



The Structured Decision Making[®] System

The Graduated Response Approach

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Georgia Department of
Juvenile Justice

NCCD | National Council on
Crime & Delinquency

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GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE INTRODUCTION TO THE GRADUATED RESPONSE APPROACH

In addition to the Pre-Dispositional Risk Assessment and the Juvenile Needs Assessment (JNA), the graduated response approach (GRA) helps workers develop a case plan for reducing disruptive and harmful behaviors and increasing pro-social behaviors as youth work through their supervision and transition out of Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) commitment. The GRA provides a flexible yet consistent process and assists in the application of rewards/deterrents that help shape a youth's behavior over time. Workers also use the Behavior and Response Agreement to cultivate a shared understanding of expected behaviors, rewards, and deterrents. Case managers or probation officers track the youth's behaviors and progresses in the youth's case notes.

The GRA provides workers with a checklist where they can record steps they have taken toward case closure/progress. Research shows that highly skilled decision makers in stressful situations benefit from the use of checklists, which help ensure that repetitive tasks are completed efficiently and appropriately every time. Including each step needed to complete a task allows for an allocation of energy from remembering the steps to more thoughtful and thorough completion of that list. Checklists can also improve productivity, reliability, and delegation, as different people can complete the same task in the same way. The GRA's goals are to:

- Improve accuracy by testing decision-making tools for validity and reducing the reliance on memorization of routine procedural items;
- Improve reliability by ensuring that, when presented with the same information about a youth and his/her specific circumstances, similar decisions are made across workers, units, departments, etc.; and
- Improve equity by reducing implicit and cognitive biases.

These goals are consistent with the goals of juvenile justice reform in Georgia. Once it is fully implemented, the GRA—along with training on cognitive biases, decision-making processes, and goals—can help improve outcomes for youth, families, and communities.

NCCD's Graduated Response Approach



Engaging youth in identifying behavior facilitates buy-in and supports best practice.

1



Antecedents



Natural
Consequences



Probation
Consequences



Creating a behavior plan allows for shared understanding between the youth, family, and courts.

2



Average
Progress



Excellent
Progress



Disruption



A continuous review process results in rewards or consequences for the youth.

3



Revisit/Revise
Plan



Reward Positive
Behavior



Use Disruption
Checklist



Youth behavior leads to successful termination or to supervisor review and further consequences.

4



Termination



Early
Termination



Supervisor
Review

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE KEYS OF THE GRADUATED RESPONSE APPROACH

The purpose of the GRA is to help shape a youth's behavior. The use of incentives/rewards helps increase desired behaviors and the use of sanctions/deterrents helps decrease undesirable behaviors.

The GRA addresses the needs of youth, system workers and stakeholders, and communities.

- For youth, it ensures that incentives and sanctions are derived from best practices and implemented consistently across workers.
- The approach helps workers focus case plans on the most important strengths and needs for each youth, and it allows integration with other tools and best practices implemented by the department.
- The GRA allows departments to conduct ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness through data collection.
- Finally, communities are safer when justice-involved youth learn and use strategies and skills taught through the GRA for long-term, sustainable success.

Characteristics of a Successful GRA

In order for any GRA to be effective, the following key characteristics need to be considered.

- Timely: Youth learn best when rewards or deterrents are provided immediately after the identified behavior occurs. Both the specific rewards or deterrents used and the process for implementing them need to be prompt and timely.
- Developmentally Appropriate: The GRA considers many different factors (e.g., age, developmental level, learning style, culture, and mental health issues). The agreed-upon behaviors, rewards, and deterrents must address each individual youth's unique needs and situation.
- Integrated: The GRA should complement and be integrated with other strategies and tools, such as the Pre-Dispositional Risk Assessment, the Juvenile Strengths and Needs Assessment, Effective Practices for Community Supervision, and other services that are part of the overall supervision plan.
- Individualized: Rewards and deterrents can only shape behavior if they are meaningful to the youth. Through the GRA, the supervising worker and the youth identify positive and negative behavior together and then respond in a way that is meaningful to the youth.
- Evolving: The approach needs to allow for increasing expectations of pro-social and other positive behaviors as they are learned and demonstrated. Similarly, if undesirable behaviors escalate, it may be necessary to adjust the deterrents proportionally.
- Equitable: Parameters must be fair and equitable to promote consistency across workers and across youth. More importantly, the approach must be developed to promote equity when applied to varying demographic groups and to eliminate the unintended consequences of implicit and structural bias.

