- The youth responsible for the harm and their parent or legal guardian must agree to allow the Youth Diversion Team to share their identity and the diversion outcome with the harmed party if requested.
- Individuals directly harmed have the right to participate in the Youth Diversion Team process, which can occur in various ways.
- If the process is completed, the youth's record will indicate that diversion was used.
- Clearly explain the purpose of confidentiality, along with its legal and ethical limitations, to all participants.
- Obtain signatures from the youth who caused harm and their parent or legal guardian on the *Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information* (see [*Appendix A*](#)). If a youth has turned 18 after the incident and before the intake, they can sign the Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information.
- Obtain signatures from the youth who caused harm, their parent or legal guardian, and any individuals directly harmed on the *Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement* during the intake meeting (see [*Appendix B*](#)). If a youth has turned 18 after the incident and before the intake, they can sign the Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement.
- These explanations and discussions *must* occur in tandem with the next section, [*5.6 Establishing Voluntary Participation: Parental Consent and Youth Assent*](#), to ensure that

families fully understand the voluntary nature of participation as they make their decision.

5.6 Establishing Voluntary Participation – Parental Consent and Youth Assent

During the intake meeting, the parent or legal guardian must *consent* to the youth's participation in the Youth Diversion Team process. At the same time, the youth must express their *assent*, indicating their *willingness* to engage *meaningfully* in the restorative process. The following clarifies these terms and explains their importance in the restorative process.

Youth Diversion Team staff must understand the distinction between parental consent and youth assent to avoid unintentionally pressuring the youth into compliance simply because an adult has given permission. Ensuring that youth are not pressured into participation is essential for maintaining a trauma-informed restorative diversion approach.

In the Youth Diversion Team process:

- Parental **consent** ensures the parent or legal guardian is informed and supports the youth's participation.
- Youth **assent** reflects that the youth is informed and voluntarily agrees to participate, confirming that they understand the process and are willing to engage meaningfully.

While parental consent is necessary, the youth's authentic willingness to participate is *key* for maintaining the integrity of the restorative process. While the youth may be scared, confused, or need clarification, a genuine desire to engage remains essential.

If the youth participates in the diversion process without a genuine desire to understand and prepare for accountability, the restorative value of the process may be lost. This could lead to it becoming performative rather than transformative, potentially causing additional harm. Without the youth's genuine commitment to understanding their role in the incident and accepting responsibility, the diversion process risks failing to achieve its intended purpose.

Consent and assent are documented through the signed contract, waiver of rights, and release of information form (see [Appendix A: Sample Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information](#)).

Whether the form is signed before or during the intake meeting, diversion staff should thoroughly review its purpose, scope, and how the information will be used. Although it may take time for the family to understand the process thoroughly and for the youth to accept their behavior and its impact, reviewing the document fosters transparency, builds trust, and reinforces the voluntary and collaborative nature of the Youth Diversion Team process.

Therefore, the process is as follows:

- **If the parent (or legal guardian) and the youth agree to participate**, proceed with the intake. Confirm whether the referring agency has already obtained the signed contract, waiver of rights, and release of information form. If the form is not included or the file

has not yet been transferred, the parent or legal guardian must sign it before moving forward.

- **If the parent (or legal guardian) or the youth declines to participate**, document the decision and return the case to the referring agency. See [*Section 10.2—Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process*](#).

When a family declines participation, respond with respect and openness. Offer space to explore their concerns. Reassure them that their decision will be respected without pressure or judgment.

5.7 The Responsible Youth Questionnaire

As part of the Youth Diversion Team intake process, the youth who caused the harm must complete a personal reflection tool called the *Responsible Youth Questionnaire* (see [*Appendix C: Responsible Youth Questionnaire*](#)). This document is vital in preparing the youth for restorative dialogue and helping the team understand their perspective.

Restorative Note: While this form retains “Responsible Youth” in the title for consistency and recognition, it reflects restorative values that honor each young person’s dignity and capacity for growth.

Diversion staff are responsible for introducing the questionnaire to the youth and their parent or legal guardian during the intake meeting. Please ask that the completed questionnaire be returned by a specified date. Encourage the youth to answer the questions thoughtfully, as their responses will help the Youth Diversion Team understand their perspective and support their success in the restorative process.

Diversion staff must clearly explain the purpose of the questionnaire and how the information provided will contribute to the restorative process. Staff should:

- Explain that the questionnaire helps the youth reflect on the incident, its impact, and the steps they can take to take responsibility and make amends.
- Encourage the youth to complete the questionnaire in conversation with their parent or legal guardian.
- Ensure the final form includes signatures from the youth, their parent or guardian, and a diversion staff member.
- Emphasize that the form is not punitive but an opportunity to demonstrate insight and readiness to participate meaningfully in the Restorative Meeting.
- Inform the family that any disclosures indicating illegal activity or safety risks may be subject to mandated reporting requirements.

The completed questionnaire must be returned to diversion staff by the specified deadline. This ensures the Youth Diversion Team has time to:

- Review the youth’s responses in preparation for the Restorative Meeting.

- Use the youth’s insights to inform and guide the restorative decision-making process.

Supporting the youth in completing this task reinforces key values of the restorative approach:

- Responsibility
- Engagement
- Follow-through

5.8 Assessment of Strengths, Challenges, and Family Dynamics

During the intake process, diversion staff aim to understand the full context of the referral by gathering essential information about the circumstances of the incident, the youth who caused harm, and the family. This includes assessing the youth’s developmental stage and any relevant strengths, challenges, or system-level barriers, such as:

Youth Strengths:

- Uses art, music, or sports as healthy outlets for self-expression and regulation
- Demonstrates insight, empathy, or a desire to make amends
- Shows responsibility through caregiving roles, part-time work, or helping at home

Youth Challenges:

- Struggles with academic engagement or performance
- Experiences feelings of shame, anxiety, or disconnection
- May have difficulty managing emotions or peer relationships

Family Strengths:

- Maintains strong values around education, accountability, and cultural identity
- Provides emotional or logistical support despite limited resources
- Expresses willingness to engage in the diversion process and support the youth

Family Challenges:

- Faces housing instability, food insecurity, or financial stress
- Manages multiple caregiving responsibilities or limited adult availability
- Experiences communication or relational difficulties within the household

System-Level Strengths

- Consistent support from a caring school staff member (e.g., counselor, teacher, coach) who advocates for the youth’s needs.

- Existing wraparound services coordinated care across school, mental health, and family support systems.
- Availability of culturally relevant or trauma-informed programming that the youth has previously accessed or found helpful.

System-Level Challenges (see [Section 3.6 Collective Accountability](#))

- School responses have relied on exclusionary discipline rather than support
- Limited access to mental health, academic, or culturally relevant services
- Fragmented communication between systems serving the youth (e.g., school, child welfare, probation)

In addition to engaging in narrative conversations, diversion staff may utilize validated, evidence-based screening tools to evaluate risk and protective factors, identify service needs, determine the youth's interests, and assess available support systems and connections with positive adult figures. It is essential to be aware of any specific instruments or screening processes required by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. Staff members administering these tools must be qualified to interpret the results accurately.

5.9 Coordination with Existing Service Providers

Before being referred to the Youth Diversion Team, some youth may already work with professionals, such as school staff, therapists, mentors, or other service providers. While participation in the diversion process is not required for these providers, involving them early can help ensure the diversion plan builds on existing supports and avoids duplication.

Diversion staff should ask about current service providers during the initial conversation or at the intake meeting. At either point, they should encourage the parent or legal guardian to inform relevant providers about the youth's participation in the Youth Diversion Team process. This promotes coordination and strengthens consistent support across systems.

Staff should document any identified professionals and, with appropriate consent, reach out to gather relevant information or invite their participation in a manner that supports the youth and family.

5.10 Preparing for Restorative Justice Practice Recommendations

The information collected through this assessment does more than document the youth's current situation—it forms the foundation for thoughtful, personalized recommendations that:

- Promote active accountability
- Reflect restorative values
- Support healing, growth, and skill-building
- Propose developmentally appropriate, meaningful supports

- Ensure services align with the youth’s lived context

During intake, diversion staff should:

- Work closely with the youth who caused harm and their family to explore possible supportive services
- Work with the youth and family to ensure that recommendations reflect the youth’s strengths and are developmentally appropriate
- Help the family understand how these services relate to accountability, healing, and long-term change
- Clarify that recommendations discussed at intake are not final, but rather a starting point for discussion

It must be communicated that:

- Additional service recommendations may emerge at the Restorative Meeting
- The final restorative agreement is developed after all voices are heard and a consensus is reached
- This process promotes collaboration, reduces power imbalances, and increases youth ownership

Staff should aim to:

- Ground recommendations in the youth’s developmental capacity, strengths, and interests
- Avoid punitive or unrealistic suggestions
- Prevent major conflicts by addressing concerns before the Restorative Meeting

For additional guidance, refer to Sections [*3.7: Distinguishing Restorative Practices and Intervention-Based Services*](#) and [*3.8: Requirements for Restorative Alignment in Agreements*](#).

These sections outline effective methods for integrating service needs with active restorative justice accountability practices.

Action items discussed at intake and written into diversion agreements at the Restorative Meeting must meet SMART goals—specific, strengths-based, measurable, achievable, restorative, and timely ([Brummer & Thorsborne, 2020](#)). These action item development SMART guidelines are provided to help Youth Diversion Teams create realistic, collaborative agreements that address the harm and the youth’s needs, ensuring measurable outcomes and fidelity to the Youth Diversion Team model. For guidance developing SMART goals, see [*Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement*](#).

5.11 The Inclusion of Both Parties in the Youth Diversion Team Process

A fundamental principle of restorative justice practice is the active involvement of those responsible for causing harm and those directly affected by it. The perspectives and experiences of the individuals impacted by an incident are essential to the process.

This section provides guidance for diversion staff on how to prepare for and support the youth who caused harm, their family, and individuals who were directly harmed in situations where both parties have agreed to participate in the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting. It closely relates to Section 5.12, which focuses on preparing all parties for the restorative meeting process. While Section 5.11 emphasizes the importance of including those who have been harmed when they choose to participate, Section 5.12 outlines the steps necessary to ensure meaningful engagement from everyone involved.

While full participation may not always be possible, thoughtful preparation and facilitation of inclusion—when voluntary, appropriate, and safe—can lead to more impactful, healing-centered outcomes.

These preparatory conversations help reduce anxiety, build readiness, and enhance the understanding of all participants regarding restorative justice as a process grounded in human dignity, mutual respect, and the healing potential.

For additional guidance and detailed information, please refer to Sections:

- [*1.6: Core Framework and Professional Standards*](#)
- [*1.10: Language That Upholds Trauma-Informed Restorative Values*](#)
- [*2.8: Restorative Engagement of Those Harmed*](#)

Purpose and Value of Inclusion. Explain how including both the youth who caused harm and those harmed in the Youth Diversion Team meeting supports several restorative aims:

- **Accountability with context:** The youth who caused harm hears firsthand how their actions affected others.
- **Validation and voice for the harmed party:** They are given a platform to express their experience, needs, and hopes for repair.
- **Relationship repair and community strengthening:** Inclusion can build understanding and reduce ongoing tensions.

However, this process is nuanced and requires careful preparation to avoid re-traumatization, power imbalances, or unintended harm. Staff should be attuned to trauma-informed principles when engaging harmed parties. Prioritize emotional safety, consent, and self-determination.

Preparing the Youth and Family. Staff must explain the opportunity for inclusion and what that might look like. This includes:

- Clarifying that participation is voluntary for those who are harmed.
- Exploring the youth's readiness and willingness to hear from the harmed party.
- Explaining it is not the youth's option to include those who have been harmed.
- Outlining possible formats (e.g., face-to-face meeting, letter exchange, representative sharing).
- Discussing what taking responsibility might look like and why it matters in a restorative context. See Sections [*3.1 Understanding Responsibility and Accountability in Restorative Practice*](#), [*3.2 Understanding Consequences, Punishment, and Accountability*](#), and [*3.3 Supporting Responsibility and Active Accountability*](#).
- Clarifying how the inclusion aligns with restorative values and addressing any concerns they may have about fairness, safety, or emotional impact.

Preparing those Harmed. Not all harmed parties wish to participate, which must always be respected. Still, when they are open to engagement, preparation is essential. This includes:

- Clearly explaining the purpose of the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting and what participation could involve.
- Offering choices around how and when to participate (e.g., speaking in the meeting, submitting a written impact statement, or using a proxy).
- Emphasizing that they can change their mind at any point.
- It may be helpful to survey those affected about uninsured financial losses. In financial loss cases, individuals who experienced harm retain the right to pursue restitution through civil legal channels, independent of the restorative diversion process.
- Exploring what the harmed party wishes to achieve from the process and what support they may require to feel safe and heard. The intake facilitator may ask questions to encourage dialogue and reflection by meeting with the youth, such as:
 - “*What needs to happen to make things right for you?*”
 - “*What are you hoping to accomplish by meeting with the person responsible?*”
 - “*What do you need to feel like a youth is accountable for their actions?*”
 - “*What questions do you hope to have answered?*”

The conversation should be flexible and responsive to their needs and comfort level rather than dictate a specific action or outcome. It is essential to explain to those present that these questions may be asked in addition to the *Restorative Questions* during the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting.

Diversion staff are not expected to be restorative justice experts, but they do play a pivotal role in setting the stage for inclusion by:

- Identifying when inclusion may be appropriate, based on the case's nature and the readiness of both parties.
- Initiating and guiding preparatory conversations using trauma-informed, culturally responsive practices.
- Coordinating with other diversion staff and volunteers when planning restorative meetings involving both parties is essential, as it highlights the collaborative aspect of preparing for a successful restorative process.
- Advocating for flexibility in the process, recognizing that harm can be addressed in multiple ways.

Even when direct participation isn't possible, inclusion can be represented in other ways:

- Sharing a written impact statement or video from the harmed party.
- Having a support person speak on their behalf.
- The restorative questions were used to imagine how the harmed party might feel and what repair might look like.

These alternatives uphold restorative values and help the youth reflect meaningfully on their actions. Including both parties is not a checkbox but a dynamic process grounded in relationship, trust, and readiness. Youth Diversion Team staff can grow in this area by reflecting on case experiences, seeking consultation, and partnering with experienced restorative practitioners. With support, staff can facilitate more impactful, healing-centered outcomes for all involved.

5.12 Preparation for the Restorative Meeting Process

The respective intake sessions (one with the youth responsible and their family and the other with those who were harmed) presents an opportunity to initiate a discussion about the restorative process. Diversion staff can engage the youth who caused harm, their families, and those who were harmed in reflective, relational conversations that help establish a foundation for understanding, accountability, and repair. The goal is to:

- Guide participants toward personal insight
- Nurture empathy for others
- Support the youth's ownership of actions and their consequences
- Foster intrinsic motivation to make things right

Diversion staff must assess the responsibility and accountability of the youth who caused harm. This discussion begins at intake and continues through practice, culminating at the Restorative Meeting. For guidance on these processes, refer to [*Section 1.10: Language That Upholds Trauma-Informed Restorative Values*](#) and [*Part 3: Conservation Frameworks for Accountability and Repair*](#).

1. During intake, diversion staff will introduce the *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions* (see [Section 3.9.1](#) for guidelines) **only** to the youth who caused harm and their family. The youth selects two questions they feel comfortable asking and answering. The youth's selected questions are kept confidential until the meeting. These two questions will be posed to everyone at the beginning of the Restorative Meeting to help build trust and connection.

Diversion staff *do not* present the *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions* to the persons harmed. Staff should explain to the youth and their family that these questions are intended to shift the focus from the incident to the individual beyond what happened. Having everyone respond to the same two questions creates a shared experience that centers each participant as a whole person. This practice helps establish a supportive and respectful tone for the meeting, encouraging meaningful dialogue rooted in mutual understanding.

The questions include:

1. *When people first meet you, what do you think they see? What would you like them to see?*
2. *What is one important value you can see in our space today?*
3. *What is one word that someone you love would use to describe you?*
4. *What is one of your strengths? What would you like to improve on?*
5. *When you first get to know someone, what helps build trust?*

Note: At the start of the Restorative Meeting, the facilitator can use icebreaker questions in addition to the Trust and Relationship-Building Questions. However, these icebreaker questions do not need to be presented to the youth and their family during the intake process. They are to be used in addition to, not in place of, the *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions*.

2. During their respective intake meetings, diversion staff introduce the *Restorative Questions* to both the youth who caused harm and their family, as well as to those who were directly harmed (if they choose to participate in the Restorative Meeting). These questions help shape the restorative dialogue during the meeting itself. For guidance, see [Section 3.9.2: Restorative Questions](#). Diversion staff at intake and staff and volunteers at the Restorative Meeting *must* create space for participants to explore:
 - “*What happened from your perspective?*” (This allows the individual to describe the incident in their own words, fostering a sense of agency and ownership over their narrative. It helps avoid blame or defensiveness by centering their viewpoint.)
 - “*What were you thinking about at the time?*” (This encourages reflection on their mindset, motivations, or assumptions during the event, which can help others understand their reasoning, even if they caused harm.)

- “*What have you thought about since?*” (This allows the individual to express how their understanding or feelings about the incident may have shifted over time, revealing growth, regret, or continued confusion.)
- “*Who has been impacted, and how?*” (This opens a conversation about the ripple effects of the harm on families, communities, and even the person who caused harm, fostering empathy and accountability.)
- “*What has been the hardest thing for you?*” (This question helps surface the emotional or relational consequences that may still be unresolved. It creates space for vulnerability and recognizes the complexity of their experience.)
- “*What needs to happen to make things right?*” (This empowers the individual to identify meaningful steps toward repair and accountability, rather than being assigned consequences from a place of authority.)

Introducing these discussions during intake creates a lower-pressure environment for participants to engage with these questions. This preparation:

- Reduces anxiety
- Promotes readiness
- Encourages deeper engagement in the upcoming Restorative Meeting

Genuine restorative accountability occurs when the youth who caused harm:

- Understands their actions
- Takes ownership without coercion
- Engages in efforts to repair harm in meaningful, self-directed ways

Intake becomes a space where the youth who caused harm begins to see accountability not as imposed but as a conscious choice. This mindset shift toward ownership, empathy, and reparation sets the stage for meaningful participation in the Restorative Meeting and co-creating a values-driven agreement.

This conversation is not a supplement to restorative practice—it is foundational. By grounding early conversations in empathy, voluntary participation, and a shared commitment to making things right, diversion staff help participants internalize the core principles of restorative accountability from the beginning.

These conversations demonstrate that restorative dialogue is not about control, but about connection. It helps shift the perspective of the youth who caused harm: accountability is *not* something done *to* them, but something they actively choose to take on.

3. During intake, diversion staff discuss how the *Restorative Agreement* will be developed. They introduce the *4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions* to the youth, their family, and those directly harmed (if they decide to attend the *Restorative Meeting*).

Note: Diversion staff only need to explain a summary of the process. Explain that the 4-Quadrant Agreement Process is a tool used to guide the youth and those harmed in deciding how to make things right (see [Section 3.9.3: 4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions](#) and [Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement](#)). This process ensures the Restorative Agreement addresses four key areas of harm: to self, those directly harmed, the family, and the broader community.

While this discussion begins at intake, the actual agreement will be co-created during the *Restorative Meeting*, with input from everyone involved.

Key points to share:

- The Restorative Agreement is collaboratively made with everyone present at the Restorative Meeting.
- Intake discussions are just the starting point—they help generate ideas and prepare everyone for more in-depth conversations later.
- The four questions we explore are:
 1. *How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?*
 2. *How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?*
 3. *How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?*
 4. *How will the youth repair harm to the broader community?*

These questions will be visible to everyone at the Restorative Meeting to support shared understanding, encourage participation, and build a meaningful plan for accountability, healing, and reintegration.

For additional guidance on presenting the 4-Quadrant Agreement Process to those directly harmed, refer to Preparing Those Harmed in [Section 5.11: The Inclusion of Both Parties in the Youth Diversion Team Process](#).

5.13 Explain the Restorative Meeting Process

During intake, diversion staff must clearly explain the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting process. The same core information is presented to both groups. This explanation occurs through two parallel but separate conversations:

- One with the youth who caused harm and their parent(s) or guardian(s)
- One with the individual(s) who are directly harmed (if willing to participate)

For additional guidance, refer to [Part 6: Restorative Meeting Preparation](#) and [Part 7: Guidelines for Conducting the Restorative Meeting](#).

Meeting Structure. Help participants understand the 4-phase sequence of the restorative meeting:

1. Getting Acquainted

- Introductions and a brief explanation of each participant's role
- Relationship-building and icebreaker questions help establish a safe and respectful tone

2. Restorative Dialogue

- Each person shares their experience and reflections related to the incident
- The youth who caused harm, those harmed, and other participants contribute their perspectives
- The facilitator uses Restorative Questions to guide this phase

3. Making Agreements

- Participants collaborate to create a realistic, values-based agreement
- The facilitator uses the *4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions*

4. Closing and Appreciation

- The meeting ends with a round of appreciation, recognition of effort, and acknowledgment of shared commitment
- This phase helps ensure that participants leave with a sense of resolution and closure

Meeting Location

- Inform participants that the meeting takes place in a quiet, neutral space designed to minimize distractions and promote emotional safety
- If possible, offer to show them the meeting room during intake and describe how the seating is arranged to encourage equality and connection

Participants

- **Required Participants:**
 - The youth who caused harm and their parent or legal guardian
 - A trained facilitator (usually a diversion staff member)
 - Volunteers
- **Other Possible Participants:**
 - Those directly harmed (participation is voluntary).