Building on Strengths, Learning Over Time

Research on social learning, youth development, and best practices shows that youth in the juvenile justice system are capable of learning new skills, exhibiting new behaviors, and establishing new pro-social relationships. For many youth, the link between their behavior and consequences, whether positive or negative, is not well established. The GRA facilitates learning by teaching youth that they have control, both over their behavior and over the positive and negative consequences.

**GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
THREE BENEFITS TO THE GRADUATED RESPONSE APPROACH**

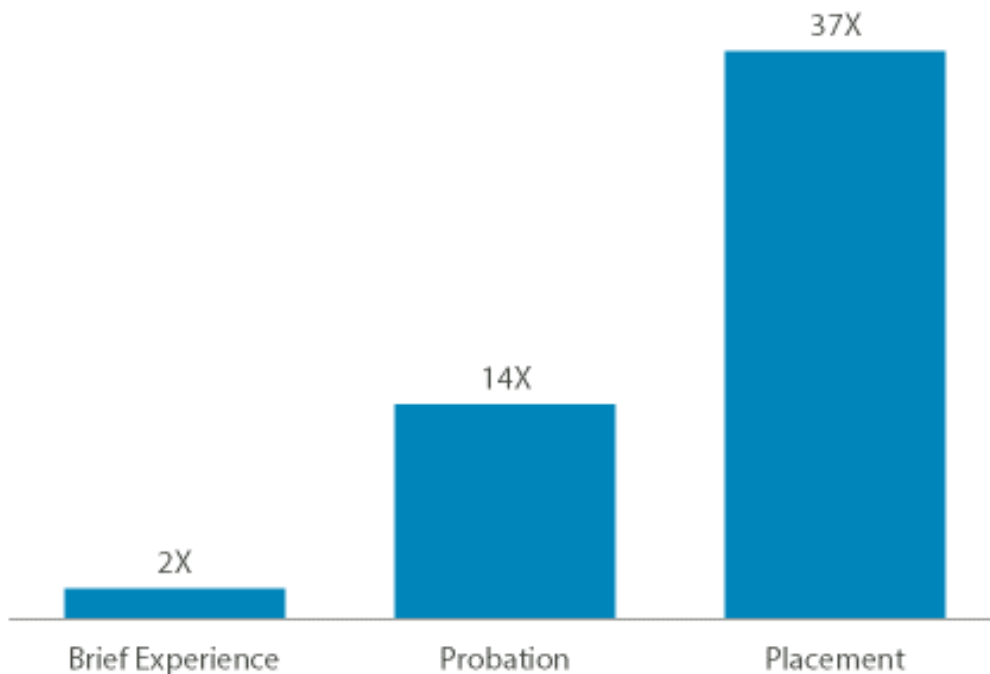
The GRA promotes positive behavior change, offers support to workers, and is critical for a safer community.

Benefits to Youth

Research clearly shows that probation alone does not have a positive impact on a youth’s likelihood of future offending. Youth who receive a disposition of probation alone are, on average, 14 times more likely to be rearrested than youth with similar characteristics who were not adjudicated.

Research also shows that youth in detention have an even higher likelihood of future offending compared to youth who are not adjudicated. Youth who receive a disposition of placement are 37 times more likely to be rearrested than non-adjudicated youth with similar characteristics.

Chance of Rearrest



To be successful, probation and detention should be used to facilitate development of pro-social skills and relationships. This is why the GRA focuses on protective factors and building new social assets for youth. By incentivizing youth to engage in pro-social activities that enable their growth and development, we help them engage in positive behaviors, build their connection with the community, desist from offending, and make a more successful transition to adulthood. The GRA is designed to help youth in the juvenile justice system become accountable, responsible, and competent members of society.

Benefits to Workers and the Department of Juvenile Justice

Traditionally, it has been the worker's responsibility to fill many roles: resource provider, mentor, advocate, advisor, officer, compliance monitor, and violation enforcer. Workers can thus face a significant burden as they navigate tough decisions concerning compliance and non-compliance with court orders; the significance of probation violations; the frequency, appropriateness, and availability of incentives, rewards, and deterrents; and the purpose and appropriate use of detention.

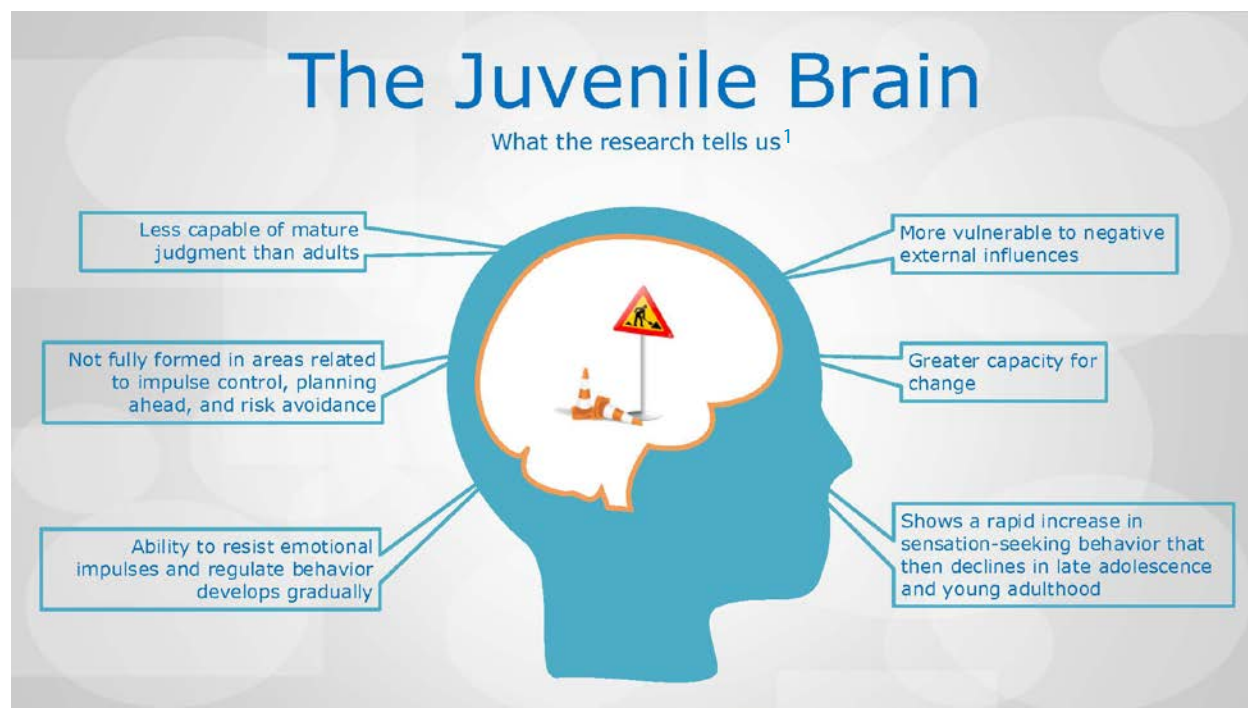
The GRA allows workers and youth to work together to identify incentives, rewards, and deterrents that are meaningful to the youth. It provides a framework for workers to reward good decision making and positive behavioral changes, as well as respond to problematic behaviors without unnecessarily detaining youth.

The GRA benefits DJJ by maintaining a structure for data collection in the quality assurance process. Tracking youth progress, along with the rewards and deterrents applied, will provide information to DJJ, the courts, and the community about the effectiveness of the GRA and DJJ supervision strategies.

Benefits to the Community

Since its creation more than 100 years ago, the goal of juvenile probation has been to promote a safer community while supporting youth in their development and transition to adulthood.