- Referring officer, law enforcement, or school resource officer (only if relevant to the case)
- School representative (if the incident is school-related)
- Support persons for either the youth or the harmed party, if identified and willing to participate

Restorative Tone of the Meeting. Explain the restorative meeting:

- Emphasizes dialogue, empathy, and shared accountability, not punishment
- Creates space for participants to understand each other's experiences and perspectives
- Focuses on repairing harm and identifying ways to prevent future harm
- Uses a circle or inclusive seating arrangement to reflect equal standing among participants when possible

Facilitator's Role and Responsibilities. Clarify that the facilitator's role includes:

- Remaining neutral – guiding the process without taking sides
- Ensuring balanced participation – making sure every voice is heard and respected
- Providing structured guidance – leading participants through three sets of predetermined questions that shape the process
- Fostering safety – maintaining both emotional and physical safety throughout the conversation
- Maintaining a focus on accountability – helping participants concentrate on responsibility, repair, and restoration

Question Sets That Shape the Meeting. Inform the participants that the following three consistent sets of questions will guide the meeting. These are explained during intake to increase understanding and readiness.

- *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions* and Icebreakers – used initially to foster emotional safety and connection.
- *Restorative Questions* – used during the dialogue to explore what happened, who was affected, and how responsibility can be taken.
- *4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions* – used to co-create meaningful and achievable agreements for accountability and repair.

Speaking Order. Explain the speaking as:

- If those harmed will attend the meeting, ask during intake whether they would prefer to:
 - Speak first, or

- Hear from the youth who caused harm before sharing their perspective
- This choice, while small, can significantly influence their readiness and emotional safety during the meeting
- If harmed individuals are not attending, the youth who caused harm will be the first to speak after the facilitator opens the discussion
- The youth responsible for the harm does not get to decide this order

5.14 Bringing a Support Person to the Restorative Meeting

To foster meaningful support at the Restorative Meeting, diversion staff should encourage the youth who caused harm and those harmed to bring one trusted adult, such as a relative, teacher, coach, or mentor (see [*Section 3.5: The Role of Trusted Supporters*](#)). A single, well-chosen supporter helps provide emotional support, encourages accountability, and ensures a balanced and respectful environment.

Supporters can:

- Offer comfort and reassurance in a challenging setting
- Help the harmed party feel grounded and confident
- Balance power dynamics when others have support present
- Clarify aspects of the meeting or gently advocate if the harmed party struggles to speak
- Validate their experience and reinforce dignity throughout the process

Limiting supporters to one per party maintains focus and emotional safety. Staff should also share the Restorative Questions at intake so supporters can reflect in advance and come prepared to contribute meaningfully.

5.15 When the Youth Does Not Accept Accountability

As the intake process continues, staff assess the youth's readiness for restorative diversion. This process is voluntary and depends on the youth's willingness to take responsibility and engage in repairing the harm caused. See [*Section 3.1: Understanding Responsibility and Accountability in Restorative Practice*](#).

If the youth remains unwilling or unable to accept responsibility and to take accountability, even after supportive dialogue and multiple opportunities for reflection, the case is inappropriate for restorative diversion. It must be returned to the referring agency. For example, persistent statements like "*It wasn't me*" or "*I was there, but I didn't do anything*" indicate a lack of readiness to take responsibility for one's actions.

Youth Diversion Team staff must thoroughly document the circumstances before returning a case to the referring agency. Cases should only be returned after all reasonable efforts to promote understanding and encourage accountability have been fully explored. For guidance on returning

a case, refer to Sections [5.6: Establishing Voluntary Participation: Parental Consent and Youth Assent](#) and [10.2: Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process](#).

5.16 Conflict of Interest Considerations

When a diversion staff member or volunteer suspects a potential conflict of interest involving themselves or another team member, it should be raised confidentially as early as possible, ideally during or just after intake and always before the Youth Diversion Team meeting. If a conflict of interest is known or suspected, follow the guidance in [Section 10.9: Conflict of Interest Considerations](#).

Conflicts may include:

- Personal, family, or close social relationships with the youth, family, or those harmed.
- Prior involvement in the incident under review.
- Professional roles that could affect neutrality (e.g., therapist, school staff).
- Any situation that could raise concerns about bias, even if unintentional.

Perceived conflicts of interest also matter. A youth or family member may express discomfort or concern about a team member's involvement, even if that team member does not feel a conflict exists. These concerns must be taken seriously. In such cases, staff should listen openly, assess the situation with care, and consider adjustments to the team if needed to uphold trust and transparency.

When in doubt, choose caution. Addressing actual or perceived conflicts early helps preserve fairness, safety, and the integrity of the restorative process. Briefly document all conflict-related decisions—without including sensitive or identifying details.

When in doubt, choose caution. Addressing potential conflicts early helps preserve trust, fairness, and the integrity of the process. Briefly document all conflict-related decisions without sensitive details.

5.17 Scheduling the Youth Diversion Team Meeting

Restorative Meetings are typically held at a consistent, predetermined time to support structure, volunteer coordination, and program reliability. Whenever possible, the meeting for a given case should be scheduled to align with this standard time.

Once intake meetings are complete, the diversion staff member confirms the scheduled meeting date with the youth, their family, and—if they have chosen to participate—those directly impacted. If significant barriers arise for a key participant, limited flexibility may be considered to ensure meaningful engagement from all involved.

Staff should also consider any cultural, language, or accessibility needs that may affect participation.

Once the meeting date is confirmed, all participants will be notified and provided with clear information about the meeting format, location, and expectations.

5.18 Checklist: Intake Process and Staff Responsibilities

An [*Intake Process Checklist*](#) summarizes the essential responsibilities and provides a quick-reference guide to the intake process. The diversion staff must be familiar with the manual, specifically the detailed instructions in [*Part 5: The Intake Process*](#). A solid understanding of its contents enables them to clearly explain the process, build confidence and trust with participants, and collaborate effectively with professionals and volunteers.

Part 6. Restorative Meeting Preparation

Part 6 guides diversion staff who prepare for and facilitate Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meetings, as well as volunteers who support the process. These sections establish a foundation for understanding the meetings' “*why*” and “*how*.” This section outlines the key components necessary for a successful meeting, including:

- Selecting a safe, neutral location
- Arranging the room to support respectful dialogue
- Preparing relevant case materials
- Managing the length of the meeting
- Ensuring the emotional well-being of all participants

The success of a restorative meeting relies not only on logistical planning but also on trauma-informed facilitation that promotes fairness, dignity, and inclusion. Facilitators play a critical role in setting a collaborative tone, managing emotions, and maintaining neutrality throughout the process.

6.1 Foundational References for Restorative Meeting Preparation

Before reviewing the preparation guidelines, readers should consult two earlier sections for background information:

- [*Section 2.7: Foundations of the Restorative Meeting – The Circle Process*](#). This section provides in-depth information on the historical roots, philosophical underpinnings, and core values that guide the restorative meeting process. It emphasizes the importance of centering healing, accountability, and relational engagement, rather than relying on punitive responses.
- [*Section 5.13: Explaining the Restorative Meeting Process*](#). This section outlines how diversion staff introduce the restorative meeting during the intake process. It describes how the process is communicated through two parallel conversations: one with the youth who caused harm and their parent or guardian, and another with those who were directly harmed, if they choose to participate.

6.2 Participants

Participants in the meeting include, but are not limited to, the following individuals:

Required Participants:

- The youth who caused harm and their parent or legal guardian
- A trained facilitator (usually a staff member)
- Volunteers

Other Possible Participants:

- Those directly harmed (participation is voluntary).
- Referring officer, law enforcement, or school resource officer (only if relevant to the case)
- School representative
- One support person each for the youth who caused harm and the harmed party (see [*Section 3.5: The Role of Trusted Supporters*](#)).

6.3 Team Size at Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meetings

No more than four to six Youth Diversion Team members, including staff and volunteers, should participate in any meeting. This number does not include the youth, their family, and those directly impacted (and one supporter for both, if applicable).

Having a small team creates a welcoming and less intimidating environment for youth, families, and those directly affected. A smaller group also lowers the likelihood of the process feeling punitive or overwhelming, in line with trauma-informed principles. For more information about

the makeup of the staff and volunteers on the diversion team, please refer to [Section 1.7: Composition of the Youth Diversion Team](#).

6.4 Volunteer Case Assignment and Restorative Meeting Rotation

Volunteers must be selected carefully for each case based on their relationships with the youth and their capacity to foster trust. Volunteers familiar with the youth's background or current circumstances, such as school staff, service providers, and probation officers should be prioritized.

Including individuals from specific agencies or roles is unnecessary. Involvement must be appropriate for the case and they must understand the principles of trauma-informed restorative justice practice.

What matters most is assembling the *right people*—those grounded in restorative practice, connected to the community, and committed to supporting healing and accountability, rather than focusing on who they work for or what position they hold.

Depending on the size of the volunteer pool, a rotation schedule may be implemented to ensure balanced participation while maintaining consistency within each case. When using a rotation system, the same volunteers *must* follow a case from start to finish. Volunteers who begin a case but do not continue to its conclusion may disrupt the process and undermine its restorative goals.

6.5 Meeting Location

Youth Diversion Team meetings should occur in safe, professional, and confidential settings. The environment must be neutral, welcoming, non-threatening, easily accessible, and familiar to families. Locations like police departments are often perceived as inappropriate and biased and should not be used for this purpose.

6.6 Meeting Room

The meeting room should be welcoming, respectful, and accessible for all participants. It must provide both visual and auditory privacy to maintain a confidential atmosphere.

In addition to the primary meeting room, the Youth Diversion Team should ensure multiple separate spaces are available to protect participants' privacy and prevent unintended interactions, whether between the youth who caused harm and those who were harmed, or between unrelated cases that may occur subsequent to one another. These may include:

- A designated, comfortable waiting area for families who arrive early.
- Private waiting rooms for participants scheduled for later meetings when multiple Youth Diversion Team sessions are held consecutively.
- Separate waiting areas for the youth who caused harm and those who were harmed (if attending the Restorative Meeting). This arrangement helps minimize unnecessary

tension and allows all participants time to prepare emotionally for the upcoming conversation.

The overall environment should reflect the values of dignity, safety, and respect that underpin restorative justice practices.

6.7 Room Setup and Seating Arrangement

Room setup and seating arrangement are critical for establishing an atmosphere conducive to restorative dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. The aim is to encourage open dialogue, support reflection on the incident, deepen understanding of its impact, and collaborate on ways to repair the harm. Avoid using furniture, such as desks or tables, that create barriers or positioning the youth in a "defendant" role, isolated from the "accusers" or authority figures, as one might see in a courtroom.

6.7.1 Room Setup

The physical setup is essential for creating the right atmosphere, focusing on healing and shared accountability rather than punishment. The goal is to encourage open dialogue, support reflection on the incident, deepen understanding of its impact, and collaborate on ways to mitigate the harm.

Participants should sit in a circle whenever possible, with chairs arranged in an unobstructed formation to support open dialogue, promote equity, safety, inclusion, and connection.

When space or furniture limitations prevent the creation of an unobstructed circle, consider the following layout options to promote inclusivity and minimize physical separation. This is especially important when considering the placement of the youth who caused harm to those affected by the incident (if present) and the Youth Diversion Team members. Seating should ensure that all participants have equal access to shared space—no one should be physically or symbolically isolated.

Some recommended layout options include:

- Use small, shared tables that are evenly spaced among participants, rather than a large conference-style table.
- Avoid pushing tables together so the youth who caused harm sits at one short end while others sit along the long sides, as this may unintentionally signal exclusion or judgment.
- Avoid designating a "head" of the table to reinforce the principle of shared dialogue.
- Consider arranging multiple tables in an open triangular formation with equal spacing, if available. This promotes balanced dialogue and prevents an adversarial tone.
- Aim for proximity, keeping participants within 3 to 5 feet of one another to support connection and minimize emotional distance.

- Use round tables or arrange desks in a circle whenever possible to promote collaboration and reduce the feeling of hierarchy or opposition.
- If a table is needed for shared materials, such as notes, tissues, or water, position it along a wall or near the entrance—it should be accessible to all but not divide the participants.

6.7.2 Seating Arrangement

Beyond the physical arrangement of tables and chairs, attention should also be given to the overall room environment to support the emotional needs and comfort of all participants.

A typical seating arrangement aims to support inclusive dialogue and emotional safety while avoiding any sense of hierarchy. The positioning of participants, especially the youth who caused harm and the person harmed (if present), should be intentional but not adversarial. The following configuration is recommended:

- The facilitator sits between the youth who caused harm and the person harmed. This placement supports balanced dialogue and helps maintain a sense of safety and neutrality for all participants.
- The youth who caused harm sits to the right or left of the facilitator, followed by their parent(s) or guardian(s) and a support person attending with the youth.
- The harmed party sits on the opposite side of the facilitator, followed by their parent(s) or guardian(s) (if the person harmed is a minor) and a support person attending with the person harmed.

This neutral placement of the facilitator is not hierarchical—it serves a protective and balancing role by:

- Helping to moderate the emotional tone and manage power dynamics.
- Providing an anchor for dialogue and redirection as needed.
- Visually and physically signaling equal support for both sides.

6.8 Physical Tools for the Restorative Meeting

Creating a welcoming, supportive environment is an essential part of restorative practice. Thoughtful preparation of the meeting space, including specific tools and hospitality items, helps participants feel respected, cared for, and emotionally supported. These small details contribute to participants' comfort, engagement, and willingness to participate fully in the restorative process. The following tools are either necessary or highly recommended:

- **Whiteboard or Flip Chart.** To develop the *4-Quadrant Agreement*, a whiteboard, flip chart, or similar visual tool helps participants clearly and collaboratively track ideas, agreements, and action steps.

- **Hospitality Items.** Offering families a snack and water before entering the meeting room can be a simple yet meaningful gesture. It conveys hospitality, shows respect, and may meet a basic need that helps participants engage more fully during the meeting.
- **Tissues and Fidget Tools.** Tissues should be readily available inside the meeting room, as emotional moments may arise during the discussion. Fidget tools placed near families can help ease nerves, especially for youth or participants who find movement calming.
- **Additional Water.** Additional water bottles can be placed in the center of the meeting. This thoughtful touch reinforces the atmosphere of care and hospitality, ensuring participants can stay physically comfortable throughout the meeting.

6.9 Case Preparation and Information Sharing

Before the Youth Diversion Team meeting, diversion staff prepare an organized and concise case file packet containing all relevant information needed for decision-making. This packet includes case facts, background information about the youth and their family, school records, a history of services, demographic information, screening results, and notes from intake meetings with the youth and those directly affected by their situation. [Section 10.3](#) provides guidelines for developing the case file.

[Section 10.8](#) provides guidance for securing and maintaining confidentiality. All documentation must be handled sensitively, reflecting a trauma-informed approach. Before sharing any information about the case, ensure that the volunteers sign the *Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement* (see [Appendix B](#)).

The case file packet is intended for reference only and must not be shared electronically. Instead of distributing hard copies, the facilitator will verbally summarize the case facts and relevant background information to the volunteers before the Restorative Meeting begins. This approach ensures that team members comprehend the offense, the background of the youth and their family, and the impact of the incident on those directly affected, while keeping the case file information secure. If hard copies are distributed, they must be collected and stored securely after the meeting.

6.10 Conflicts of Interest

Facilitators should refer to the *Conflict-of-Interest Considerations* in [Section 10.9](#) to help identify potential conflicts that could undermine neutrality or trust.

Before the restorative meeting begins, Youth Diversion Team members must disclose any potential conflicts of interest that have emerged since the intake phase. These discussions should be handled respectfully and diplomatically, with an emphasis on fostering understanding and ensuring that all participants feel heard and safe.

If a concern arises, the facilitator will make a prompt and impartial decision about whether the individual should step back from participating in the dialogue or decision-making for that case or

if the individual should be excused from the entire process. This process preserves transparency and safeguards the integrity of the restorative approach.

6.11 Managing Meeting Length and Focus

It is crucial to schedule each session with enough time for meaningful engagement. Youth, their families, and those harmed deserve thoughtful conversations, not rushed interactions. Each meeting participant should be able to contribute meaningfully to the restorative dialogue and decision-making process.

While there is *no* set time for each conversation, planning for 60 minutes per case will allow most conversations to transpire, with room in between for a break and prep for an additional meeting, if needed.

Conducting more than a few cases in one day can be challenging for the facilitator, diversion staff, and volunteers and is not recommended. If high caseloads create a time issue, consider adding additional dates to the calendar to make sure all youth have the appropriate amount of time for their meeting.

Ensure that there is sufficient time for thoughtful conversation without hurrying participants. If meetings extend beyond one hour, incorporate short breaks to help participants stay engaged, especially given the emotional and relational nature of the work. As a guideline, offer a brief break after 45 to 60 minutes of focused conversation.

Be prepared to allocate additional time for families with complex histories or multiple challenges. However, the Youth Diversion Team meeting is not meant to retell lengthy background stories; this information should have already been gathered during the intake process.

When new information becomes available between the intake session and the date of the Restorative Meeting, it must be included in the case file packet presented to the volunteers before the meeting's commencement. If new information arises just before or during the Restorative Meeting, facilitators should follow the procedures outlined in [Section 7.3](#), which addresses how to manage new information disclosed during the meeting.

When the facilitator was absent during the intake process, they should review the youth's initial restorative needs, intervention-based considerations, and any early ideas or recommendations discussed. While intake sessions may include preliminary discussions about possible next steps, no decisions should be finalized before the restorative meeting.

Recommendations must remain open for input from all participants, particularly the youth who caused harm, their family members, and those directly affected by the incident. As highlighted in [Section 5.12: Preparation for the Restorative Meeting Process](#), conducting preparatory work during intake can help facilitate a more focused discussion. However, this preparation should never substitute for the inclusive process of developing agreements during the meeting itself. The meeting is the designated space for collaborative decision-making.

When back-to-back Youth Diversion Team meetings are scheduled, allow a brief break between sessions for the facilitator to reset and ensure they are prepared to guide the next group with the same focus and energy. Additionally, participants arriving for the next meeting should be provided with a comfortable, preferably private, waiting area that reinforces the restorative nature of the process. This thoughtful attention to the physical and emotional environment helps maintain the integrity of each meeting and supports participants' sense of safety, confidentiality, and respect.

6.12 Wellness Tips for Facilitators and Volunteers

A Youth Diversion Team meeting can be emotionally challenging. Diversion staff and volunteers should prioritize their well-being by focusing on their emotional health to create a supportive and effective environment for all participants. Here are some wellness tips for facilitators to maintain emotional regulation:

- **Practice Mindful Breathing:** Take deep, slow breaths before and during the meeting to help you stay grounded and calm. This simple technique can also be used when emotions rise, helping you regain focus and reduce stress.
- **Set Clear Boundaries:** Know your emotional limits and set boundaries to protect your well-being. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, it's okay to pause, take a breath, or call for a brief break.
- **Ground Yourself in the Present:** To remain anchored and focused, use grounding techniques, such as feeling your feet on the floor or noticing the physical space around you. This helps prevent emotional overwhelm from past or future worries.
- **Self-Awareness:** Continuously check in with your emotional state. If you feel triggered or emotionally charged, acknowledge your feelings internally and use self-regulation techniques such as deep breathing or a quick mental reset.
- **Hydrate and Move:** Maintaining physical comfort significantly impacts emotional regulation. Take regular water breaks and move your body between meetings, like a stretch or short walk, if you conduct back-to-back sessions.
- **Practice Empathy, Not Sympathy:** Empathetic listening allows facilitators to stay present without taking on others' emotional burdens. It's essential to support participants without becoming overwhelmed by their emotions.
- **Know When to Seek Support:** If you are feeling drained, stressed, or need guidance, don't hesitate to reach out to a supervisor, colleague, or counselor for support and supervision.

Part 7. Guidelines for Conducting the Restorative Meeting

Part 7 outlines the structure and key guidelines for conducting a restorative meeting, providing facilitators and volunteers with a clear framework to support an effective process. Facilitators must skillfully guide each stage of the meeting, assisting participants with sensitivity and impartiality while drawing on restorative, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive principles. When executed well, the meeting creates a space for all voices to be heard, fosters empathy, and encourages the development of socially responsible solutions.

The restorative meeting is based on the belief that a well-organized, relational process will encourage thoughtful input from all participants and produce positive, socially responsible results. Its main goal is to hold youth accountable for the harm they caused while guiding them toward actions that repair relationships, rebuild trust, restore their standing in the community, and provide any support needed to prevent the behavior from recurring.

Staff and volunteers each contribute essential strengths. Diversion staff bring professional expertise and a deep commitment to the Youth Diversion Team model, which is grounded in trauma-informed restorative practices. Volunteers offer professional experience and community insight, helping to ensure that support services are thoughtfully integrated and that accountability remains meaningful and achievable.