Research shows that the juvenile brain is still developing and is hardwired to reward impulsivity, which can lead to poor decisions. Research also tells us that incentives and rewards are effective tools in helping to re-shape behaviors and decision making. An incentive- and reward-based approach to probation encourages positive development of the juvenile brain to make better decisions in the community.



Research indicates that to reduce future offending, support workers and juvenile justice agencies, and establish a safer community, it is necessary to have an approach to juvenile probation—such as the GRA—that is centered on positive youth development and incorporates meaningful incentives.

¹ Source: Miller v. Alabama, 567 U.S. (2012); and Steinberg, L. (2014). *Age of opportunity: Lessons from the new science of adolescence*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

**GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
THE GRADUATED RESPONSE APPROACH
CHECKLISTS**

INITIAL MEETING

Identify the Target Behaviors

It is important to clearly identify and define the behavior that needs to be changed. The behavior should be defined in specific, observable, and measurable terms so that it is obvious when progress has or has not been made. It is also important to identify antecedents (events that happen right before or lead to the behaviors) and consequences (what happens right after the behaviors).

Checklist

Part 1: Set-up and Administration

- Have a face-to-face meeting with the youth
- Youth's parent/guardian is present
- Other supportive adults are present
- Explain your role as a probation officer/case manager to the youth and family
- Review completed JNA with the youth and/or family
- Discuss behavior expectations with the youth related to conditions/court orders and supervision level

Part 2: Getting to Know the Youth

- Discuss the youth's goals
- Ask the youth what motivates him/her
- Use motivational interviewing skills (e.g., affirmation, open-ended questions)

Part 3: Understanding Behaviors

- Identify targeted behaviors
- Discuss antecedents/drivers with youth and family
- Discuss the idea of natural consequences with youth and family
- Identify what natural consequences occur when the targeted behavior is exhibited

Create a Behavior and Response Agreement

Most youth respond better to behavior plans that use positive reinforcements to encourage and teach appropriate, alternative (positive) behaviors. Behavior plans should also include teaching the youth to recognize antecedents and to think ahead about natural and probation consequences.

Use the positive behavior grid to identify and teach more acceptable replacement behaviors that serve a similar function (from the youth's perspective) to the targeted behavior. Use the violations and graduated response grids to explain how probation consequences, both positive and negative, will affect the youth's probation involvement.

Checklist

Part 1: Set Up and Administration

- Develop the service plan with the youth's and family's input
- Identify any barriers to the youth receiving the identified services
- Address/mitigate identified barriers
- Make all needed referrals

Part 2: Defining the Behaviors, Rewards, and Deterrents

- Use the positive behavior grid to work with the youth to identify positive behaviors that align with the youth's strengths.
- Discuss what natural consequences will occur when the positive behaviors are exhibited.
- Identify which positive rewards will be applied when these behaviors are exhibited
- Connect the targeted behavior and probation consequences to the violations grid and graduated response grid
- Discuss what natural consequences occur when the targeted behavior is exhibited
- Identify what probation consequences occur when the targeted behavior is exhibited

Part 3: Finalizing the Agreement

- Create a realistic plan for how each identified incentive is to be applied/awarded
- Develop a Behavior and Response Agreement with the youth and family's input
- Sign the agreement yourself and have the youth sign the agreement

Ask Yourself

- Did I conduct the interview without inserting my personal views and prejudice?
- What assumptions have I made about the cultural identity, genders, and background of family members?
- What is my understanding of this family's unique culture and circumstances?
- Has this case plan been created specifically for this youth and this family?
- How has the youth's juvenile justice history influenced (or how might it influence) my interactions with the youth and family?

REGULAR REVIEWS AND CHECK-INS

Review the Behavior Plan

Creating a behavior plan is not a one-time process. The behavior plan should be reviewed at least every 30 days. As a youth modifies his/her behavior, either negatively or positively, the agreement must be revised. It is also important to recognize that a youth's situation may change over time (e.g., changes in home life), necessitating a revised agreement. Additionally, changes in activities over the calendar year will need to be addressed. For example, if the targeted behavior is centered on academics or school attendance and it is summer break, a different behavior will need to be targeted.