7.1 Foundation References for Restorative Meeting Facilitation

Before reviewing the guidelines for conducting the Restorative Meeting, readers should consult three earlier sections for background information:

- [*Section 2.7: Foundations of the Restorative Meeting – The Circle Process*](#). This section provides in-depth information on the historical roots, philosophical underpinnings, and core values that guide the restorative meeting process. It emphasizes the importance of centering healing, accountability, and relational engagement, rather than relying on punitive responses.
- [*Part 3: Conversation Frameworks for Accountability and Repair*](#). Part 3 is vital to the success of the restorative meeting. It establishes the language, structure, and mindset facilitators and diversion staff use to guide the conversation in ways that uphold restorative values.
- [*Section 5.13: Explaining the Restorative Meeting Process*](#). This section explains how diversion staff introduce the restorative meeting during the intake process. It describes how the process is communicated through two parallel conversations—one with the youth who caused harm and their parent or guardian, and another with those directly harmed (if they choose to participate). It also outlines the meeting’s structure, facilitator responsibilities, participant roles, and tools for supporting engagement and emotional safety.

7.2 Securing Confidentiality and Indemnification

Before the Youth Diversion Team meeting begins, the facilitator must ensure that all participants have signed the confidentiality agreement. The form is in [*Appendix B: Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement*](#).

The facilitator must explain before the meeting starts that confidentiality,

- protects the integrity of the diversion process and the privacy of those involved,
- establishes clear expectations that conversations during the meeting are confidential and cannot be shared outside the Youth Diversion Team process without consent, and
- and that participants agree to be personally responsible for any damages caused by the unauthorized release of confidential information.

The youth, their family, and those affected were informed about confidentiality during the intake process and may have signed a confidentiality agreement. The facilitator should verify this information.

7.3 Handling New Information Disclosed During the Restorative Meeting

When new information arises immediately before or during the Restorative Meeting—whether from diversion staff, the youth who caused harm, those directly affected, or other participants—

it's essential to handle it carefully to ensure fairness, transparency, and emotional safety. However, the Restorative Meeting is not intended to include lengthy background stories. Here are some guidelines on how to manage this situation:

- **Acknowledge the new information calmly and neutrally.** The facilitator should pause the discussion briefly to acknowledge that new information has been shared. Use neutral language to avoid escalating emotions or implying blame.

Example: “Thank you for sharing that. Let’s take a moment to make sure everyone has a shared understanding.”

- **Clarify for accuracy.** Ask brief, clarifying questions if needed to ensure all participants understand the information accurately. Avoid delving into investigative or adversarial questioning.

Example: “Can you clarify when that occurred?” or “Can you help us understand how that connects to what happened?”

- **Assess the impact.** The facilitator should determine whether the new information significantly changes:
 - the understanding of the incident,
 - the accountability of the youth, and
 - the appropriateness of the restorative process.
- **Keep the circle focused.** If the new information does not disrupt the integrity of the process, continue with the meeting while allowing participants to respond to the updated context respectfully.

Example: “With that new understanding, let’s take a moment for each of you to reflect on how this might affect your experience of what happened.”

- **Proceeding with the meeting.** If the new information does not undermine safety, trust, or the youth’s ability to take accountability, and all parties share a mutual understanding of the latest facts, the meeting may proceed as planned.
- **Document the new information.** Whether the meeting continues or not, facilitators must document the latest information and any decisions made in response to it in the case file immediately after the meeting.

New information may affect the appropriateness of the restorative process if it significantly alters the understanding of the incident, raises questions about the youth’s accountability, or introduces safety concerns. A restorative process requires a shared sense of events, voluntary participation, and a foundation of trust. If new information emerges—such as evidence of a significant power imbalance, coercion, or other factors that may indicate the need for formal legal intervention—the facilitator must assess whether it remains ethical, safe, and trauma-informed to proceed with

a restorative approach. Any ongoing decision must prioritize the safety, dignity, and autonomy of all participants.

7.4 Meeting Script

The meeting script serves as the *primary guide* for facilitators in conducting restorative meetings. It anchors the conversation, ensuring the process remains structured, equitable, and aligned with trauma-informed restorative justice principles. By relying on the script as their foundation, facilitators help maintain consistency across meetings and safeguard the trauma-informed restorative nature of this process.

The script is provided in [Appendix D](#).

The facilitator must follow this script to maintain a consistent meeting process that consists of four phases, guided by three sets of questions.

- **Getting Acquainted.** The meeting begins with introductions and an overview of participants' roles. To foster a sense of emotional and physical safety, facilitators use *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions* (refer to [Section 3.9.1](#)). These questions help create connections among participants. Additionally, facilitators may incorporate icebreaker questions, which should complement rather than replace the *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions*.
- **The Restorative Dialogue:** This central part of the meeting allows each participant to share their perspective on the incident and its impact. The *Restorative Questions* guide this conversation portion (see [Section 3.9.2](#)). Understanding the whole story requires making space for each unique voice.
- **Making Agreements:** In this phase, participants collaborate to develop concrete steps to repair harm and support positive change using the *4-Quadrant Agreement Process*. The *4-Quadrant Agreement and Process Questions* (see [Section 3.9.3](#)) guide the creation of the Agreement using [SSMART](#) goals.
- **Closing – Appreciation:** The meeting concludes with an opportunity for reflection, gratitude, and encouragement to promote follow-through and resolution.

The script offers a narrative and a series of prompts to help facilitators guide participants through all four phases of the restorative meeting. In each phase, facilitators ask all participants the same core questions in a consistent, structured sequence to ensure that every voice is heard and the dialogue remains balanced and respectful.

This approach reflects trauma-informed values by offering predictability, emotional safety, and opportunities for voice and choice. To support inclusivity and cultural responsiveness, facilitators use collective language, such as “*each of you*”—when addressing all attendees, including the youth who caused harm, their parent or guardian, those directly harmed (if participating), and others present to offer support or insight.

Facilitators are expected to follow the script closely to guide each stage of the meeting, making thoughtful adaptations *only* when necessary to enhance clarity, support participant understanding, or maintain the trauma-informed and restorative nature of the process. Facilitators may rephrase questions when needed, provided they retain the original intent and preserve the integrity of the process.

Example: If the scripted question is, “*What were you thinking at the time?*” and the youth appears confused or overwhelmed, the facilitator might rephrase it as, “*Can you help us understand what was going through your mind when it happened?*” This preserves the question’s intent while using more accessible language for the participant.

Facilitators play a critical role in holding the structure and emotional tone of the meeting. The following responsibilities support a respectful, balanced, and reflective dialogue among participants:

- As they guide the conversation, facilitators are expected to listen, validate emotions, and actively encourage deep reflection.
- Facilitators may invite participants to contribute new information or clarify earlier responses, while avoiding repetition or unnecessary expansion of others’ stories.
- Once everyone has responded to a set of questions and there is shared understanding, the facilitator moves to the next set of questions, following the established speaking order.
- If a participant becomes unclear or avoids answering, the facilitator may gently clarify the question or offer a respectful redirection to maintain the integrity of the discussion.

7.5 Facilitating the Meeting with Neutrality, Empathy, and Respect

The restorative meeting should be facilitated so that participants experience it as happening *with* them, rather than *to* them, as something collaborative, respectful, and empowering, rather than imposed or punitive. The facilitator guides the process while maintaining neutrality, respect, and a structured approach. This approach ensures that everyone, regardless of their role, can contribute in a balanced way. Here’s how the facilitator can guide the process effectively:

7.5.1 Setting the Tone and Intentions

The facilitator sets the tone for the restorative dialogue and agreement process, ensuring that all participants understand the purpose of the diversion meeting—to repair harm, take responsibility, and restore relationships. This is done by briefly reviewing the guiding principles of restorative justice, including:

- **Accountability.** The facilitator emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for one’s actions. This means acknowledging the harm caused, understanding its impact on others, and committing to steps that help repair that harm. Accountability is not about assigning blame but about recognizing each person’s role in moving toward healing.

- **Healing.** Healing is a central focus of the meeting process. The facilitator helps participants understand that restorative justice is more than addressing the incident. It's about supporting emotional and relational repair, assisting participants to move forward in a healthier, more connected way.
- **Empathy.** The facilitator encourages participants to listen deeply and understand one another's feelings and perspectives. Empathy helps create a space where everyone's experience is respected, making it possible to foster a sense of mutual understanding and compassion, which is essential for genuine healing.
- **Community Involvement.** The facilitator underscores that restorative justice concerns not only the individuals involved but also the larger community. Everyone present, including supporters and community members, plays a role in supporting accountability and healing. The community's collective involvement fosters a shared responsibility for repair and growth.
- **Intentions.** The facilitator explains the meeting's structure, including rules such as speaking one at a time, respecting others' perspectives, and listening actively. This ensures the meeting process is straightforward and everyone feels safe participating.

7.5.2 Managing Emotions and Tension

Restorative justice meetings can evoke strong emotions, particularly when discussing the harm caused to others. The facilitator's role is to create a safe environment where participants can express these feelings without feeling overwhelmed or unsafe.

If emotions start to run high, the facilitator may pause the meeting to acknowledge the tension and invite participants to take a moment to breathe or reflect. This may include checking in with those affected or allowing a participant to step outside for a break if necessary.

Additionally, the facilitator is responsible for managing conflicts as they arise, ensuring that the meeting remains respectful and that the dialogue is constructive. They can suggest alternative communication methods, such as taking a break or encouraging participants to reframe their statements more positively if needed.

7.5.3 Ensuring Balance and Equity

The facilitator's role includes ensuring that all participants have an equal opportunity to speak. This is particularly important in meetings where power imbalances can arise. The facilitator will ensure that those most affected by the incident, such as those who have been harmed, are given space to share their perspective. Similarly, they'll ensure the youth and their family have ample time to speak and reflect on the process.

Note: The order of who speaks first—those harmed or the youth responsible—should have been predetermined during intake. For more details, refer to [Section 5.13](#), see *Speaking Order*.

If this task was not accomplished, the facilitator *must* do it *before* the Youth Diversion Team meeting starts. If present at the Youth Diversion Team meeting, the facilitator will ask the individual(s) harmed if they prefer to speak first or hear from the youth before sharing their perspective.

If necessary, the facilitator will ensure the group remains focused on the restorative process rather than letting the conversation devolve into blame or legal matters.

The facilitator guides the meeting structure while remaining flexible and responsive to participants' needs. Meetings will not always unfold precisely as planned; the facilitator must adapt to differences in conditions, emotional dynamics, or participant needs without losing sight of the meeting's objectives.

Part 8 explains the process of developing the Restorative Agreement, which is the outcome of the restorative dialogue during the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting. It bridges the acknowledgment of harm and taking action to make things right. Rooted in the principles of restorative justice and informed by trauma-aware practices, the agreement reflects the youth's active accountability and commitment to repair, learning, and reintegration.

Part 8. Developing the Restorative Agreement

Part 8 explains how to develop the Agreement, which results from the restorative dialogue during the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting. It outlines how the youth who caused harm will work actively and authentically to demonstrate accountability, repair harm, and move forward with personal growth. The Agreement must reflect restorative values, avoiding any drift toward punishment, blame, or legal arguments.

Developing this agreement emphasizes the core values of voice, mutual understanding, and shared responsibility. It allows the youth to take meaningful ownership of their actions in a developmentally appropriate and relational manner.

The agreement is not a contract imposed on the youth, but a collaborative plan created in consultation with those present. This includes the youth, their family, those who were harmed (if applicable), supporters for both parties (if applicable), and the Youth Diversion Team. If those harmed are not present, their input may be shared through other acceptable methods, such as written statements.

The format of restorative agreements may differ among diversion teams, but their core principles remain the same: the Agreement should be specific, achievable, and focused on accountability, healing, and growth. Diversion staff and volunteers are encouraged to utilize the SSMART goals framework to ensure that the agreement is measurable and aligns with the trauma-informed restorative values inherent in the Youth Diversion Team model.

Visual collaboration is *essential*. A whiteboard, flip chart, or other shared visual aid helps map the Agreement so everyone can see and contribute to its development. This supports transparency and encourages youth and others to engage deeply with accountability, repair, family and community restoration, and personal reintegration.

If needed, the facilitator will ensure that the group stays focused on the restorative process, redirecting conversations that veer toward blame, legal arguments, or punitive thinking.

Once the Agreement has been finalized, transfer the agreed-upon components onto a document, file the original printed copy in the case management file, and provide a printed copy to the family.

8.1 Foundational References for Developing the Restorative Agreement

Before reviewing the guidelines for developing the Restorative Agreement, readers should consult three earlier sections for background information:

- [Section 3.7: Distinguishing Restorative Practices and Intervention-Based Services](#)
- [Section 3.8: Requirements for Restorative Alignment in Agreements](#)

When developing SSMART goals, it is essential to ensure they align with core restorative principles. Goals should directly connect to the harm caused, promote active accountability, and support the youth's reintegration into the community. This alignment enhances the agreement's impact by making it meaningful, relevant, and consistent with restorative values.

8.2 Using the 4-Quadrant Agreement Process

The 4-Quadrant Agreement Process shapes the restorative agreement by using a structured set of guiding questions that center accountability and repair harm across four distinct yet interconnected domains: self, family, those directly harmed, and the broader community. Each quadrant fosters inclusive dialogue, surfaces diverse perspectives, and helps ensure the agreement reflects the full scope of the harm and its ripple effects.

The 4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions include:

1. ***How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?*** (This includes reflecting on how the situation has affected their goals, relationships, and sense of self, and what they can do to move forward. This is also the place to identify additional supports or services—such as counseling, mentoring, or skill-building programs—that could help the youth sustain positive behavior and avoid future harm.)
2. ***How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?*** (This focuses on understanding the harm from the point of view of those directly harmed and considering what steps the youth can take to acknowledge that harm and make amends.)
3. ***How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?*** (This looks at how the youth's family members may have been affected emotionally, socially, or even financially, and how those relationships can be repaired.)
4. ***How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?*** (This includes anyone indirectly impacted—like a school, neighborhood, or peer group—and explores ways the youth can contribute positively to those spaces again.)

During the intake process, the diversion staff introduced the Four-Quadrant Process Questions to the youth who caused harm and their family. The goal was not to make commitments but to encourage reflection and gather input. This initial discussion aimed to help the youth and their family understand the key areas that require repair. Doing so enables the youth to consider harm,

healing, and restoration relationally without feeling pressured to decide or agree on outcomes too soon.

While developing the restorative agreement, participants may encounter situations where the harm involved a financial loss. In some cases, direct restitution may be appropriate and feasible. In other cases, the youth may lack the financial means to repay the loss, or the harmed party may prefer a more meaningful or symbolic expression of accountability.

In restorative justice, financial repair is not limited to monetary repayment. Creative or non-monetary gestures of repair can demonstrate the youth's understanding of the harm and their commitment to making things right. These may include:

- Apology letters or verbal expressions of responsibility
- Creating something meaningful (e.g., a drawing, short video, poem, or handmade item)
- Service-based contributions that benefit the person harmed, the community, or an issue related to the incident
- Educational efforts, such as giving a brief presentation or creating a flyer, that reflect learning and accountability

The guiding principle is that these actions should emerge from the restorative dialogue, be developmentally appropriate, and reflect the youth's sincere effort to address the harm in a way that matters to those impacted. Even when financial restitution is possible, combining it with a symbolic gesture can deepen the sense of accountability and relational repair.

Decisions are made collaboratively during the Restorative Meeting. During the meeting, the facilitator uses the four key questions to guide the dialogue, ensuring that all participants can share their ideas and concerns thoughtfully and inclusively. Responses are recorded on a flip chart or whiteboard to ensure transparency and facilitate the group's real-time visual co-creation of the restorative agreement.

At the Restorative Meeting, those present can generate a variety of options in each quadrant, and then the youth, family, and Team will collaborate to decide which ones to proceed with. The template is provided in [*Appendix E: The 4-Quadrant Agreement and Questions Template*](#). Table 8.1 presents examples of various action items that can be included in an agreement.

Table 8.1: 4-Quadrant Process Questions with Example Action Items

<p><i>How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse assessment, evaluation, treatment • Behavioral health assessments, evaluation, treatment • Engagement in a positive youth development activity • Mentoring • Educational support or tutoring • Employment Services • Journal prompts 	<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in a harm circle and responding to additional obligations from it • Apology letter or video • Restitution • Mediation • Fundraising/Donation in the family's name to a suitable charity of the those harmed choose • Other reasonable requests of those harmed or their family
<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apology letter or video • Working off damages or lost employment time through chores or special projects • Addressing the concerns of the parent. This could include youth participating in support services to work on the root cause of the behavior. • Establish check-ins to gauge behavior improvement at home • Spending intentional time together as a family • Earning back trust from the family through specific tasks 	<p><i>How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation • Completing appropriate and meaningful community service hours (and, whenever possible, service that relates back to the initial reason for referral) • Presentation on an appropriate topic related to the offense • Completion of a report on an appropriate topic related to the offense through the use of research and/or meetings • Mentoring or coaching younger peers • Getting involved with their Youth Service Bureau

8.3 Developing SSMART Goals

To uphold the integrity of the Youth Diversion Team model, facilitators must guide the agreement process with intention and clarity. Each action item developed through the 4-Quadrant Process should be restorative.

The SSMART framework—adapted by [Brummer and Thorsborne \(2020\)](#) from the traditional SMART goal model—provides critical structure to ensure each commitment is Specific, Strengths-based, Measurable, Achievable, Restorative, and Timely. This approach supports accountability while fostering personal growth and meaningful repair. By applying the SSMART framework, diversion staff and volunteers can ensure agreements reflect restorative values and allow for transparent tracking of progress and outcomes.

SSMART stands for:

- **Specific:** *Clearly define each action item.* What exactly must be done? How will it be achieved?

Rationale: This prevents vague or subjective statements, such as “be more respectful,” and prompts the group to co-create clear and constructive actions, such as “write a letter of apology to the teacher” or “rebuild trust with a sibling by planning and carrying out a joint activity.”
- **Strength-based:** *Focus on the youth’s talents, skills, interests, and strengths.* This is a critical conversation at the diversion staff intake (during intake and the restorative meeting) and the restorative meeting (volunteers).

Rationale: A youth interested in art may create a poster on conflict resolution instead of doing a generic service project. This promotes engagement and growth, ensuring the Agreement uplifts rather than punishes.
- **Measurable:** *Identify what evidence will show the youth has fulfilled their commitments.* How will completion be recognized or confirmed? Who will monitor progress?

Rationale: Rather than simply assigning “community service,” the Agreement might include “complete 10 hours of community service at the food bank, interview the supervisor from the food bank, and obtain a signed log,” providing a transparent way to confirm follow-through and support accountability.
- **Achievable:** *Ensure action steps are realistic, developmentally-appropriate, and supported with necessary resources and encouragement.*

Rationale: If a youth lacks reliable transportation or needs support managing anxiety, the plan may include assistance with arranging transportation or completing tasks at home or school instead. This aligns with trauma-informed practices and sets the youth up for success.

- **Restorative:** *Ask at every step: Does this promote healing, accountability, and harm repair, or does it veer toward punishment or suffering?*

Rationale: Instead of assigning rote tasks, the team considers how the youth’s actions can acknowledge harm, rebuild trust, and contribute positively. For instance, giving a presentation on healthy conflict at their youth center may help repair relationships while benefiting others.

- **Timely:** *Set a clear and reasonable timeframe for completing each action item.* This maintains momentum and keeps expectations transparent.

Rationale: Rather than an open-ended task list, each item includes a completion date (e.g., “by May 30”) to support closure and prevent the process from lingering in ways that may increase stress or disengagement. Dates are adjustable if it becomes apparent that more time may be needed and should be discussed with the youth and family.

8.4 Combining the 4-Quadrant Agreement Process with SSMART Goals

This example shows how the 4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions can be paired with SSMART goals to guide youth in taking meaningful steps toward repair and growth. These examples are generic and not based on a single incident. Instead, they are meant to illustrate how youth might take responsibility and restore relationships or trust in each area of harm. Refer to [*Appendix D: The Youth Diversion Team Meeting Script*](#) for guidance.

Begin with the Youth. The facilitator invites the youth who caused harm to begin the discussion, responding to prompts in the four quadrants. The facilitator supports the youth in identifying specific, meaningful action items using the SSMART goals framework (Specific, Strengths-based, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound).

Invite Parent/Guardian Input. Once the youth has shared their ideas, the facilitator invites the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to contribute. They may offer perspectives, add support strategies, or identify areas where the youth may need guidance or accountability.

Include Those Harmed and Their Supporters. If present, those harmed and their supporters are then allowed to respond. The facilitator ensures they feel safe and heard, and that their needs and suggestions for repair are considered respectfully.

Open the Floor to Additional Participants. After the core participants have spoken, the facilitator opens space for input from other attendees, such as community members, mentors, or professionals. Participants are encouraged to share only new or clarifying information to avoid repetition and maintain focus.

The facilitator guides the group through each quadrant one at a time. They monitor tone and content, ensuring the conversation stays aligned with restorative principles—centered on healing, relationship-building, accountability, and future repair rather than blame or punishment.

Throughout the process, the facilitator actively supports a respectful and balanced dialogue. They help participants focus on collaborative solutions and encourage all contributions to be future-oriented and constructive.

This tool ensures final agreements are balanced, meaningful, and rooted in restorative values. It prevents overreliance on external consequences by connecting all actions, like counseling or community service, to relationships, responsibility, and repair. The process enforces restorative accountability with intervention-based services.

The diversion process becomes more collaborative and developmentally appropriate. Agreements reflect the voices and needs of all participants and are more likely to lead to lasting change.

Diversion staff can guide this process by sharing sample responses for each quadrant if participants struggle to provide ideas.

It is important to note that some action items may serve multiple functions and align with more than one quadrant of the SSMART framework. For example, a youth-led community service project may simultaneously contribute to accountability (restoring trust or repairing the harm to person(s) harmed), strengthen personal development (Repair of harm to oneself), and promote connection with community resources (Repair of damage to broader community). Diversion staff should acknowledge and use this overlap to reinforce the youth's progress across multiple dimensions.

1. ***How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?***

This includes reflecting on how the incident has affected the youth's well-being, relationships, goals, or sense of identity, and what steps they can take to move forward constructively.

All commitments to repair harm to oneself must ensure that proposed actions are grounded as SSMART goals to support the youth's personal growth and accountability.

SMART Goal: Repairing harm to self, using *mentoring* as the accountability action item.

“I will meet with a mentor through the local Youth Services Bureau once a week for at least 60 minutes, over the next 8 weeks, to build decision-making and communication skills that support my personal goals. I will track these sessions in a reflection journal and share one takeaway from each with my case manager. This will help me grow from my experience, stay focused on my goals, and have a trusted adult to talk to as I work to make better choices.”

Why is this goal SSMART? It is:

- **Specific:** Clearly states the who (mentor and youth), what (weekly meetings), where (through Youth Services Bureau), and why (to support growth).

- **Strengths-based:** Focuses on building decision-making and communication skills to support the youth's growth and personal goals.
- **Measurable:** 8 mentoring sessions tracked in a reflection journal; 1 takeaway shared with the case manager after each.
- **Achievable:** One hour per week is a realistic commitment, supported by an existing community resource (Youth Service Bureau).
- **Restorative:** This helps the youth reflect on their behavior, connect with a supportive adult, and grow from the experience, meaningfully addressing harm to self.
- **Time-bound:** The goal has an 8-week duration with weekly check-ins and clear expectations for documentation and follow-up.

2. ***How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?***

This focuses on acknowledging the experience of the person(s) harmed, identifying what accountability means from their perspective, and considering how amends can be made.

All commitments to repair harm in this quadrant must be clearly defined as SSMART goals that provide a transparent, respectful, and feasible path toward accountability and harm repair.

SSMART Goal: Restore the relationship or repair the harm to the person(s) directly affected using a *letter of apology* as the accountability action item.

“I will write a thoughtful letter of apology to the person harmed using the restorative principles I’ve learned through the diversion process, reflecting on the impact of my actions, with support from a case manager or trusted adult, within one week. The letter will include (1) an explicit acknowledgment of what happened, (2) an expression of empathy and understanding of how [name of person(s) harmed] was affected, and (3) a sincere statement of responsibility along with the specific actions I am taking to make things right. Before sharing, my case manager will review the letter to ensure it aligns with restorative principles.”

Why is this goal SSMART? It is:

- **Specific:** Writing a letter with three clearly defined components.
- **Strengths-based:** Builds on the youth's ability to reflect, empathize, and communicate responsibly with support.
- **Measurable:** Completion within one week, includes specific content criteria, and will be reviewed for alignment with restorative values.
- **Achievable:** Support is provided to help the youth complete the task.

- **Restorative:** Focuses on acknowledging harm, showing empathy, and taking responsibility.
- **Timely:** Set to be completed within one week.

3. How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?

This explores how family members may have been affected emotionally, socially, or even financially, and what the youth can do to rebuild trust and strengthen those relationships.

Action items identified in this quadrant must be clearly defined as SSMART goals, ensuring the youth and family understand how each step promotes repairing relationships within the home.

SSMART Goal: Restore the relationship and repair the harm to the parent(s)/guardian (s) by *participating in mentoring support services*, and work on the root cause of the behavior.

“To take responsibility for my actions and rebuild trust with my [parent(s)/guardian(s)], I will actively participate in mentoring once a week at the Youth Service Bureau for the next eight weeks, to work on the root causes of my behavior. I will arrive on time, participate respectfully, and reflect on my learning. With support from my case manager or trusted adult, I will also share progress with my [parent(s)/guardian(s)] through reflection sessions at least twice during this time, to show them I’m committed to making positive changes.”

Why is this goal SSMART? It is:

- **Specific:** It identifies the action (attending support services), purpose (addressing root causes), and expectations (attendance, participation, reflection sessions, and communication).
- **Strengths-based:** Focuses on the youth’s ability to grow, take responsibility, and rebuild trust.
- **Measurable:** Frequency (weekly for eight weeks) and progress check-ins with parents.
- **Achievable:** Includes adult support and reasonable time commitments.
- **Restorative:** Rebuilds relationships and addresses underlying needs, rather than just surface behaviors.
- **Timely:** Defined a timeframe of eight weeks, which includes two reflection sessions with parents/guardians.

4. How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?

This encourages reflection on how schools, neighborhoods, or peer groups may have been impacted, and how the youth can contribute positively to these settings again.

Each action item addressing community repair must be grounded in the SSMART framework to ensure clarity of purpose, accountability, and appropriate scope.

SSMART Goal: Repairing the harm to the broader community by *participating in community service*.

“To take responsibility for how my actions affected the community, I will complete 15 hours of community service within the next five weeks, with support from my case manager. Since my referral involved damage to public property, I will fulfill these hours by volunteering with the Parks and Recreation Department, assisting in the removal of graffiti and maintaining public spaces. As part of this commitment, I will participate in a brief interview with a department representative to learn more about the impact of my actions and gain a deeper understanding of how my service contributes to repairing harm. I will prepare a summary of my experience, connecting it to the restorative principles discussed during the Restorative Meeting, to share with my parent(s)/guardian(s) and case manager. Throughout this process, I will arrive on time, follow directions respectfully, and approach my work with care. My case manager will track my hours and meet with me weekly to support reflection on how this service helps rebuild trust and strengthen my connection to the community.”

Why is this goal SSMART? It is:

- **Specific:** Clearly defines the action (community service), purpose (repairing community harm), and expectations (interview, timeliness, behavior, relevance).
- **Strengths-based:** Focuses on the youth’s capacity to give back and contribute meaningfully.
- **Measurable:** Tracks (15) hours and progress over a defined period of five weeks.
- **Achievable:** This includes support and flexibility when choosing an appropriate service.
- **Restorative:** Connects the service to the harm caused and emphasizes making amends.
- **Timely:** Includes a defined deadline (five weeks) for completion.

8.5 Diversion Agreement Completed 4-Quadrant Template Examples

Tables 8.2a and 8.2b provide completed templates for Restorative Justice Diversion Agreements templates: one completed by the youth serving as the scribe and another where a staff person or volunteer from the Youth Diversion Team acts as the scribe. Appendix E contains a copy of the 4-Quadrant Agreement template.

Youth are encouraged to articulate their ideas in their own voice whenever developmentally appropriate. If the youth is unable to write their statement, a Youth Diversion Team staff

member or trained volunteer may scribe it. In such cases, the scribed version should accurately reflect the youth's intended commitments, using third-person or neutral language to ensure clarity, accountability, and alignment with restorative principles.

Table 8.2a: Agreement Prompts (Youth Scribed Version)

<p><i>How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?</i> “I will meet with a mentor through the local Youth Services Bureau once a week for at least 60 minutes, over the next 8 weeks, to build decision-making and communication skills that support my personal goals. I will track these sessions in a reflection journal and share one takeaway from each with my case manager. This will help me grow from my experience, stay focused on my goals, and have a trusted adult to talk to as I work to make better choices.”</p>	<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?</i> “I will write a thoughtful letter of apology to the person harmed using the restorative principles I’ve learned through the diversion process, reflecting on the impact of my actions, with support from a case manager or trusted adult, within one week. The letter will include (1) an explicit acknowledgment of what happened, (2) an expression of empathy and understanding of how [name of person(s) harmed] was affected, and (3) a sincere statement of responsibility along with the specific actions I am taking to make things right. Before sharing, my case manager will review the letter to ensure it aligns with restorative principles.”</p>
<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?</i> “To take responsibility for my actions and rebuild trust with my [parent(s)/guardian(s)], I will actively participate in mentoring once a week at the Youth Service Bureau for the next eight weeks, to work on the root causes of my behavior. I will arrive on time, participate respectfully, and reflect on my learning. With support from my case manager or trusted adult, I will also share progress with my [parent(s)/guardian(s)] through reflection sessions at least twice during this time, to show them I’m committed to making positive changes.”</p>	<p><i>How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?</i> “To take responsibility for how my actions affected the community, I will complete 15 hours of community service within the next five weeks, with support from my case manager. Since my referral involved damage to public property, I will fulfill these hours by volunteering with the Parks and Recreation Department, assisting in the removal of graffiti and maintaining public spaces. As part of this commitment, I will participate in a brief interview with a department representative to learn more about the impact of my actions and gain a deeper understanding of how my service contributes to repairing harm. I will prepare a summary of my experience, connecting it to the restorative principles discussed during the Restorative Meeting, to share with my parent(s)/guardian(s) and case manager. Throughout this process, I will arrive on time, follow directions respectfully, and approach my work with care. My case manager will track my hours and meet with me weekly to support reflection on how this service helps rebuild trust and strengthen my connection to the community.”</p>

Table 8.2b: Agreement Prompts (Staff Scribed Version)

<p><i>How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?</i> “[Youth’s name] will meet with a mentor through the local Youth Services Bureau once a week for at least 60 minutes over the next 8 weeks. The purpose of these sessions is to strengthen decision-making and communication skills that align with the [Name] personal goals. [Name] agrees to track these sessions in a reflection journal and will share one takeaway from each meeting with their case manager. This arrangement is intended to support the [Name] growth, help them stay focused on their goals, and ensure they have a trusted adult to talk to as they work toward making healthier choices.”</p>	<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?</i> “With support from a case manager or trusted adult, [Youth’s name] will write a thoughtful letter of apology to [name of person harmed] within one week, using the restorative principles introduced during the diversion process. The letter will include a clear acknowledgment of what occurred, an expression of empathy and understanding of how [name of person harmed] was affected, and a sincere acceptance of responsibility along with specific actions the [youth’s name] is taking to make things right. Before the letter is shared, the facilitator will review it to ensure it aligns with restorative values and principles.”</p>
<p><i>How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?</i> “To take responsibility for their actions and begin rebuilding trust with their parent(s) or guardian(s), [youth’s name] will actively participate in mentoring once a week for the next eight weeks to address the underlying causes of their behavior. [Youth’s name] will arrive on time, engage respectfully, and reflect on what they are learning throughout the process. With support from a case manager or trusted adult, [youth’s name] will also share their progress with their parent(s) or guardian(s) through reflections sessions at least twice during this period to demonstrate a genuine commitment to making positive changes.”</p>	<p><i>How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?</i> “To take responsibility for how their actions affected the community, [youth’s name] will complete 15 hours of community service within the next five weeks, with guidance and support from their case manager. Because the referral involved damage to public property, [youth’s name] will fulfill their hours by volunteering with the Parks and Recreation Department, assisting in graffiti removal and the upkeep of public spaces. As part of this commitment, [youth’s name] will participate in a brief interview with a department representative to learn more about the impact of their actions and gain a deeper understanding of how their service contributes to repairing harm. [Youth’s name] will prepare a summary of their experience, connecting it to the restorative principles discussed during the Restorative Meeting, to share with their parent(s)/guardian(s) and case manager. [Youth’s name] will arrive on time, follow instructions respectfully, and take care in the work performed. Their case manager will help monitor the completion of service hours, and</p>

	<i>[youth's name] will meet weekly to reflect on how this service contributes to repairing harm and rebuilding trust with the broader community."</i>
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8.6 Establishing Follow-Up: Maintaining Accountability and Support

As the SSMART goals in the Agreement are developed, participants must collaboratively determine a realistic timeline for completing each action item and establish expectations for follow-up meetings and check-ins. These follow-ups help ensure the youth is supported, progress is tracked, and any emerging challenges are addressed promptly and collaboratively. For additional guidance, see [*Section 9.1: Case Management Sessions and Follow-up Monitoring*](#).

The frequency and format of these check-ins should reflect the complexity of the Agreement and the needs of the youth. For example, a youth with multiple commitments or higher support needs may benefit from biweekly check-ins, while others may only require one or two follow-ups. These check-ins may be formal Youth Diversion Team meetings or informal conversations facilitated by diversion staff.

Setting this structure during the initial meeting reinforces shared accountability and communicates the team's continued investment in the youth's growth and successful reintegration. Framing follow-up as a supportive and reflective process, rather than as surveillance or punishment, helps the youth feel encouraged and empowered. It provides space to celebrate progress, reflect on obstacles, and make thoughtful adjustments to the plan as needed.

Part 9. Post-Diversion Meeting Administrative Duties

Part 9 outlines the essential processes of case management, follow-up monitoring, and case closure within the Youth Diversion Team model. These procedures ensure the restorative plan remains active and meaningful beyond the initial meeting, supporting youth while consistently and compassionately holding them accountable.

While the Youth Diversion Team meeting establishes a foundational agreement and identifies initial goals, the work of restoration and growth continues afterward through individualized follow-up and structured support. Diversion staff play a critical role in guiding youth through the implementation of their plan, tracking progress, addressing emerging challenges, and adapting as needed, while centering on the principles of accountability, empathy, and sustained connection.

In a study conducted in 2024 on the Youth Diversion Team process and its limited outcome evaluation, researchers found that early engagement with families during the intake process, clear communication with parents, and individual case management sessions with the youth are crucial for building the relationships needed for a successful diversion experience and meaningful case resolution.

9.1 Case Management Sessions and Follow-up Monitoring

Case management sessions and follow-up monitoring are crucial for supporting youth and holding them accountable as they work through the terms of their agreement. This ongoing process allows diversion staff to keep the youth engaged and responsive throughout the diversion process. Regular follow-ups enable the team to assess progress, identify emerging barriers, and adjust plans to ensure compliance with the Agreement.

Diversion staff are responsible for tracking the youth's progress and reporting outcomes to relevant stakeholders. When significant problems or concerns arise during the follow-up period, the Youth Diversion Team may need to decide if modifications to the Agreement or a formal follow-up meeting are necessary.

9.1.1 Methods of Contact. Follow-up may be conducted in person, by phone, text, or email, depending on what is most appropriate for the youth and family and what is feasible for staff.

9.1.2 Timeline and Frequency. The Agreement must include a follow-up schedule with the Youth Diversion Team or diversion staff that reflects the level of support the youth is expected to need. This must be built into each SSMART goal. For instance, youth with multiple commitments or higher support needs may require more frequent check-ins. For additional information, please refer to [Section 8.6 Establishing Follow-Up: Maintaining Accountability and Support.](#)

Additional case management and follow-ups may be scheduled upon the family's request or if any concerns arise during the implementation of the Agreement. Regularly scheduled check-ins will continue after the required tasks are completed and remain in place until the case is formally closed.

Even when no concerns are present, a *courtesy* call or letter is considered a trauma-informed and restorative approach. It demonstrates care, respect, and ongoing availability. This communicates to the youth and family that the Diversion Team remains supportive should they need assistance.

9.1.3 Topics to Address. During follow-up contacts, examples the case manager or designee may need to address include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring the youth is complying with the conditions of the agreement.
- Helping access recommended services or complete the tasks listed in the agreement.
- Monitoring the youth's school attendance, discipline, and academic performance.
- Monitoring the youth's conduct in the community.
- Following up with other service providers and supports engaged with the family or named in the agreement.
- Acknowledging the youth and family's progress, supporting them, and continuing to encourage them.

9.1.4 Documentation Requirements. Diversion staff must document all follow-up contacts, updates, and actions, including the date and method used. Progress should be logged and updated regularly. For notetaking and file maintenance expectations, see [*Section 10.2: Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process*](#). Possible documentation may include, but is not limited to:

- Criteria for modifying an Agreement post-meeting.
- Process for gaining consent from stakeholders (especially harmed parties, if involved)
- Documentation of changes and rationale.
- When and how adjustments are made.
- Lack of engagement.
- Withdrawal of their consent to participate.

9.1.5 Scheduling Additional Meetings. If a follow-up meeting is needed, diversion staff should work with families and team members to schedule it as soon as possible. Families may still meet with available team members when it is not feasible for the entire Youth Diversion Team to meet simultaneously. Input from absent members can be gathered through secure methods or approved encrypted messaging platforms. All perspectives should be compiled and considered collectively to guide follow-up decisions and uphold the integrity of the process. The decision to schedule a meeting may be based on various factors, including but not limited to:

- Barriers to completion.
- Lack of follow-through.
- Request from the youth or family.
- Concerns raised by service providers.

A Youth Diversion Team meeting should not occur without the presence of the youth who caused harm and their parent or legal guardian. Their participation is essential to ensure accountability, support, and alignment with restorative principles. Possible reasons for this follow-up meeting include, but are not limited to:

- Extensive changes in the recommendation plan.
- An extension of time for completion based on extenuating circumstances.
- Additional assistance or resources offered.
- Discussion with the family that failure to comply could result in referral to the referring agency for possible court involvement.
- Early case closure resulting from new legal violations, lack of compliance, or other exceptional circumstances (e.g., family illness, relocation).

9.2 Balancing Support and Accountability When Barriers Arise

Youth and families often face real-life challenges, such as housing instability, health concerns, and limited financial resources, which can make it challenging for them to complete the tasks outlined in the Agreement.

Ideally, if these concerns were identified during the intake process or the Youth Diversion Team meeting, they should guide the development of SSMART goals. This approach ensures that action items are realistic and do not impose additional strain on the youth or their family (refer to [*Section 5.8: Assessment of Strengths, Challenges, and Family Dynamics*](#)). However, in cases involving financial loss, individuals who have experienced harm retain the right to pursue restitution through civil legal channels, independent of the restorative diversion process.

If challenges arise after the meeting, diversion staff should respond empathetically and offer support while continuing to hold the youth accountable for their actions. These barriers should be acknowledged and addressed, but do not excuse the youth from fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in the Agreement.

Staff should document the situation when a youth is sincerely trying but struggling. When appropriate, aspects of the Agreement—such as the timeline or service access methods—may be adjusted without compromising the plan’s core expectations. Staff should continue to monitor progress and offer support, maintaining accountability and assistance as two distinct but complementary efforts.

9.3 Case Closure

This section outlines the procedures for closing both successful and unsuccessful cases. Cases must remain open for at least six months starting from the intake process. Please refer to [*Section 5.4: Explaining the 6-Month Timeline and Ongoing Case Management*](#).

9.3.1 Case Closing Meeting. Whenever possible—especially in cases of successful completion—a final meeting should be held with the whole Youth Diversion Team to acknowledge the youth’s efforts, reflect on the process, and formally close the case in a supportive and restorative manner. When the whole team cannot be convened, a closing meeting may still occur with the case manager and a smaller group of team members. If a meeting is not feasible, alternative closure procedures may be used. For example, a written letter can be sent to inform the youth and their family of the successful completion and closure of the case, *but only as a last resort*. For youth and families who have disengaged or cannot be reached despite reasonable efforts, diversion staff may proceed with administrative closure, document the outcome accordingly, and send a letter to the parent or legal guardian and the youth who caused harm. Diversion staff should also send the unsuccessful case back to the referring agency.

9.3.2 Successful Cases. If the case is *successful*:

The case may be formally closed when the youth completes their Diversion Agreement—by meeting the outlined expectations, demonstrating accountability, participating in the restorative process, and completing the 6 months from the date of intake.

- Contact the parent or guardian and the youth to inform them of the successful completion of the diversion plan and schedule the case closing meeting. If an in-person meeting is *absolutely* not possible, offer the option of a phone conversation, either immediately or at a mutually agreed-upon time. However, the expectation is to have an in-person meeting. During this meeting, the Youth Diversion Team should acknowledge the youth and family's success and offer continued support if needed.
- Emphasize the strengths that contributed to the successful completion. Celebrate their efforts and encourage continued growth. Ask the youth and their family to identify and reflect on what made their progress possible, such as personal resilience, family support, or effective service engagement. This intentional reflection strengthens neural pathways associated with motivation, resilience, and self-regulation, helping the brain recognize and replicate successful strategies. It also integrates these positive experiences into the youth's developing identity, increasing the likelihood of lasting behavioral change.
- Encourage continued participation in programs, services, or relationships supporting ongoing progress. Provide referrals or follow-up support when appropriate.
- Support the repair of remaining relationships. The Youth Diversion Team can assist in efforts to mend relationships with police, school staff, or others affected by the original behavior or incident.
- Collect feedback through anonymous exit survey (see [Appendix J: Youth Exit Survey](#) and [Appendix K: Parent Exit Survey](#)). If email addresses were collected at intake, request that the youth and their parent or guardian complete the exit surveys. Surveys should be completed onsite immediately after the case closing meeting to ensure completion. Email them the online link to complete the anonymous survey using their mobile device. You can also utilize an iPad or similar technology to have the youth and family complete the exit questionnaire on-site at the end of their meeting. If no meeting occurs, mail a paper survey with a prepaid return envelope or email a survey link. Be sure to preserve anonymity when collecting responses. If a paper copy is obtained, diversion staff will need to enter the results into the appropriate system.
- Notify the referring agency of the successful case closure and document any relevant follow-up offers made to the youth and family.
- Send a follow-up letter to the youth and their family, regardless of whether the closing meeting was held in person or by phone. This letter should be sent *within one week of case closure* and should acknowledge the successful completion of the diversion plan,

highlight the youth's strengths and achievements, and offer continued access to supportive resources through the Youth Diversion Team or Youth Service Bureau.