If the youth successfully modifies most of the targeted behavior, be sure to inform the youth and supportive adults. The graduated response grid can help determine whether the youth is on track for early termination. If things are not going well, work with the youth to understand the reasons for not meeting behavior goals. Ask whether different rewards would better incentivize positive behavior modification. Discuss other behaviors that could still address the targeted service area needs and strength(s). It may be appropriate to complete the JNA again if the youth's circumstances have changed and to revise the Behavior and Response Agreement accordingly.

Checklist

Part 1: Set Up and Administration

- Have a face-to-face meeting with the youth
- Youth's parent/guardian is present
- Other supportive adults are present
- Use motivational interviewing skills (e.g., affirmation, open-ended questions)
- If due, complete a JNA reassessment
- Update the service plan
- Identify any barriers to the youth receiving the identified services
- Address/mitigate identified barriers
- Make all needed referrals

Part 2: Check-In/Review

- Discuss youth's progress toward target and positive behaviors
- Discuss youth's compliance with conditions/court orders
- Apply agreed-upon rewards from Rewards Group
- Apply agreed-upon deterrent from Deterrent Group

Part 3: Thinking Ahead/Planning for Next Steps

- Determine appropriate supervision color
- Determine whether youth is a candidate for administrative supervision or early termination
- File the appropriate request if youth qualifies for administrative supervision or early termination
- Determine whether revisions to the Behavior and Response Agreement are needed

Ask Yourself

- Did I conduct the meeting without inserting my personal views and prejudice?
- What assumptions have I made about the cultural identity, genders, and background of family members?
- What is my understanding of this family's unique culture and circumstances?
- Has this plan been created specifically for this youth and this family?
- How has the youth's juvenile justice history influenced (or how might it influence) my interactions with the youth and family?

Respond to Disruptions

Use the positive behavior grid, the violations grid, and the graduated response grid to identify the supervision color. This will help to determine whether modifications to the behaviors, behavioral agreement, or service plan need to be made, or if it is appropriate to refer the youth to court. Youth must have had three prior moderate and/or major violations (at least one must be major) while on Red Tier to be considered for a 7-, 14-, or 30-day stay in detention.

Checklist

Part 1: Set Up and Administration

- Determine whether the JNA or service plan need to be modified
- Determine whether the youth's Behavior and Response Agreement needs to be modified

Part 2: Check-In/Review

- Determine whether the noncompliance behavior(s) are already being addressed by another authority
- If the noncompliance behavior(s) are not already being addressed by another authority, refer to the Graduated Response Grid

Part 3: Thinking Ahead/Planning for Next Steps

- Determine appropriate supervision color
- Identify the number of prior moderate and/or major violations while on Red Tier
- Review case with a supervisor

Ask Yourself

- Did I review the noncompliance behavior without inserting my personal views and prejudice?
- What assumptions have I made about the circumstance this youth is in and his/her cultural identity, gender, and background?
- What is my understanding of this unique circumstance?
- How has the youth's juvenile justice history influenced (or how might it influence) my interactions with the youth and family?

**GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
THE GRADUATED RESPONSE APPROACH: BEHAVIOR GRID**

Violations Grid	Major (-4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence from home without permission for more than 24 hours Expulsion Removal from programming due to youth's noncompliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal from placement due to youth's noncompliance with conditions of placement without regional youth detention center placement Failed three or more drug screens (within specified timeframe)
	Moderate (-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Out-of-school suspension resulting in new offense Failure of second drug screen (within specified timeframe) Noncompliance with special conditions related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weapons; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gang activity; Sexual offenses; Victim/no contact status; and/or Co-perpetrator(s), if specific to violent offenses.
	Minor (-2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curfew violation Noncompliance with special conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Out-of-school suspension Failure of first drug screen
	Undesirable (-1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to comply with parental/home rules Missed appointment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School discipline issue Failure of drug screen while in active alcohol/drug treatment