- The method of closure—whether through a team meeting or administrative process—must be documented in the case file, along with the rationale for determining successful completion.

9.3.3 Unsuccessful Cases. If the case is *unsuccessful*:

- The Youth Diversion Team should review the case documentation to understand why the diversion plan was unsuccessful. Identify any patterns, obstacles, or insights that may help to understand the factors that led to the unsuccessful outcome.
- Contact the parent or guardian and the youth to inform them of the diversion plan's unsuccessful completion, the reasons why, and schedule the case closing meeting. If an in-person meeting is not possible, offer the option of a phone conversation, either immediately or at a mutually agreed-upon time. If the youth and/or family have disengaged and are not responding to communication attempts, a letter should be sent to inform them of the unsuccessful outcome. This letter should explain the reason for this result and outline the next steps and available support options.
- If the youth and family reengage, explain the reason for the unsuccessful outcome and the possible next steps they might expect. Use this communication as a continued opportunity to support accountability and repair relationships.
- In your communications, make it clear that, although the diversion process was not completed, the Youth Diversion Team and the Youth Service Bureau are still available for support. They can also help connect the youth and their families to relevant services outside the formal diversion process.
- Encourage the youth and their parent or guardian to complete an anonymous exit survey (see [Appendix J: Youth Exit Survey](#) and [Appendix K: Parent Exit Survey](#)). This gives them a voice and offers valuable feedback for improving the program, identifying what might have led to the unsuccessful outcome, and understanding why they disengaged.
- To help ensure completion, surveys should be completed onsite immediately after the case closing meeting. Email them the online link to complete the anonymous survey using their mobile device. If no meeting occurs, mail a paper survey with a prepaid return envelope or email a survey link. Be sure to preserve anonymity when collecting responses. If a paper copy is obtained, diversion staff will need to enter the results into the appropriate system.
- The initial case materials, including any additional documentation created or collected by the Youth Diversion Team, should be maintained as part of the case file.

- In the memo to the referring agency, note that the diversion process was attempted but unsuccessful, and the reasons for this outcome (refer to [*Section 10.2: Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process*](#)).

If the court was not the initial referral, the referring agency can decide whether to refer the case to the Juvenile Court. In making this decision, the agency may consider the following factors:

- The severity of the offense
- The youth's role in the offense
- The amount of time that has passed since the offense occurred
- Consider what was accomplished through the Youth Diversion Team process, such as increased awareness, partial goal progress, or improved communication
- The potential benefits of referring the case to court
- The method of closure—whether through a team meeting or administrative process—must be documented in the case file, along with the rationale for determining the unsuccessful completion.

9.4 Determining Successful Completion

Successful completion is determined based on whether the youth who caused harm has meaningfully fulfilled the terms outlined in their Agreement, with particular emphasis on the activities related to the four-quadrants in the Restorative Agreement: Repairing harm to the self, those directly harmed, the family, and the broader community.

Completion may include:

- Full completion of tasks within all four quadrants; or
- Substantial completion of most core activities, with reasonable alternative efforts made when full completion is impossible (e.g., if a service was unavailable, a similar restorative or skill-building task may have been completed instead).

Other referrals or recommendations that fall outside the four quadrants—such as optional therapeutic services or community programs not tied to the restorative agreement—should not be used to determine successful completion.

Diversion staff tracks progress through regular follow-ups, communication with service providers, and check-ins with the youth and their family. If the youth completes the agreement as described and no significant concerns remain, and it has been at least six months from intake, the case manager may determine the case is ready for closure.

9.5 Criteria for Distinguishing Non-Compliance from Good Faith Effort

The distinction between a youth who is making reasonable effort and struggling and one who is intentionally avoiding or refusing to participate is critical, but not always clear. Establishing fair and consistent criteria helps diversion staff respond appropriately and equitably.

If youth communicate challenges openly and respond to outreach, they may be making a reasonable faith effort. However, a youth may be considered non-compliant if they skip meetings or services without explaining, do not respond to multiple outreach attempts, or show no effort or interest in fulfilling the Agreement, even when offered support.

In cases where the youth is willing to engage with the Agreement, even if inconsistently, diversion staff should use regular follow-ups to determine the reasons for the inconsistency. These check-ins allow the team to assess progress, identify emerging barriers, and make necessary adjustments to support the youth in meeting the terms of the Agreement.

In cases where a youth shows no effort to comply with the Agreement or disengages entirely, staff must maintain detailed documentation of all outreach and engagement attempts (see [*Section 10.2: Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process*](#) for guidance). One final contact attempt should be made—this may be through a phone call, text message, written letter, or home visit. If the youth fails to re-engage, staff should consult with the Youth Diversion Team and proceed with administrative closure if deemed appropriate. The referring agency must be notified of the outcome, and the case documentation should clearly explain the rationale for the closure.

9.6 Case File Closure & Internal Record Keeping

This section outlines the final steps to close a case, ensuring all documentation is complete, accurate, and stored appropriately. It helps maintain consistent records and supports future reference or follow-up when needed.

- Confirm all case file documents are complete and accurate (e.g., Agreement, follow-up notes, communications)
- Enter the final status into the case management system.
- Mark the case as closed in physical or digital records.
- Archive all materials per confidentiality and retention policy.
- Note if any follow-up support referrals were made beyond closure.

9.7 Stakeholder Feedback

Collecting feedback from youth, families, harmed parties, and volunteers offers valuable insight for improving the program. This step strengthens restorative practices and supports accountability to the community.

- Gathering feedback from youth, family, the harmed party, and volunteers using survey methods or interviews

- Use of insights for program improvement
- Use of feedback to improve the program and future meetings.

9.8 Staff and Volunteer Debrief and Reflection

Debriefing after complex or emotionally intense cases promotes staff and volunteer wellness and continuous learning. It enables the team to reflect on challenges, celebrate successes, and refine future practices.

- Encourage short team debriefs for complex cases
- Provide team reflection for complex or high-impact cases
- Offer emotional check-in for staff and volunteer well-being
- Provide opportunities to identify lessons learned

9.9 Post-Meeting and Case Closure Checklist

The [Post-Meeting and Case Closure Checklist](#) ensures all necessary steps are completed when closing a youth diversion case. It promotes consistency, accountability, accurate documentation, smooth transitions for the youth responsible, and supports reflective practice and data readiness.

Part 10. Case Management, Legal Distinctions, and Ethical Protocols

Part 10 of this manual outlines the key protocols for case management, legal safeguards, and ethical practices. It equips diversion staff to handle each case with care and consistency, grounded in trauma-informed and restorative practice principles. These protocols emphasize accurate documentation, informed consent, and protecting participants' rights and confidentiality—critical elements in building trust and supporting youth through a process that prioritizes healing over punishment.

Documentation of the Youth Diversion Team process begins with a referral. Careful and consistent documentation ensures transparency, program accountability, and continuity in practice. Proper case file management helps maintain accurate, current, and easily accessible records, enabling staff to make informed decisions while upholding the integrity of the process.

Understanding the legal distinctions and the voluntary nature of program participation is essential. Informing youth and their families about their rights and the implications of their involvement promotes fairness and reinforces the non-punitive nature of restorative diversion.

Confidentiality is another cornerstone of trauma-informed and restorative work. Protecting sensitive information shared during the program fosters psychological safety and trust among all participants, while also meeting legal and ethical standards.

Attention is given to waivers of rights and releases of information. All parties must understand how their data may be used, shared, or withheld, and that they have a genuine choice to participate in restorative processes.

Finally, this section addresses conflict of interest protocols, which help maintain fairness and integrity in the Youth Diversion Team process. Clear guidelines for identifying and managing conflicts of interest ensure that all decisions reflect the best interests of the youth, those who have been harmed, and the broader community.

These components establish a foundation for ethical, legally compliant, and relationship-centered case management. They ensure that participants experience a safe, transparent, and supportive diversion process that aligns with the core values of restorative justice and trauma-informed practice.

10.1 Data Collection Protocols

Data collection is essential to demonstrating the effectiveness of the Youth Diversion Team process and securing ongoing program funding. State agencies, the Legislature, and private funders rely on evidence that the process yields positive outcomes for youth, families, and communities.

The list of required data points (see below) is designed to help diversion staff develop a comprehensive understanding of each youth's background, relevant history, the incident that led to referral, and the outcomes of their participation in the process. Staff may also use this data internally to support sound decision-making in the best interest of the youth, their family, and those harmed.

On a statewide level, de-identified, aggregated data enables state agencies, funders, and other partners to assess overall impact, identify areas of improvement, and support diversion programs and their staff. Maintaining complete and accurate records is essential to demonstrating whether the YDT process is achieving meaningful and measurable outcomes for youth.

Because families are central to the Youth Diversion Team process, transparency around data use is essential. Data collection and reporting requirements must be explained clearly to families during the intake meeting. Staff should note on the YDT intake paperwork that:

- Data is collected for state and funder reporting purposes.
- Information is aggregated and de-identified before use in reports.
- No individually identifiable information will be shared outside the organization.

All data should be entered into the DCF-approved data collection system, which must support:

- Entry of standardized case-level data using drop-down options provided by the Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA).
- Collection of post-case data through the Youth and Parent/Guardian Closeout Questionnaires.

The CYSA Data Subcommittee is developing a complete list of drop-down options for applicable data fields. For all data points with drop-downs, two fallback options will be available:

- Client Would Not Report – indicates the youth or parent was asked but declined to respond.
- Staff Member Did Not Ask – indicates the youth or parent was not asked the question.

Individual funders or local partnerships may set additional data or reporting requirements.

Note: As of the date of the most recent revision of this manual (see [Edit and Version History](#)), the full data collection protocols and final dropdown lists are still in development. Categories not yet finalized are marked with an asterisk (*).

Data collected through the referral process or during intake:

- Date of Incident
- Date of Referral
- Referral Source (Police, Juvenile Court, or School)
- Reason for Referral (Arrestable Offenses)
- Date of Intake
- Name of Youth
- Reason Case Not Accepted (utilize current DCF list- expand to include “No-Release Signature Not Obtained”)
- Youth/Family Engaged in Process*
- Pronouns*
- Date of Birth
- Gender (utilize current DCF list)
- Ethnicity (utilize current DCF list)
- Race (utilize current DCF list)
- Language Information*
- Family Constellation (utilize current DCF list)
- Housing Status (utilize current DCF list)
- Special Education Information* (utilize current DCF list as a starting point- expand options to include things other than IEP status)
- Risk Factors and Relevant History*
 - Experienced Trauma (could include abuse, neglect, violence)
 - School/Community Discipline (could include fighting, illegal activity)
 - Experienced Instability (could include food, housing, transportation)
 - Eating/Body Image Disorders (could include anorexia, body image issues)
 - Suicidal Thoughts/Actions (could include planning or inflicting self-harm)

- Mental Health Issues (could include anxiety, depression)
- Family Issues (could include death, incarceration, separation)
- Discrimination (could include bullying, hate crimes)
- Substance Use (could include drugs, alcohol, vaping)

Data collected during the YDT meeting:

- Date of YDT Meeting
- Format of YDT Meeting
- Youth in Attendance (*Yes, No*)
- Services and/or Agreement Needed (*Yes, No*)
- Services Recommended Outside of Agreement (*Yes, No*)
- YDT Agreement Components by Quadrant*
 - Repairing harm to self
 - Substance Abuse Assessment, Evaluation, and/or Treatment
 - Behavioral Health Assessment, Evaluation, and/or Treatment
 - Positive Youth Development Activities
 - Mentoring
 - Educational Support
 - Educational Tutoring
 - Employment Services
 - Journal Prompts
 - Other
 - Repairing Harm to Person(s) Harmed/Victim(s)
 - Harm Circle
 - Apology Letter/Video
 - Non-monetary Restitution
 - Monetary Restitution
 - Mediation
 - Fundraising/Donation to Charity
 - Other

- Repairing Harm to Family
 - Apology Letter/Video
 - Work Off Damages
 - Addressing Parent Concerns
 - Establishing Check-Ins
 - Intentional Time Together
 - Other
- Repairing Harm to Community (Indirect Victim)
 - Mediation
 - Community Service
 - Presentation
 - Research/Report
 - Mentoring/Coaching Younger Peers
 - YSB Involvement
- **Other Data collected during the closeout meeting:**
 - Did Youth Complete Four Quadrant Agreement (*Yes, No, N/A*)
 - Date Youth Completed Four-Quadrant Agreement
 - Did Youth Complete Additional Recommendations (*Yes, No, N/A*)
 - Date Youth Completed Additional Recommendations (*if applicable*)
 - Date of Case Closeout (*must be at least 6 months after Intake Date*)
 - Did Youth Complete Exit Survey (*Yes, No*)
 - Did Youth Complete Ohio Scales (*Yes, No*)
 - Format of the Case Closeout Meeting*

10.2 Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process

Documentation of each case *begins* with the referral and continues throughout the youth's engagement with the diversion program. Accurate and thoughtful documentation is crucial for supporting a restorative and trauma-informed diversion process.

Diversion staff are encouraged to reflect on any systemic or relational barriers that may affect a youth or family's ability to engage—for example, limited access to reliable transportation, lack of internet or phone service, past negative experiences with schools or legal systems, language or

cultural differences, financial strain, or fear related to immigration status. These barriers may influence how and when participants respond, show up, or follow through on communication.

- Missed calls or unanswered messages may be due to phone service disruptions, not disinterest.
- A parent's delayed response might reflect work obligations, lack of childcare, or financial stress.
- A youth's silence or avoidance could stem from prior trauma or feeling unsafe in unfamiliar environments.
- A participant's mistrust might result from earlier experiences with racial profiling, surveillance, or discrimination.
- A family's reluctance to share information might be tied to stigma, fear of judgment, or uncertainty about how the process could affect them.

It is essential to document outreach efforts without making assumptions or passing judgment. Approach documentation with curiosity and care, recognizing that a participant's disengagement could reflect past trauma, systemic harm, or unmet needs rather than a sign of disinterest or defiance.

Diversion staff must maintain thorough documentation at every stage of the Youth Diversion Team process, particularly when a parent, legal guardian, or the youth who caused the harm:

- declines to participate in the Youth Diversion Team process,
- disengages at key stages (e.g., initial phone call, intake meeting, Restorative Meeting, or follow-up), or
- fails to respond to outreach attempts.

These circumstances must be documented if a case is returned to the referring agency.

Documentation efforts to engage the family must include:

- dates of attempted contact,
- the methods of communication used (e.g., phone, email, home visit), and
- any relevant circumstances or barriers encountered.

10.3 Developing the Case File

Diversion staff must create and maintain a case file *beginning* with the referral and continuing through case closure.

The information collected before the Youth Diversion Team meeting will be used to present the case to the entire team. Relevant information must be added to the case file after the meeting concludes and throughout the case's duration until it is closed.

The case presentation includes preparing an informative, cohesive, and concise package of materials with appropriate summaries of the gathered information, as described below. This “packet” should contain all the information required to support the team’s decision-making, excluding any materials or details irrelevant to the case.

The case file must include all available and pertinent information regarding the reason for referral, as well as relevant background information about the youth and their family. This includes and is not limited to:

- Collecting addresses and telephone numbers from all participants. Ensure you also gather email addresses from all participants so you can send them any pertinent communications or a link to complete an anonymous online exit questionnaire.
- A report of the incident or the statement of the reason for referral from the referring agency.
- The signed *Contract, Waiver of Rights, and Release of Information*.
- School records, including attendance, discipline, and academic performance.
- A summary of factors influencing the youth’s behavior (e.g., trauma history, learning differences, or family stressors).
- Information about current services currently used by the youth and their family.
- History of any current or past services or interventions received.
- Demographic information relevant to understanding the youth’s context and ensuring equitable responses (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, language, living arrangements).
- The results of any evidence-based screening tools to identify risk factors, service needs, and assets, such as the youth’s strengths, interests, support systems, or positive adult relationships.
- The completed Responsible Youth Questionnaire.
- Notes from the intake meeting, including how the youth and family expressed interest in participating in a restorative process and any concerns or needs they shared.
- Notes from the intake with those directly harmed.
- Prepared letters or statements submitted by supporters of the youth and those directly impacted.
- Any data or documentation specifically requested by the Department of Children and Families.

All materials should be compiled with sensitivity, avoiding pathologizing or labeling the youth. Diversion staff are encouraged to reflect on their assumptions as they document. The goal is to

understand the full context of the situation to support restorative, fair, and individualized responses that foster accountability, healing, and growth.

10.4 Legal Distinctions

During the intake, clarifying the distinctions between the Juvenile Court and the Youth Diversion Team process helps ensure the youth who caused harm and their family, as well as those directly harmed, are well-informed, understand the boundaries of confidentiality, and feel more confident participating in the process. The youth and a parent or legal guardian must sign the *Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information*. (See [Appendix A: Sample Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information](#)). See also [Section 5.5: Explaining Legal Distinctions, Confidentiality, and Voluntary Participation](#).

10.4.1 The Youth Diversion Team as an Alternative to Juvenile Court

The Youth Diversion Team process is intentionally designed as an alternative to the Juvenile Court system. While it offers the youth who caused harm a restorative path focused on accountability, healing, and support, it does not mirror traditional legal procedures or protections. Therefore, all parties must understand the legal limitations and distinctions of the Youth Diversion Team process before moving forward.

Unlike traditional legal proceedings, the Youth Diversion Team process:

- is not adversarial,
- does not involve prosecution or conviction, and
- cannot result in probation or incarceration.

Certain legal rights guaranteed in Juvenile Court—such as the right to remain silent, the right to legal representation, the right to a trial, and the right to confront witnesses—do not apply to the Youth Diversion Team process. These differences reflect the process’s restorative and voluntary nature. See [Section 5.5: Explaining Legal Distinctions, Confidentiality, and Voluntary Participation](#).

10.4.2 Disposition of Record

When the youth who caused harm completes all requirements of the Youth Diversion Team process, the case will not result in court adjudication. Although the record may remain in specific law enforcement databases, it will indicate that diversion was used, and the youth may truthfully report that they have never been convicted of a crime.

10.4.3 Legal Rights of Victims “Those Harmed” and Participation

The person (s) directly harmed have specific legal rights that are respected in the Youth Diversion Team process. In a traditional court process, they have the right to know the youth’s name and address if they decide to pursue a civil lawsuit.

The youth and their parent or legal guardian must agree to allow the Youth Diversion Team to share the youth’s identity and the outcome of the diversion process with the harmed party if requested. Individuals who have been directly harmed also have the right to participate in the Youth Diversion Team process.

The Youth Diversion Team intentionally creates a restorative and non-confrontational environment. The focus is on accountability, repair, and healing. Participation is not intended to replicate a courtroom experience. It is not an opportunity for cross-examination or confrontation. Instead, participants are invited to share how they have been affected and to contribute to shaping an agreement that fosters accountability and meaningful repair. Each voice is essential, not in opposition, but as part of a collective effort to support healing and restoration for all involved.

10.4.5 Participation of Attorneys

Lawyers may not serve in a representative capacity at the Youth Diversion Team process for either the youth, family, or those harmed. When a Youth Diversion Team member is an attorney, they participate as a neutral party, such as a community volunteer, professional team member, or observer, not as legal counsel for the youth or the harmed party.

10.5 Voluntary Participation

Participation in the Youth Diversion Team process must be entirely voluntary for all involved—this includes the youth who caused harm, their parent or guardian, and the person or people affected by the harm. Voluntary participation helps ensure that everyone engages authentically, respectfully, and grounded in the core values of restorative justice and trauma-informed practice.

Participants should be provided with clear and accessible information about the program’s goals, procedures, and expectations. They should be encouraged to ask questions and express any concerns so they can make informed, unpressured decisions about their involvement. This will support emotional safety and build trust from the outset.

Diversion staff and facilitators should remain mindful that for some participants, especially youth and those who have experienced harm, saying “yes” to participation may take time, and should never come from a place of coercion or pressure.

Refer to [*Section 5.6: Establishing Voluntary Participation—Parental Consent and Youth Assent*](#) for more detailed guidance on obtaining and documenting informed, voluntary agreement from youth and their families.

10.6 Verification of Waiver of Rights and Release of Information

No member of the Youth Diversion Team—whether staff or volunteers—may access arrest records or any case-related information without a signed Contract, Waiver of Rights, and Release of Information on file (see [*Appendix A: Sample Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information*](#)).

This waiver authorizes the diversion staff to access essential documents, such as police reports, school records, and information from school personnel or service providers supporting the youth outside school, and to share this information with the volunteers.

Upon receiving a referral, diversion staff must check whether the referring agency has obtained a signed waiver from the youth's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) with decision-making authority, and whether this waiver was included with the referral and any materials sent to the Youth Diversion Team. If the waiver is missing, the case cannot proceed until the necessary signatures are obtained. This step may be completed during the intake meeting if the youth and their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) mutually agree to participate.

10.7 Parent/Legal Guardian Marital Status and Custody Disclosure

As part of the intake process, diversion staff must confirm the youth's legal custody status. Diversion staff must ask the youth's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to disclose their marital status and current custody arrangement. In situations involving joint custody, both parents or all legal guardians with legal authority to make decisions on behalf of the youth must provide written consent before the case may proceed.

This information is collected solely to determine whether one or both legal custodians must provide informed consent and sign required waiver documents before the youth participates in the diversion process.

Diversion staff must ask:

- Are the youth's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) married, divorced, separated, or never married?
- Do the youth's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) share joint legal custody?
- Is there a legal document granting one parent or guardian sole legal custody or exclusive decision-making authority?

If joint legal custody exists, written consent must be obtained from both parents or guardians, unless one has sole legal custody as evidenced by formal legal documentation. If the legal custody status is unclear or in dispute, the case must not proceed until proper legal clarification and required signatures are obtained.

Diversion staff must document the custody status in the intake file and flag any cases requiring additional follow-up or signatures before case activation.

10.8 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a core value and vital component of the Youth Diversion Team process. It protects sensitive information, upholds the dignity of youth, families, and those directly harmed, fosters trust, and preserves the program's integrity.

Confidentiality must be maintained throughout the entire process and applies to all forms of communication, including verbal, written, and electronic. However, it is essential to understand that confidentiality is not absolute.

Diversion staff must clearly explain the purpose of confidentiality to all participants, along with its legal and ethical limitations. When a participant shares information that indicates a potential violation of the law or raises a mandatory reporting obligation, such as suspected abuse, neglect, or risks of harm to themselves or others, staff members are obligated to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Everyone participating at any point in the Youth Diversion Team process must sign a *Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement* (see [Appendix B](#)). This requirement applies to, but is not limited to:

- The youth who caused harm and their parent or legal guardian
- Individuals directly harmed by the youth's actions
- Youth Diversion Team staff and volunteers
- Police officers and school resource officers (if a member of the Youth Diversion Team)
- Supporters of the youth and those harmed
- Observers and guests

10.8.1 Securing Confidentiality

The youth who caused harm, their parent or legal guardian, and those directly harmed must sign the Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement during their respective intake meeting. Completing this step during intake ensures the agreement is included in the case file from the outset and eliminates the need to sign again at the Restorative Meeting. Then, before the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting begins, the facilitator will confirm that everyone present has signed the Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement. See [Appendix B](#).

10.8.2 Maintaining Confidentiality

Handling information with discretion and intention reflects our trauma-informed commitment to emotional safety and relational respect. Unauthorized sharing, even unintentionally, can cause real harm to the youth, their families, those directly impacted, and the broader community. By protecting confidentiality, we communicate that each participant's story belongs to them and their participation in this process is valued and safeguarded.

To protect the privacy of all participants and to honor the trust placed in the Youth Diversion Team process:

- Case files must *not* be electronically transmitted to Youth Diversion Team members.

- It is strongly recommended that a diversion staff member *present the case verbally* during the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting, using the file contents as a reference.
- If hard copies are distributed before or during the meeting, they must be collected, accounted for, and securely stored or appropriately destroyed at the end of the meeting.
- When not in use, all materials must be stored in a locked storage cabinet, accessible only to authorized personnel.
- Conversations about cases should occur only in private, secure settings—never in open areas, hallways, or shared spaces where they could be overheard.
- Team members must refrain from engaging in conversations about youth or cases outside of official meeting times, especially in informal or social settings.
- When engaging in meetings, members should ensure that their environment allows for confidential discussion (e.g., using headphones in virtual meetings, closing doors, or choosing a private location).

10.9 Conflict of Interest Considerations

When any Youth Diversion Team staff member or volunteer believes they may have a potential conflict of interest related to a youth who caused harm, their family, those harmed, or the incident under review, or becomes aware of a potential conflict involving a professional or community volunteer who may participate in the Youth Diversion Team Restorative Meeting, it is essential to address the concern as early as possible—ideally during or immediately after the intake meeting, but always before the Youth Diversion Team meeting for that case, when possible.

A youth or family member may raise a concern about someone’s presence based on a past relationship or interaction that feels uncomfortable or untrustworthy to them. These concerns must be taken seriously, even if the team member in question believes they can remain impartial. Trust in the process depends not only on fairness but on the shared perception of fairness.

Potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- Personal, family, or close social relationships with the youth or family.
- Personal, family, or close social relationships with the person(s) harmed.
- Prior involvement in the incident under review.
- Professional relationships that may impair impartiality (e.g., providing therapeutic services, previous school disciplinary actions)
- Any situation where a diversion staff person or volunteer could reasonably be questioned regarding their impartiality or objectivity. For example, a volunteer who publicly posted

opinions about the incident on social media or a staff member who previously advocated for a specific outcome in the case may be perceived as biased, even if unintentionally, by the youth, those harmed, or other participants.

Upon recognizing a possible conflict, the matter should be discussed confidentially to determine if the staff or volunteer should:

- Recuse themselves from participating in discussions and decision-making for that particular case.
- Remain involved only if, after a thoughtful and confidential discussion with *all* participants present, there is shared agreement that no substantial risk of bias or perceived unfairness exists, and that continued participation will support the safety, fairness, and integrity of the restorative process.

Before the meeting begins, the facilitator will check in with all participants to ensure they feel safe and comfortable with those present. If anyone has concerns about a volunteer's presence or past interactions that may pose a conflict of interest, they are encouraged to share these concerns at that time. Any issues raised will be addressed promptly to ensure a respectful and restorative environment for all involved before proceeding.

Decisions about conflict of interest must prioritize maintaining a fair, trustworthy, and trauma-informed process for all participants. If there is any doubt, erring on the side of caution by excusing the member helps protect the integrity of the process and fosters a sense of safety and fairness for the youth and family.

This practice also helps ensure that:

- Families can trust the impartiality of the process, increasing their willingness to engage openly.
- Youth feel they are being treated fairly and respectfully, which supports accountability and encourages meaningful participation.
- The integrity and credibility of the Youth Diversion Team and program are upheld within the community.

To maintain transparency and accountability in Youth Diversion Team operations, all conflict-of-interest discussions and outcomes should be documented briefly but appropriately, without including sensitive details.

Part 11. Program Visibility and Messaging

The purpose of Part 11 is to establish shared, foundational guidelines for messages that define the Youth Diversion Team's trauma-informed, restorative justice framework. This framework, along with the accompanying messages, serves as a guiding narrative for all communication and outreach efforts. It ensures consistency, accuracy, and alignment with the Youth Diversion Team's mission and values. Effective communication is foundational to the success and integrity of the Youth Diversion Team program.

Program *visibility* refers to how all stakeholders—including youth who have caused harm and their families, those who have been harmed, volunteers, referring agency personnel, and the general public—are informed about and understand the Youth Diversion Team's purpose, benefits, and potential outcomes. This visibility, sometimes referred to as *awareness* in evaluation contexts, is operationalized through how the program is introduced, described, and made accessible across multiple platforms and materials.

Clear, consistent messaging not only enhances the frequency and effectiveness of program utilization but also improves the quality of stakeholder engagement, the appropriateness of referrals, community trust levels, and the overall impact of the diversion process.

For the general public, visibility builds confidence in the program's transparency, community value, and commitment to prioritizing accountability and repair over punishment, especially for young people. A well-informed public can reduce participants' stigma, encourage community support, and increase volunteer engagement and long-term investment in restorative practices.

Diversion staff play a critical role in shaping the public narrative around the Youth Diversion Team. They are responsible for ensuring that all internal and external communications reflect the program's trauma-informed and restorative values, as well as its legal and ethical obligations. This includes messaging shared internally with team members, externally with referral sources and partners, and publicly through websites, social media, brochures, and other outreach materials.

Consistent, values-aligned messaging is essential for maintaining public trust, promoting appropriate and timely referrals, and helping communities understand how the Youth Diversion Team contributes to safety, healing, and meaningful accountability without relying on punitive systems.

11.1 Unified Awareness Messaging

A unified awareness message is a living tool that should evolve through community feedback, outcome evaluation, and culturally responsive practices. Grounding the Youth Diversion Team in consistent, transparent, and values-driven communication is crucial for increasing visibility, deepening impact, and fostering lasting community trust.

While Connecticut law does not currently prescribe the structure or operation of Youth Diversion Teams, state agency and legislative support for this model has been obtained. Some flexibility, however, is designed to support the development of programs that reflect each community's unique values, needs, and available resources. This local adaptability strengthens the program, but it does not alter the foundational restorative and trauma-informed standards outlined in this manual.

For this reason, all Youth Diversion Teams across the state are expected to adhere to a unified awareness message and shared core principles as found in this manual. Consistent public communication reinforces the legitimacy of the program, ensures clarity across systems and communities, and helps build a cohesive, credible statewide presence. Every team is part of a broader effort to make restorative diversion a trusted and accessible alternative to punitive responses for youth.

11.2 Implementation Guidelines for Diversion Staff

All communication must:

- Be accurate and transparent about the program's goals, processes, and outcomes.
- Use non-stigmatizing, developmentally appropriate, and person-first language.
- Avoid sharing confidential or identifying information about individual participants or cases.

To ensure consistent, effective messaging:

- Use the core messaging statement (see below) in all public-facing materials.
- Apply the core objectives and features when describing the program in meetings or interviews. See [*Section 1.6: Core Framework and Professional Standards*](#).
- Provide orientation and refresher training for staff and volunteers on how to clearly and confidently explain the Youth Diversion Team.
- Create and distribute customizable templates (e.g., emails, talking points, social media posts) that effectively embed this message.
- Ensure all communication uses restorative, person-first, and trauma-informed language (e.g., "youth who caused harm" instead of "offender").

11.3 Why Unified Messaging Matters

Inconsistent messaging can weaken engagement, lead to inappropriate referrals, and reduce public confidence. Unified messages enhance:

- **Clarity:** Everyone understands what the program is and isn't
- **Legitimacy:** Stakeholders recognize the program's ethical and evidence-based foundation
- **Access:** More youth and families are aware of and open to participation
- **Support:** Volunteers, partners, and funders are more likely to align with and promote the program

11.2 Core Messaging Philosophy and Public-Facing Language

All Youth Diversion Team communications—whether shared in person, online, in print, or through outreach materials—must reflect the program's trauma-informed, restorative foundation and uphold its legal, ethical, and relational responsibilities. This section presents core messaging examples that demonstrate a philosophy ensuring consistency, transparency, and community alignment across all teams statewide.

While each Youth Diversion Team reflects its community's unique values, needs, and resources, all teams must describe the program using a shared public-facing message grounded in the program's restorative justice framework.

These sections help clarify what the Youth Diversion Team is, how it operates, and what distinguishes it from punitive or traditional justice system responses. At the same time, local or regional languages may be tailored to reflect distinct community partnerships, but foundational messaging must remain intact.

11.2.1 Core Messaging Statement Examples. Includes a statewide general statement, a locally adaptable version, and a regionally based version, all rooted in the same restorative values.

General Statement Example.

The Youth Diversion Team offers a trauma-informed, restorative response to harm caused by youth between the ages of 10 and 17 who have been involved in an arrestable offense. The program prioritizes accountability, healing, and community safety, without relying on punishment or traditional justice system involvement. It creates a supportive, structured space where young people take responsibility for their actions and work to make things right.

The Youth Diversion Team process promotes truth-telling, repair, and personal growth by centering the needs of those who were harmed, those who caused harm, and the broader community. At its heart, the Youth Diversion Team believes that accountability isn't about punishment—it's about understanding the impact of harm and taking real steps to repair it.

While all Youth Diversion Teams adhere to core trauma-informed, restorative justice principles, each team reflects the values, needs, and resources of the community it serves. Local teams collaborate with law enforcement, school resource officers, Juvenile Court officials, and community-based professionals, including child welfare agencies and mental health providers.

Locally Adaptable Messaging Example.

In [Town/City Name], the Youth Diversion Team offers a trauma-informed, restorative response to harm caused by youth between the ages of 10 and 17 who have been involved in an arrestable offense. The program prioritizes accountability, healing, and community safety, without relying on punishment or traditional justice system involvement.

The Youth Diversion Team creates a supportive and structured space where young people take responsibility for their actions and work to make amends. The process promotes truth-telling, repair, and personal growth by centering the needs of those who were harmed, those who caused harm, and the broader community.

At its heart, the Youth Diversion Team believes that accountability isn't about punishment—it's about understanding the impact of harm and taking real steps to repair it.

In [Town/City Name], our Youth Diversion Team reflects our community's specific values, needs, and local partnerships. We collaborate with law enforcement, school resource officers, juvenile court officials, and community-based professionals, including child welfare agencies and mental health providers.

Regionally-Based Messaging Example.

The [Region Name] Youth Diversion Team provides a trauma-informed, restorative response to harm caused by youth between the ages of 10 and 17 who have been involved in an arrestable offense. The program prioritizes accountability, healing, and community safety, without relying on punishment or traditional justice system involvement.

It creates a supportive, structured space where young people take responsibility for their actions and work to make things right. The process promotes truth-telling, repair, and personal growth by centering the needs of those who were harmed, those who caused harm, and the broader community.

At its heart, the Youth Diversion Team believes that accountability isn't about punishment—it's about understanding the impact of harm and taking real steps to repair it.

The [Region Name] Youth Diversion Team brings together several towns with shared restorative values and distinct community needs. By pooling local resources and expertise, the regional model ensures all referred youth receive equitable, trauma-informed support.

11.2.2 What Is Trauma-Informed Restorative Practice? This section includes a concise dot-point explanation of the philosophy behind the Youth Diversion Team approach.

Trauma-informed restorative practice is an approach that:

- Recognizes the effects of trauma on everyone involved in a harmful incident.
- Creates safe spaces for open and respectful dialogue.
- Supports healing and accountability while avoiding re-traumatization.
- Empowers participants to collaborate in determining how to repair the harm done.

11.2.3 Core Objectives of the Youth Diversion Team. The guiding principles influence referral decisions, team structure, and measures of success.

Core objectives of the Youth Diversion Team include:

- Promote healing for all affected parties.
- Reduce recidivism by building skills and empathy in youth.
- Increase community trust in non-punitive justice alternatives.
- Address the root causes of harm and conflict.
- Reduce systemic inequities in the justice system.

11.2.4 Core Features of the Youth Diversion Team Approach. The essential elements that distinguish this model from punitive or generic diversion programs.

Core features of the Youth Diversion Team approach include:

- **Voluntary Participation:** Engagement in the process is not coerced and respects the autonomy of participants.
- **Facilitated Dialogue:** Trained facilitators guide conversations between harmed parties, responsible youth, and community members.
- **Individualized Agreements:** Outcomes are tailored to repair harm and support youth development.
- **Community Involvement:** Volunteers and community representatives play a key role.
- **Confidentiality and Safety:** All processes are designed to protect privacy and ensure emotional and physical safety.

11.3 Social Media Post Examples

Post 1 provides a more detailed explanation of the program's key features, while posts 2 and 3 serve as shorter, attention-grabbing introductions to the same ideas.

Post 1—General Awareness

Header: Youth Deserve a Chance to Repair Harm and Rebuild Trust

The Youth Diversion Team is a restorative justice program that offers youth a path toward accountability and healing, rather than punishment.

- Youth take responsibility in a supportive, non-punitive setting
- Everyone impacted by harm has a voice
- Volunteers help shape the outcomes

Why It Matters: Youth who participate in diversion are less likely to reoffend and more likely to thrive.

For more information, please visit [Website] or contact us at [Contact Info].

#RestorativeJustice #YouthDiversion #CommunityHealing

Post 2—General Awareness

Caption: The Youth Diversion Team helps young people take responsibility for harm *without* pushing them deeper into the justice system.

Accountability. Healing. Growth.

#RestorativeJustice #YouthDiversion #CommunityHealing

Post 3—Volunteer Call

Caption: Want to make a difference in a young person's life?

Join the YDT as a community volunteer and help guide restorative conversations that rebuild trust.

#VolunteerOpportunity #RestorativeJustice #RestorativePractices

11.4 Youth Diversion Team – Print or Website Content

Homepage / Welcome

Tag Line: Real Accountability. Real Repair. Real Second Chances.

The Youth Diversion Team offers a different path for youth who have caused harm—one rooted in accountability, healing, and repair, rather than punishment.

If your child, student, or someone you care about is involved in an arrestable offense, we support meaningful responsibility and healing for everyone affected—youth, families, those directly harmed, and the community.

About the Program

What Is the Youth Diversion Team?

The Youth Diversion Team is a community-based, trauma-informed restorative justice diversion program for youth ages 10 to 17 involved in an arrestable offense. Instead of facing court or probation, youth participate in a process where they take responsibility, hear from those impacted, and create a plan to repair harm.

We bring together youth who have caused harm, those who have been harmed (if they choose to participate), and trained volunteers in a safe, facilitated setting. Together, they work to understand what happened, collaboratively determine what needs to happen to correct the harm, and how everyone can move forward.

This is not about punishment—it's about making things right.

How It Works

A Restorative Process in Four Steps

1. **Referral:** Youth are referred by police, school resource officers, the Juvenile Court, or other partners, rather than being sent to court.
2. **Preparation:** Trained staff meet with youth, families, and others affected to understand what happened and prepare for dialogue with the Youth Diversion Team.
3. **Restorative Meeting:** All parties come together (when safe and appropriate) to discuss the harm, take accountability, and create a repair agreement.
4. **Follow-Through:** The youth completes the agreement with support from the Youth Diversion Team. Once done, the case is closed with no formal charges.

Why It Matters

- Youth learn to take responsibility for their actions and repair damaged relationships.
- Families and youth are supported, not punished.
- Those who were harmed have a voice and are an integral part of the healing process.
- The community helps guide outcomes and restore trust.
- Long-term system involvement is avoided.

Who Can Participate

Eligibility Criteria: Youth may be eligible for the Youth Diversion Team if:

- They are between 10 and 17 years old
- They have been involved in an arrestable offense
- They accept responsibility and agree to participate
- The case is referred by a partner agency (e.g., law enforcement, school resource officer, Juvenile Court)

For Families

If your child has caused harm, it can feel overwhelming. The Youth Diversion Team provides support, structure, and an opportunity to make amends without formal charges.

We guide your child through a fair and thoughtful process that helps them:

- Understand the impact of their actions
- Repair harm in a real and meaningful way
- Rebuild trust with you, the community, and themselves

You'll be supported every step of the way.

For Those Harmed

Your voice matters.

If a young person's actions harmed you, you deserve to be heard. In the Youth Diversion Team process, you'll be invited (but never required) to share how the harm affected you and what repair looks like.

We prioritize safety, support, and empowerment, and our facilitators will work with you to determine the level of participation that feels right for you.

Volunteer / Get Involved

Be part of the solution.

Community members play a vital role in the Youth Diversion Team. Volunteers help facilitate healing conversations, support youth in completing agreements, and offer wisdom and accountability.

Training is provided; no prior legal or professional experience is required, but a basic understanding of youth development is necessary.

Referring Partners

Working Together to Create Better Outcomes

If you're a police officer, school administrator, probation officer, or prosecutor looking for meaningful alternatives for youth, the Youth Diversion Team is ready to partner with you.

We handle intake, preparation, facilitation, and case follow-up. Our process is evidence-informed, community-centered, and aligned with public safety goals.

Get in touch.

Have questions? Want to learn more? Reach out to our team—we're here to help.

[Phone]

[Email]

[Office Location / Hours]

Appendix A: Sample Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information

[INSERT THE NAME OF YOUTH DIVERSION TEAM]

CONTRACT/WAIVER OF RIGHTS/RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Part I: Introduction

You have been referred to the Youth Diversion Team for allegedly committing the following offense(s) _____, which is considered a violation of Connecticut General Statutes _____. The word “*allegedly*” means that the accusation has not yet been proven in court.

The Youth Diversion Team (YDT) is comprised of volunteers and professionals from your community who partner with police, schools, and the Juvenile Court to address cases like yours in a way that promotes accountability and support. Rooted in restorative justice principles, the YDT works with you and your family to understand what happened and co-create a meaningful agreement that addresses any issues that may be identified and repairs harm done. This agreement is shaped by the unique details of your situation, including your age, your strengths, the nature of the incident, your willingness to take responsibility, and your school and family circumstances.

What is the advantage of using the diversion program?

If you agree to participate in the YDT process and follow through with your agreement, your case will be closed, and you will not have to go to Juvenile Court. At any time, you can choose not to proceed with the case review, agreement, or services offered by the YDT. However, if you do not consent to participate in the process or follow through with the agreement, your case will be returned to the referring agency for potential referral and screening by the Juvenile Court. The court will be advised that you were provided the opportunity to participate in the YDT and the outcome.

If you acknowledge responsibility for the behavior that led to your referral and agree to participate in the YDT process, you will waive certain rights. You and your family need to know that if the incident involved damage to property or injury to someone, your parent(s) or guardian(s) may still be responsible for paying those harmed for the damage or injury through restitution or a civil suit, even if you complete the recommended diversion program. You and your parent(s) or guardian(s) may speak with the YDT case manager or other YDT staff or get advice from a lawyer to answer any questions about the process.

If you decide to participate in the Youth Diversion Team process, please sign the Contract/Waiver of Rights/Release of Information form on the next page. Your parent(s) or guardian(s) will also be asked to sign this form if they agree with your decision.

CONTRACT / WAIVER OF RIGHTS / RELEASE OF INFORMATION
[INSERT NAME OF YOUTH DIVERSION TEAM]

Part II: Agreement to Refer Case to the Youth Diversion Team and Authorization for Release of Information

By signing below, I

- Consent (agree) to have my case diverted to the Youth Diversion Team.
- Understand that my participation in the Youth Diversion Team process is voluntary.
- Understand that the Youth Diversion Team may reject my case and return it to the police or Juvenile Court.
- Understand that if I do not fulfill the terms of the agreement made in the Youth Diversion Team process, the case will be returned to the referring agency and may ultimately go to the Juvenile Court.
- Understand that by agreeing to have my case diverted to the Youth Diversion Team, I give up certain rights that I would have if my case went to Juvenile Court, such as:
 - My right to remain silent.
 - My right to be represented by a lawyer and to have the court appoint a lawyer to represent me at no cost if I qualify.
 - My right to require the State to prove the case against me.
 - My right to confront the witnesses against me.
 - My right not to answer questions about the case asked by the police or other officials.
 - My right to have a lawyer with me when those questions are being asked.
 - My right to stop answering questions or talking with police or other officials.
- I give my consent to the Youth Diversion Team case manager or staff who work on behalf of the Youth Diversion Team to:
 - Obtain relevant information and records from school personnel, if the information provided would help or is related to my case.
 - Speak to and receive relevant information from any counselor/therapist, physician, or case worker with whom I am currently working with that is related to the case or related to the behaviors that led to the referral.
 - Obtain documentation from the police or Juvenile Court that is related to my case.

Youth's Signature

Date

I agree and consent to the terms of the above Contract/Release of Information.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Witness's Signature Date

This release expires on _____

Appendix B: Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement

[NAME OF YOUTH DIVERSION TEAM]

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT

The purpose of the <NAME OF YOUTH DIVERSION TEAM> is to offer diversion to youth and families who are experiencing crisis or conflict in the community, at school, or home. Our involvement with these youth and families provides them with an alternative to the juvenile justice system.

To be effective, the youth and families, as well as the board members, must be free to discuss pertinent matters of a personal and sensitive nature and share otherwise case-sensitive private records and information.

Additionally, since a case that the Youth Diversion Team does not successfully resolve may be referred to the Juvenile Court, the confidentiality of juvenile matters, which is mandated by Connecticut General Statutes 46b-124, must be respected.

Since each person is individually and personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of the conversations, records, and information discussed by the Team, each member of the Youth Diversion Team, as well as any other person who is permitted to attend a Team meeting as an observer, must also agree to be personally responsible for any damages caused by the unauthorized release of confidential information.

For these reasons, all members of the <NAME OF YOUTH DIVERSION TEAM> and any other person permitted to attend a meeting as an observer must read and sign the Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement or have access to the case information.

Any person who refuses to sign this Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement will not be permitted to be present at any meeting of the Youth Diversion Team or have access to any case information.

Confidentiality Statement

I understand and agree that all conversations, records, and information reviewed, heard, or discussed at any meeting of the Youth Diversion Team shall be confidential and used solely to enable the Team to carry out its stated purpose. Any further disclosure of such conversations, records, or information is strictly prohibited except where statute or a properly executed, written release is authorized.

Indemnity Agreement

I further understand and agree that if I cause the unauthorized release of any of the conversations, records, or information that would be otherwise confidential, I will assume personal liability for any claim of damages directly resulting from such unauthorized release and agree further to indemnify the <NAME OF YOUTH DIVERSION TEAM>, the members

of the Team and associated agencies for any damages, expenses or losses found to be the result of such unauthorized release.

I have read, understood, and agree to comply with the Confidentiality Statement and Indemnity Agreement, which binds me.

Signature of Member or Observer

Date

Printed Name

Appendix C: Responsible Youth Questionnaire

Name: _____

Date: _____

Case Manager: _____

Please answer these questions to the best of your ability. Discuss your answers with your parents and have them sign the bottom. Your answers will be shared with the Youth Diversion Team.

1. What did you do that is causing you to appear before the Youth Diversion Team? Explain in detail. (Que hiciste para que aparecieras ante la Junta de Revision Juvenil? Explique en detalle.)
2. What were you thinking at the time? Was it a “spur of the moment” act, or had you been planning it for some time? (Que estabas pensando en ese momento? Fue un “impulse de momento” actuar o habia estado planeando durante algun tiempo? Explique su respuesta.)
3. Who has been affected by what happened, and how? How have you been affected? (Quien Fue impactado por su comportamiento en este caso? Como tu as estado afectado(a))?

4. What have you thought about since the incident? (que tu as pensado desde el incidente?)

5. How have you been disciplined for this at home or school? (Como has sido disciplinado por resto en casa y/o en escuela?) Do you think the punishment was fair? Why or why not? (Piensa usted que el castigo era justo? Por que o por que no?)

6. What do you think needs to be done to make things right as possible? (Que tu piensas que se necesita hacer para arreglar la situation lo mas pronto possible?)

7. Have you been in trouble before, either with the school or the police? Explain. (Has tenido problemas antes, sea en la escuela o la policia? Explique.)

8. Name two (2) positive qualities about yourself and explain why you think they are positive.
(Nombre 2 cualidades de usted y explique por que piensas que son positive.)

(1)

(2)

9. Write three goals that will help you stay out of trouble in the future. (Escriba 3 metas que te pueden ayudar mantenerte fuera de problemas en el futuro.)

(1)

(2)

(3)

10. What are three (3) things your family could do to make things better for you? (Cuales son las 3 cosas que su familia puede hacer para mejorar las cosas para ti mismo?)

(1)

(2)

(3)

11. What job would you like to eventually get? (Que trabajo le gustaria conseguir?)

12. Name someone you consider to be a “hero” and explain why? (Nombre alguien que usted piensas es un hroe y explique por que.)

Youth’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Case Manager’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: The Youth Diversion Team Meeting Script

This script provides a structured narrative to guide facilitators through the four phases of the Youth Diversion Team meeting. It is designed for use whether or not those harmed are present.

The script offers a strong and consistent framework, and facilitators are expected to follow it closely to preserve the integrity of the process. Still, they may adapt the language thoughtfully to enhance clarity and support participant understanding, as long as they uphold the dialogue's trauma-informed, restorative nature.

Facilitators should review and follow the guidelines in the sections below. These resources support facilitators in asking purposeful questions, listening with care, and leading a process rooted in accountability, healing, and relationship-building.

- [*Section 1.6: Core Framework and Professional Standards*](#)
- [*Section 1.10: Language That Upholds Trauma-Informed Restorative Values*](#)
- [*Part 3: Conversation Frameworks for Accountability and Repair*](#)

The following foundational materials support facilitators in guiding restorative conversations. These sections include the core question sets used during the meeting, along with practical strategies for processing responses and fostering meaningful discussion:

- [*Section 3.9: Question Sets that Shape the Restorative Meeting*](#)
- [*Section 3.10: How to Process the Question Sets*](#)
- [*Part 8: Developing the Restorative Agreement*](#)

Drawing on this guidance, facilitators move participants through a consistent sequence of questions, creating space for reflection, responsibility, and collaborative problem-solving.

Each participant is asked the same questions (or slight modifications of them) in order. When the facilitator uses the phrase “each of you,” they address all participants in the room, including the youth, their parent or guardian, those harmed (if present), and others offering support or input.

Note: The facilitator must confirm with those harmed (if present) if they prefer to speak first or hear from the youth before sharing their thoughts. This simple choice can significantly influence their safety and readiness to participate. If those harmed are absent, the youth will begin the dialogue after the facilitator sets the tone for the discussion.

The script is organized into four phases, detailed as follows:

Part 1: Getting Acquainted – The meeting begins with the preamble, introductions, and role-sharing using the *Trust and Relationship-Building Questions*, and icebreakers, which help create a sense of emotional and physical safety by fostering connection among participants.

1. Preamble
2. Opening Rounds – Introductions + Two Rounds of Trust and Relationship-Building Questions

Part 2: The Restorative Dialogue – The central part of the meeting is dedicated to allowing each participant to share their perspective on the incident and its impact. The *Restorative Questions* guide this conversation. Providing space for each unique voice is essential to understanding the complete story. Questions are posed to those present in the following order:

3. Restorative questions for those harmed (if present, and they choose to begin the dialogue)
4. Restorative questions for the youth who caused harm (if they are invited to speak first, or those harmed are not present)
5. Restorative questions for the parent(s)/guardian of the youth responsible
6. Restorative questions for the support persons of those harmed
7. Restorative questions for the support persons of the youth who caused harm

Part 3: Making Agreements – In this phase, participants work together to create specific steps, known as the Restorative Agreement, to hold the youth who caused harm accountable, repair the harm caused, and promote positive change. The process utilizes the *4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions* to guide the development of these agreements. For a blank template, see [Appendix E: The 4-Quadrant Agreement and Questions Template](#). Input from those present is gathered in the following order:

8. Agreement prompts for the youth
9. Agreement prompts for those harmed
10. Agreement prompts for the parent/guardian
11. Group discussion on agreement
12. Final say for those harmed, youth, & parent/guardian

Part 4: Appreciation and Closing– The meeting concludes with an opportunity for reflection, gratitude, and encouragement to promote follow-through and resolution.

13. Closing Round - Appreciation

Meeting Script

Part 1: Getting Acquainted

1. Preamble

[The facilitator will open the session.]

Facilitator: “Welcome. I am [STATE YOUR NAME AND WHERE YOU ARE FROM] and will facilitate this meeting. I want to thank everyone for joining us today. As you know, we are here today because an arrestable offense has occurred. Still, it is important to note that this community, and the small group of people here with us representing it, believe that people make mistakes and that being accountable for those mistakes can happen here in the community as opposed to a courtroom.”

Facilitator: “So, we are here today to hear from each of you about what happened and its impact on you and others, and then, as a group, we will figure out how to move forward positively to make things right. [YOUTH’S NAME], I will also say that if everything we collectively agree to is completed satisfactorily, you have completed the process successfully. You can truthfully say, ‘You have never been arrested.’”

2. Opening Rounds: Introductions + Two Rounds of Trust and Relationship-Building Questions

[Round 1]

Facilitator: “Before we move forward, I want to acknowledge that there are some people in this room whom you may know, and some you might not. It is important for us to get to know each other a little better, so let’s take a few moments to introduce ourselves.”

Facilitator: “[INSERT YOUTH’S NAME], you had the opportunity to choose two questions to help start this discussion. We will take turns answering them, sharing our names and where we are from.” So, the first question you have picked is . . . [READ THE FIRST PROMPT THE YOUTH CHOSE].

[The facilitator may repeat the prompt, and then everyone in the room introduces themselves and responds to the first prompt.]

[Round 2]

Facilitator: “Great, thank you. For our second round, you have also chosen the question. . .

[Facilitator reads the second prompt that the youth chose and may repeat it a second time. Now, everyone in the room answers the second prompt.]

[After each person has answered the questions, the facilitator moves to Part 2 – The Restorative Dialogue, addressing the purpose of the restorative meeting.]

Facilitator: “Thanks. Now that we have a sense of who is in the room with us, we will take a moment to hear from each of you about what happened, its impact, and how to make it right. After that, we will have a collective conversation on our agreement.”

[**IMPORTANT:** At intake, it should have been pre-determined if those harmed would be present and who would tell their story first. If the meeting includes those harmed, they can determine when they speak or listen.]

[When the facilitator uses the phrase, “Each of you,” they refer to those harmed, the youth, the parent/guardian, and others present at the meeting for support and input.]

[At this point, the facilitator should introduce the group to the incident and any charges brought upon the youth who caused harm.]

Part 2: The Restorative Dialogue

3. Restorative Questions to Those Harmed (if they speak first)

[Note: If those harmed are absent, skip to item 4: Restorative Questions for the Youth.]

[If present, those harmed respond to the following questions without interruption. The facilitator may slightly modify the questions to reflect their perspective.]

Facilitator: “In your own words, [INSERT NAME OF PERSON HARMED], tell us what happened.”

[Person speaks.]

Facilitator: “What were you thinking at the time of the incident or when you found out?”

[Person speaks.]

Facilitator: “What have you been thinking about since that time?”

[Person speaks.]

Facilitator: “How has this affected you?”

[Person speaks.]

Facilitator: “Who else do you think has been affected, and in what ways?”

[Person speaks.]

Facilitator: “What has been the hardest thing about this situation for you?”

[Person speaks.]

Facilitator: “What needs to happen to make things right?”

[Person speaks.]

Facilitator: Thank you. I appreciate you offering all that.”

4. Restorative Questions for the Youth Who Caused Harm

[If the Youth speaks first or if those harmed are absent, the facilitator reads the six (6) restorative questions. The youth should be given time to answer each question without interruption.]

Facilitator: “[INSERT YOUTH’S NAME], tell us what happened in your own words?”

[Youth speaks.]

Facilitator: “What were you thinking at the time?”

[Youth speaks.]

Facilitator: “What have you thought about since?”

[Youth speaks.]

Facilitator: “Who has been impacted, and how?”

[Youth speaks.]

Facilitator: “What has been the hardest thing for you?”

[Youth speaks.]

Facilitator: “Thinking about all those folks you just mentioned, including yourself, what do you think needs to happen for each one to make things right?”

[Youth speaks.]

Facilitator: “Thank you, I appreciate you offering all that.”

[Now, the facilitator turns the focus on the parent/guardian]

5. Restorative Questions to Parent(s)/Guardian of Youth

[The facilitator reads the restorative questions, allowing the parent or guardian to respond without interruption. The questions may be slightly modified to the parent or guardian’s perspective.]

Facilitator: “[NAME OF PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)], please share your thoughts when you learned what happened.”

[Parent/Guardian speaks.]

Facilitator: “What have you been thinking since that time?”

[Parent/Guardian speaks.]

Facilitator: “Who has been impacted, and how?”

[Parent/Guardian speaks.]

Facilitator: “What has been the hardest thing for you?”

[Parent/Guardian speaks.]

Facilitator: “What needs to happen to make things right?”

[Parent/Guardian speaks.]

Facilitator: “Thank you, I appreciate you offering that as well.”

8. Restorative Questions for Support Person(s) of Those Harmed (If present)

[The restorative questions may be modified
slightly to address the support person.]

Facilitator: “In your own words, [SUPPORT PERSON’S NAME], tell us what happened.”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What were you thinking at the time of the incident or when you found out?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What have you been thinking about since that time?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “How has this affected you?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “Who else do you think has been affected, and in what ways?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What has been the hardest thing about this situation for you?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What needs to happen to make things right?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: Thank you. I appreciate you offering all that.”

7. Restorative Questions for the Youth Support Persons (If present)

[The restorative questions may be modified
slightly to address those present to support those harmed.]

Facilitator: “In your own words, [SUPPORT PERSON’S NAME], tell us what happened.”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What were you thinking at the time of the incident or when you found out?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What have you been thinking about since that time?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “How has this affected you?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “Who else do you think has been affected, and in what ways?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What has been the hardest thing about this situation for you?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: “What needs to happen to make things right?”

[Supporter speaks.]

Facilitator: Thank you. I appreciate you offering all that.”

Part 3: Making Agreements

[In this phase, the facilitator starts by asking the responsible youth to answer the agreement prompts questions first.]

8. Agreement Prompts for Youth

Facilitator: “Now we’re going to shift into a group conversation about making things right. This means thinking about everyone who was affected, including [INSERT THE NAMES OF THOSE HARMED, IF KNOWN. IF THE INDIVIDUALS ARE UNKNOWN, OR IF HARM WAS CAUSED TO A GROUP OR THE BROADER COMMUNITY, USE A GENERAL TERM SUCH AS “THOSE HARMED” OR SPECIFY THE GROUP IF POSSIBLE (E.G., “LOCAL RESIDENTS,” “STUDENTS,” OR “COMMUNITY MEMBERS”).] We will also consider what needs to be done to make things right with your parent or guardian and you. We’ll also examine any broader factors that may have contributed to the incident and discuss how we can collaborate to address them so you don’t end up in a similar situation again. And because harm doesn’t just affect individuals, we’ll also consider ways to make things right with the broader community.”

Facilitator: “So, with that said, [STATE YOUTH’S NAME], what do you feel should be in this agreement?”

[The facilitator is asking the youth to share their ideas about what should be included in the restorative agreement, based on what they’ve learned from the dialogue so far. This question encourages the youth to take responsibility and reflect on how to make things right. It also allows them to take the lead in the process before the facilitator introduces the structured 4-Quadrant Process Agreement questions.]

[Or, the facilitator may say something like, “[STATE YOUTH’S NAME], earlier, I heard you say XXX would be a way to make things right. Could that be part of our agreement?”]

[Then, the facilitator presents the agreement prompt questions, repeating the agreement prompts in various ways until the youth has successfully worked through the ripple effect of harm, filling in *each* quadrant. The youth is provided the time to answer the questions.]

4-Quadrant Agreement Question Prompts (For blank form see Appendix E) (See complete examples in Part 8) Using a whiteboard or large flip chart paper can help the Youth Diversion Team keep note of these ideals.	
<i>How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?</i>	<i>How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?</i>
<i>How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?</i>	<i>How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?</i>

[As the facilitator moves forward, those same questions should be asked of each person present, starting with the family of the youth, then those harmed, and the supporters, if present. When everyone has answered, move on to the next block of questions and repeat the speaking order. It may be necessary for the facilitator to ask meeting participants only to add new information or clarify their answers. There is no need to retell stories that have been told.]

9. Agreement Prompts for Those Harmed

Facilitator: “[STATE NAME OF PERSONED HARMED], what do you feel should be in this agreement?”

[Or the facilitator may say something like, “[STATE NAME OF PERSON HARMED], earlier, I heard you say XXX was important to you. What would that look like in an agreement?”]

[Facilitator reads the Agreement Prompt questions. The person harmed is provided the time to answer the questions.]

[It may be necessary to repeat these prompts in various ways to create ideas for agreement.]

10. Agreement Prompt for Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Facilitator: “[STATE PARENT’S/GUARDIAN’S NAME], how about on your end, what do you feel should be in this agreement?”

[Or the facilitator may say something like, “[STATE PARENT’S/GUARDIAN’S NAME], earlier, I heard you say XXX was important to you. What would that look like in an agreement?”]

[Facilitator reads the Agreement Prompt questions. The parent/guardian is provided the time to answer the questions.]

[It may be necessary to repeat these prompts in various ways to create ideas for agreement.]

11. Group Discussion on Agreement

Facilitator: “How about others in the room? What are your thoughts on a potential agreement?”

[Individuals present offer their thoughts, ask questions, offer possible community connections, identify strengths and protective factors, and try to connect initial thoughts from this conversation to tangible, workable, attainable items.]

12. Final Say for Those Harmed, Youth/Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Facilitator: “As we look like we may have formalized our agreement, [STATE YOUTH’S NAME], was there anything that you wanted to say that you have not had a chance to say yet, or was there something you would hope the process would offer that has not happened yet?”

[The youth is provided the time to answer the question.]

Facilitator: “[STATE NAME(s) OF THOSE HARMED], was there anything you wanted to say that you have not had a chance to say yet, or was there something you would hope the process would offer that has not happened yet?”

[The person harmed is provided the time to answer the question.]

Facilitator: “[STATE PARENT’S/GUARDIAN’S) NAME], was there anything you wanted to say that you have not gotten a chance to say yet, or was there something you would hope the process would offer that has not happened yet?”

[The parent/guardian is given time to answer the question.]

Part 4: Appreciation and Closing

13. Closing Round – Appreciation

Facilitator: “Great, so with our agreement completed and potentially your needs met, we have accomplished our goal for today. As we conclude, we want to acknowledge that we do not believe this relationship ends simply because this conversation is over or your agreement is complete. Now that you know us, if there is anything you need, from a summer job to additional support, you have [STATE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE ROOM] people here to help you. Our goal is to see you through high school, so it doesn't matter if it's six months or two years from now. Know that we have your back if you need it.”

Facilitator: “And on that note, to officially close us out, we always offer gratitude. However, this time, we will ask [STATE THE NAME OF PERSON WHO IS SITTING NEXT TO THE YOUTH] to kick us off so that (STATE YOUTH’S NAME) gets to have the last word.”

Facilitator: “Thank you!”

[The meeting has now ended.]

Appendix E: The 4-Quadrant Agreement and Questions Template

4-Quadrant Agreement Question Prompts Using a whiteboard or large flip chart paper can help the Youth Diversion Team keep note of these ideals.	
<i>How will the youth repair the harm they have done to themselves?</i>	<i>How will the youth restore relationships or repair the harm to those who have been directly affected?</i>
<i>How will the youth restore relationships and repair harm done to their family?</i>	<i>How will the youth repair harm done to the broader community?</i>

Appendix F: Quick Reference – Referring Agencies

This checklist helps referring agencies submit complete and accurate referrals to the Youth Diversion Team. Referring agency personnel can facilitate a smoother referral process by gathering necessary information, ensuring eligibility, and providing relevant documentation. Referring agency personnel must be familiar with the detailed instructions in [Part 4: Eligibility & Referral Requirements for Diversion](#), specifically the sections that apply to referring agency responsibilities. A solid understanding of its contents enables referring agency personnel to clearly explain the process, build confidence and trust with participants, and collaborate effectively with diversion staff.

Section 4.1: Eligibility Criteria for Youth Diversion Team Referrals

- **Age:** Youth must be between 10 and 17 years old.
- **Offense Type:** Low-level or non-violent offenses; some low-level felonies may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Fights may be eligible unless a serious injury is involved.
- **Incident Severity:** Incident must have involved an arrest or have the potential to lead to one.
- **Residency:** Youth must live within the Youth Diversion Team’s jurisdiction. Exceptions may apply for non-residents under inter-agency agreements or in cases involving school-related incidents across jurisdictions.
- **Referral Source:** Must come from an approved agency (e.g., law enforcement, juvenile court).
- **Accountability:** Youth must be willing to take responsibility. Diversion staff should support youth who are initially reluctant to engage.
- **Prior History:** Previous involvement with the justice system or diversion programs does not automatically disqualify a youth; eligibility is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

4.3.2 Evaluating Suitability for Diversion

- **Preliminary Assessment:** Referring agency must assess whether the case meets the eligibility criteria (see [Section 4.1](#)).
- **Incident Details:** Consider the nature and severity of the offense.
- **Prior Diversion Participation:** Review any past diversion involvement and outcomes.
- **Accountability & Engagement:** Assess the youth’s willingness to take responsibility and the family’s readiness to participate (see [Section 4.3.3](#)).
- **Youth & Family Needs:** Include relevant observations (e.g., behavior, school issues, family circumstances).

- **Stakeholder Input:** Gather background information from various sources, including law enforcement, school staff, parents, and individuals directly impacted.
- **Staff Consultation:** Referring agencies may consult diversion staff when unsure about case suitability.

4.3.3 Confirming the Family's Decision

- **Inform & Engage:** Clearly explain the Youth Diversion Team option, including benefits, expectations, and outcomes.
- **Emphasize Family Role:** Highlight the family's importance in supporting the youth's success in the program.
- **Address Questions:** Answer any concerns the family may have about participation.
- **Facilitate Decision:** Provide the necessary paperwork and guide the family through the process of accepting or declining the referral.
- **Waiver Requirement:** If the family accepts, ensure a signed waiver is obtained before any Youth Diversion Team staff handle pre-/arrest information.
- **Next Steps if Declined:** If the family declines, document the decision and determine whether to refer the case to Juvenile Court or dismiss it.

4.3.4 Providing Necessary Information to Diversion Staff

- **Case Documentation:** Compile all relevant details, including incident reports, behavioral history, and prior interventions.
- **Transparency:** Share clear, factual, and unbiased information with the Youth Diversion Team.
- **Risk Factors:** Communicate known concerns such as family issues, school challenges, or behavioral patterns.
- **Timely Submission:** Provide all documentation promptly to prevent delays.
- **Confidentiality:** Protect privacy while ensuring staff have the background needed for informed decision-making.

Appendix G: Quick Reference - Youth Diversion Team Referral Packet

This checklist offers diversion staff a systematic approach for reviewing incoming referrals and ensuring that each youth has access to the necessary resources. By evaluating the referral packet and verifying program suitability and capacity, the youth diversion team can make informed decisions that enhance positive outcomes.

Section 4.4.1: Assessing Referral Validity

- **Waiver & Release:** Confirm the referral includes a signed waiver and release of information form (see Section [5.6](#)).
- **Eligibility & Suitability:** Verify the case meets eligibility criteria and is appropriate for diversion, with family consent (see Sections [4.1](#) and [4.3.2](#)).
- **Offense Review:** Ensure the offense qualifies (e.g., infraction, violation, misdemeanor, or low-level felony considered case-by-case).
- **Approved Referral Source:** Confirm the referral came from an authorized entity (e.g., police, school, court).
- **Restorative Alignment:** Determine if the case fits the Youth Diversion Team's trauma-informed, restorative goals.
- **Residency Check:** Verify the youth's eligibility based on jurisdiction, including inter-agency agreements for non-residents.

Section 4.4.2: Evaluating Resource Capacity

- **Team Readiness:** Assess whether staff have the personnel and expertise to manage the case effectively.
- **Support Services:** Review the availability of needed services (e.g., counseling, mentorship, family support).
- **Case Complexity:** Determine if the case exceeds the team's capacity or available resources.
- **Prioritization:** When resources are limited, prioritize referrals based on urgency and suitability.
- **Case Rejection Protocol:** If a case is not accepted, return the referring agency's materials with an explanation; securely destroy any additional background info.
- **Alternative Options:** Recommend other services or interventions if appropriate.

Appendix H: Quick Reference – Part 5 – The Intake Process

This section summarizes the essential responsibilities and provides a quick-reference guide to the intake process. The diversion staff must be familiar with the manual, specifically the detailed instructions in [Part 5: The Intake Process](#). A solid understanding of its contents enables them to clearly explain the process, build confidence and trust with participants, and collaborate effectively with professionals and volunteers.

Section 5.2: Begin Case File and Documentation

- Start the case file when a referral is received
- Review the referral packet for program fit and team capacity
- Contact youth and family; log all outreach attempts and responses
- Note any challenges to participation (e.g., missed calls, scheduling issues)
- Keep records brief, respectful, and focused on key details
- Use notes to help prepare for the Restorative Meeting
- Follow documentation guidance in [Sections 10.2: Documenting the Youth Diversion Team Process](#), and [10.3: Developing the Case File](#)

Section 5.3: Make Initial Contact with the Parent or Legal Guardian

- Contact the parent or legal guardian when the referral is received
- Explain the Youth Diversion Team process and next steps
- Clarify any information previously provided by the referring agency
- Use clear, patient, and compassionate communication
- Cover these key points:
 - Role of the Youth Diversion Team
 - Overview of the process and timeline
 - Differences between juvenile court and diversion (see *Section 10.4*)
 - Responsibilities of the youth and family
 - Possible outcomes, including impact on records (see *Section 10.4.2*)
 - What happens if the family declines or withdraws
- Schedule the intake meeting if they agree to proceed
- Document the contact and any concerns raised

Section 5.4: Explain the 6-Month Timeline and Ongoing Case Management

- Explain the six-month case timeline starting from intake
- Clarify why cases stay open even after agreement completion
- Emphasize goals: monitor progress, offer support, ensure repair, evaluate impact
- Acknowledge family hopes for early closure while reinforcing the case management purpose
- Note that informal support may continue after case closure

Section 5.5: Explaining Legal Distinctions, Confidentiality, and Voluntary Participation

- Reaffirm that the Youth Diversion Team process is a restorative alternative, not a legal proceeding
- Clarify process is non-adversarial with no prosecution or incarceration
- Inform that juvenile court legal rights (e.g., right to silence, counsel, trial) do not apply
- Emphasize that participation is voluntary for youth, family, and harmed parties
- Inform the youth responsible, and the family's consent *is not* required to share the youth's identity and diversion outcome with the harmed parties
- Affirm that it is the harmed individuals' right to participate
- Explain the purpose of confidentiality and its legal/ethical limits
- Discuss confidentiality and its limitations
- Collect required signatures on Confidentiality/Indemnity agreements (see [Appendix A](#))

Section 5.6: Establishing Voluntary Participation: Parental Consent and Youth Assent

- Verify whether the referring agency obtained signed forms; if not, collect them before proceeding
- Review and explain the signed contract, waiver of rights, and release of information form (see [Appendix A](#))
- Ensure parental consent and youth assent are obtained during the intake meeting
- Confirm that the parent/guardian understands and supports the youth's participation
- Confirm that the youth is willing to engage meaningfully and voluntarily in the process
- Avoid pressuring youth into participation solely based on parental permission
- If either party declines participation, document and return the case to the referring agency
- Maintain a respectful, non-coercive approach if a family chooses not to participate

Section 5.7: Administer The Responsible Youth Questionnaire

- Introduce the Responsible Youth Questionnaire during the intake meeting
- Explain its purpose: reflection, accountability, and preparation for restorative dialogue
- Encourage youth to complete it with their parent or guardian
- Set and communicate a clear deadline for return
- Emphasize that it is not punitive, but shows readiness for restorative participation
- Inform about mandated reporting for safety or legal concerns
- Ensure signatures from the youth, parent/guardian, and case manager are included
- Review the completed questionnaire before the Restorative Meeting

Section 5.8: Assessment of Strengths, Challenges, and Family Dynamics

- Gather context on the incident, youth, and family during intake
- Assess youth strengths, challenges, and developmental stage
- Identify family strengths and challenges
- Note system-level barriers and supports
- Use narrative conversations and evidence-based screening tools
- Be aware of any DCF-required assessment tools
- Ensure staff are qualified to administer and interpret assessments

Section 5.9: Coordination with Existing Service Providers

- Ask if the youth currently works with any service providers
- Encourage the parent/guardian to inform those providers about the diversion process
- Document identified professionals
- With consent, contact providers to coordinate support
- Avoid duplicating existing services in the diversion plan

Section 5.10: Preparing for Restorative Justice Practice Recommendations

- Use conversation and assessment info to shape personalized, restorative recommendations
- Explore supportive service options with youth and family
- Explain how services connect to accountability and healing
- Clarify that recommendations at intake are not final

- Note that more action items may be added at the Restorative Meeting
- Emphasize that the final agreement is made collaboratively
- Ensure recommendations match the youth's strengths, needs, and developmental level
- Avoid punitive or unrealistic suggestions
- Address concerns early to prevent conflicts at the meeting
- When preparing for the Restorative Meeting, be sure to
 - Align services with restorative values and model fidelity (see 3.6: Distinguishing Restorative Practices and Intervention-Based Services and 3.7: Requirements for Restorative Alignment in Agreements)
 - Follow SSMART guidelines for all action items (see Part 8: Developing the Agreement)

Section 5.11: Preparing for the Inclusion of Both Parties in the Youth Diversion Team Process

- Include both the youth who caused harm and those harmed whenever appropriate and safe
- Refer to the appropriate material in Section 5.11 to prepare all parties for meaningful participation in the Restorative Meeting
- Explain how inclusion supports accountability, healing, and voice
- Emphasize trauma-informed engagement, emotional safety, and consent
- Use inclusion to strengthen understanding and reduce ongoing tension
- Reference related sections for guidance:
 - [*1.5: Core Framework and Professional Standards*](#)
 - [*1.10: Language that Upholds Trauma-Informed Restorative Values*](#)
 - [*2.8: Restorative Engagement of Those Harmed*](#)

Section 5.12: Preparation for the Restorative Meeting Process

- Begin discussing the restorative process and accountability during intake (see Section 1.8 and Part 3)
- Use reflective conversations to build understanding, empathy, ownership, and motivation
- Introduce Trust and Relationship-Building Questions to youth and family; the youth selects two questions for the meeting (see [*Section 3.9.1*](#))
 - Explain these questions shift the focus to who each person is beyond the incident

- Present Restorative Questions to youth and those affected to explore what happened, who was affected, responsibility, and repair (see [Section 3.9.2](#))
 - Intake conversations reduce anxiety, promote readiness, and encourage engagement
 - Emphasize accountability as voluntary ownership and meaningful repair by the youth
- Introduce the 4-Quadrant Agreement Process and Questions to prepare for repairing harm to self, others, family, and community (see [Section 3.9.3](#))
 - Clarify that the Restorative Agreement is co-created during the Restorative Meeting with all participants
 - Intake discussions generate ideas and prepare for deeper restorative dialogue

Section 5.13: Explain the Restorative Meeting Process

- The Restorative Meeting process involves two conversations, one with:
 - Youth who caused harm and their parent/guardian
 - Those directly harmed (if willing)
- Meeting Structure (4 phases):
 - Getting Acquainted — introductions, roles, relationship-building
 - Restorative Dialogue — sharing experiences guided by Restorative Questions
 - Making Agreements — co-creating values-based agreement using 4-Quadrant Process
 - Closing and Appreciation — recognition and closure
- Meeting Location:
 - Quiet, neutral space promoting emotional safety
 - Show room and seating arrangement during intake if possible
- Participants:
 - Required: youth who caused harm, parent/guardian, trained facilitator, volunteers
 - Possible: those harmed (voluntary), referring officer/law enforcement, school rep, support persons
- Restorative Tone:
 - Focus on dialogue, empathy, shared accountability — not punishment
 - Equal seating to reflect respect and inclusion

- Facilitator Role:
 - Neutral guide, balanced participation, structured questions
 - Manage emotional and physical safety
 - Focus on responsibility and restoration
- Speaking Order:
 - Ask harmed participants if they want to talk first or after the youth
 - If no harmed participants, the youth speaks first after the facilitator opens
 - Youth who caused harm do not decide the speaking order

Section 5.14: Bringing a Support Person to the Restorative Meeting

- Encourage youth who caused harm and those harmed to bring one trusted adult supporter (e.g., relative, teacher, coach, mentor).
- A well-chosen supporter provides emotional grounding, encourages accountability, and helps maintain a respectful, balanced environment.
- Supporters can:
 - Offer comfort and reassurance during the meeting
 - Help those harmed feel grounded and confident
 - Balance power dynamics if others have support present
 - Clarify meeting aspects or gently advocate for the harmed party
 - Validate experiences and uphold dignity throughout the process
- Limit supporters to one per party to maintain focus and emotional safety.
- Share Restorative Questions at intake with supporters to prepare them for meaningful participation.

Section 5.15: When the Youth Does Not Accept Accountability

- Staff assess the youth's readiness for restorative diversion during intake
- Participation is voluntary and requires the youth's willingness to take responsibility and repair harm
- If the youth refuses accountability despite supportive dialogue and reflection opportunities, restorative diversion is not appropriate
- Examples of refusal include statements like "It wasn't me" or "I was there, but I didn't do anything"
- Such cases must be returned to the referring agency after thorough documentation

- All reasonable efforts to promote understanding and encourage accountability must be made before returning the case

Section 5.16: Conflict of Interest Considerations

- Raise suspected conflicts of interest confidentially as early as possible, ideally during or just after intake, and before the Youth Diversion Team meeting
- Follow guidance in *Section 10.9* if a conflict is known or suspected
- Possible conflicts include:
 - Personal, family, or close social relationships with involved parties
 - Prior involvement in the incident
 - Professional roles impacting neutrality (e.g., therapist, school staff)
 - Any situation raising bias concerns, intentional or not
- When uncertain, err on the side of caution
- Early addressing of conflicts preserves trust, fairness, and process integrity
- Document conflict-related decisions briefly without sensitive details

Section 5.17: Scheduling the Restorative Meeting

- After intake, diversion staff schedules the Youth Diversion Team meeting
- Coordinate with the youth who caused harm, their family, and those directly impacted (if attending) to find a suitable date/time
- Include the availability of key participants, including Youth Diversion Team volunteers
- Schedule the meeting promptly to maintain momentum and encourage timely engagement
- Consider cultural, language, and accessibility needs when scheduling
- Once the date is set, notify all participants, providing precise details on the meeting format, location, and expectations

Appendix I: Checklist – Post-Meeting and Case Closure

The following checklist outlines the essential steps for monitoring progress after the Youth Diversion Team meeting and for formally closing a case, whether it is successful or unsuccessful. It ensures consistent documentation, supportive follow-up, and clear communication with youth, families, and referring agencies. These steps help maintain the integrity of the restorative process, reinforce accountability, and offer continued opportunities for growth and connection even when the original plan is not fully completed.

Section 9.1 Quick Reference – Case Management Sessions and Follow-up Monitoring

- **Documentation:** Required for all contacts, updates, and changes, in person, phone, text, or email. Include rationale and consent (see *Sections 10.2 & 10.3*). Include date and content of contact.
- **Monitor Follow-Up Schedule:** This is built into each SSMART goal and tailored to the youth's needs and support level (see *Section 8.4*). Ongoing monitoring topics may include, but are not limited to:
 - Agreement compliance
 - Access to services
 - School attendance and behavior
 - Community conduct
 - Updates from service providers
 - Acknowledging progress and offering encouragement
- **Schedule and Document Follow-Ups:** May occur upon request or if concerns arise; continue until formal case closure.
- **Schedule and Document Courtesy Check-Ins:** Even when no concerns exist, this shows care and maintains connection.
- **Schedule and Document Follow-Up Meetings:**
 - Work with families and available team members; gather input from absent members securely
 - Required if barriers, lack of progress, or concerns from youth, family, or service providers emerge
 - Must include the youth and parent/guardian—no meeting without them
- **Possible Reasons for a Follow-Up Meeting:**
 - Major plan revisions or extensions
 - Need for additional support

- Discussion of noncompliance and consequences
- Early closure due to legal or exceptional issues

Section 9.2: Balancing Support and Accountability When Barriers Arise

- Acknowledge real-life challenges that may impact follow-through
- Refer to the intake assessment to ensure goals remain realistic
- Monitor for new or emerging barriers during follow-up
- Respond with empathy while upholding accountability
- Document when the youth is making sincere efforts but struggling
- Adjust timelines or access methods when appropriate
- Keep the core expectations of the Agreement intact
- Continue regular progress checks
- Provide support alongside clear accountability
- Note all updates, changes, and rationales in case documentation

Section 9.3: Case Closure

The Closing Meeting, Regardless of Outcome:

- Hold a final meeting with the whole Youth Diversion Team whenever possible
- If the entire team is unavailable, hold the meeting with the case manager and available team members
- Use the meeting to acknowledge the youth's efforts and formally close the case
- If a meeting isn't possible, send a written letter to the youth and family as a last resort
- If youth and family cannot be reached after reasonable efforts, proceed with administrative closure

Successful Cases

- Confirm the youth has completed all Agreement terms and the 6-month timeline
- Contact the youth and the parent/guardian to schedule the closing meeting (preferably in person)
- Hold a case closing meeting with the full or partial Youth Diversion Team
- Acknowledge and celebrate the youth and family's efforts and growth
- Reflect on what supported their success (e.g., resilience, support, services)

- Encourage continued participation in positive programs or relationships
- Offer help to repair remaining relationships if needed
- Provide referrals or ongoing support if appropriate
- Collect anonymous feedback through an exit survey (on-site or digital preferred)
- Notify the referring agency of successful completion
- Send a follow-up letter within one week summarizing success and resources
- Document the method of closure and rationale in the case file

Unsuccessful Cases

- Review case documentation to understand why the diversion plan was not completed
- Identify patterns, obstacles, or insights from the case
- Contact the parent or guardian and the youth to explain the outcome and schedule a closing meeting
- If no response, send a letter explaining the result, next steps, and support options
- If the family reengages, explain the outcome and possible next steps
- Emphasize that support is still available from the Youth Diversion Team and Youth Service Bureau
- Encourage completion of an anonymous exit questionnaire to gather feedback
- Provide onsite or digital options for survey completion; mail if no meeting occurs
- Keep all case materials and documentation in the case file
- Inform the referring agency that the diversion process was attempted but unsuccessful, and explain why
- If the court was not the original referral, allow the referring agency to decide the next steps based on relevant factors
- Document the method and rationale for the case closure in the file

Section 9.6: Case File Closure & Internal Record Keeping

- Confirm all documents are complete and accurate (e.g., Agreement, follow-up notes, communications)
- Enter the final status into the case management system.
- Mark case as closed in physical or digital records.
- Archive per confidentiality and retention policy.

- Note if any follow-up support referrals were made beyond closure.

Section 9.7: Stakeholder Feedback

- Gathering feedback from youth, family, the harmed party, and volunteers.
- Method (survey – youth and parent, interview).
- Use of insights for program improvement.
- Optional but recommended:
- Collect feedback from youth, family, harmed parties, and volunteers.
- Use of feedback to improve the program and future meetings.
- Include sample questions or forms if applicable.

Section 9.8: Staff & Volunteer Debrief and Reflection

- Team reflection for complex or high-impact cases.
- Emotional check-in for staff well-being.
- Opportunity to identify lessons learned.
- Encourage brief team debriefs for complex cases.
- Opportunity for staff reflection and wellness check-in.

Appendix J: Youth Exit Survey

<i>YDT Youth Exit Survey- Questions</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>
Do you generally feel that your YDT <i>experience overall was a positive one?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>understood your needs?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>understood the situation?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>were transparent about the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>gave you the information you needed during the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>were supportive during the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>were knowledgeable about the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>supported you in completing the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that <i>you were included in the process at all steps?</i>			
Do you generally feel that <i>your thoughts and/or opinions were considered</i> when the agreement was developed?			
Do you generally feel that <i>your needs were considered</i> when the agreement was developed?			
Do you generally feel that the resulting agreement <i>provided the right support to repair harm that the person(s) harmed/victim(s) experienced?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the resulting agreement <i>provided the right support to repair harm that your family experienced?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the resulting agreement <i>provided the right support to repair harm that the community experienced?</i>			
Do you generally feel that you were <i>helped by the overall process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that you were <i>connected with any services and/or support that you needed to better handle situations like this in the future?</i>			

Do you generally feel that this process will <i>help you to better handle situations at home, at school, or in the community that may arise in the future?</i>			
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<p>Please use the space below to provide any additional thoughts you have on the overall YDT process. Comments can address the specific questions above or address additional areas not covered above.</p>
<div></div>

Appendix K: Parent Exit Survey

<i>YDT Parent Exit Survey- Questions</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>
Do you generally feel that your child's YDT <i>experience overall was a positive one?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>understood your child's needs?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>understood the situation?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>were transparent about the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>gave you and your child the information you needed during the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>were supportive during the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>were knowledgeable about the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the members of the YDT <i>supported your child in completing the process?</i>			
Do you generally feel that <i>you and your child were included in the process at all steps?</i>			
Do you generally feel that <i>you and your child's thoughts and/or opinions were considered</i> when the agreement was developed?			
Do you generally feel that <i>your child's needs were considered</i> when the agreement was developed?			
Do you generally feel that the resulting agreement <i>provided the right support to repair harm that the person(s) harmed/victim(s) experienced?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the resulting agreement <i>provided the right support to repair harm that your family experienced?</i>			
Do you generally feel that the resulting agreement <i>provided the right support to repair harm that the community experienced?</i>			
Do you generally feel that your child was <i>helped by the overall process?</i>			

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