	Domain	Social Orientation	Family Relationships	Living Skills/ Personal Growth	Education	Employment/ Vocation	Substance Use/Abuse	Peer Relationship
Positive Behavior Grid	Maintenance (+1)	Youth is doing at least one of the following. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not attending or participating in negative activities Attending mandated group/activity 	Youth's behavior does not disrupt the family.	Youth has long-term and/or life goals.	Youth is enrolled and attending school.	Youth is employed or pursuing vocational and/or employment skills.	Youth has not used drugs in 30 days.	Youth has limited interaction with peer groups with which he/she has had previous negative contact.
	Minor (+2)	Youth attended and/or participated in one organized team or group.	Youth is present and interacts positively with family.	Youth has long-term and/or life goals that are realistic.	Youth is seeking employment (e.g., completes applications and/or professional resume, completed job skills and/or vocational classes).	Youth is seeking employment (e.g., completes applications and/or professional resume, completed job skills and/or vocational classes).	Youth has not used drugs in 60 days.	Youth has established boundaries in his/her interactions with those peer groups that do not provide adequate/positive support and influence.
	Moderate (+3)	Youth attended and/or participated in more than one organized team or group.	Youth is doing at least one of the following. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively communicating with family members during conflict Actively participating in positive family activity 	Youth has long-term and/or life goals and is making steps to achieve those goals by seeking resources.	Youth is enrolled and attending school without recent behavior problems. Youth is maintaining consistent passing grades with positive educational report.	Youth has obtained employment.	Youth has not used drugs in 90 days.	Youth has begun interacting with a positive peer group.
	Major (+4)	Youth led an activity in an organized team or group setting.	Youth proactively engages with family members and models appropriate behaviors.	Youth has long-term and/or life goals and is using identified resources through personal investment.	Youth is enrolled and attending school without recent behavior problems. Youth has exceptional achievement (e.g., honor roll, perfect attendance, GED, graduation).	Youth is employed with a leadership position and/or receives an award/recognition.	Youth has successfully completed treatment.	Youth is interacting with a positive peer group and/or made a new positive friendship (e.g., parents are aware and/or approve of peer group/friends).

**GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
THE GRADUATED RESPONSE APPROACH
BEHAVIOR AND RESPONSE AGREEMENT**

Youth Name:

Youth ID:

Case Manager/Probation Officer:

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN YOUTH AND CASE MANAGER/PROBATION OFFICER

This contract represents the partnership between this youth and this case manager/probation officer. By signing this agreement, both of these people have made a commitment to creating positive behavior change. Others supporting this agreement may also sign to show that they will work to support these positive behavior changes.

Behaviors, Rewards, and Deterrents

1. Behavior:

Each time this behavior is accomplished, this youth will be rewarded.

Reward(s):

Each time this behavior is not accomplished, this youth will receive a deterrent.

Deterrent(s):

2. Behavior:

Each time this behavior is accomplished, this youth will be rewarded.

Reward(s):

Each time this behavior is not accomplished, this youth will receive a deterrent.

Deterrent(s):

3. Behavior:

Each time this behavior is accomplished, this youth will be rewarded.

Reward(s):

Each time this behavior is not accomplished, this youth will receive a deterrent.

Deterrent(s):

4. Behavior:

Each time this behavior is accomplished, this youth will be rewarded.

Reward(s):

Each time this behavior is not accomplished, this youth will receive a deterrent.

Deterrent(s):

Official Recognition of Responsibility

The youth, the case manager/probation officer, and any others who sign this agreement have committed to the behaviors, rewards, and deterrents named in this contract. By signing, all parties involved take responsibility to make and support positive behavior.

Youth's Name:

Youth's Signature: Date:

Case Manager's Name:

Case Manager's Signature: Date:

Name:

Signature: Date:

Name:

Signature: Date:

Name:

Signature: Date:

**GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
THE GRADUATED RESPONSE APPROACH
DETERRENT/REWARD GROUPS**

Deterrent	Reward
Group A	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS): Cost-benefit analysis • EPICS: Behavior chain • EPICS: Pros/cons • EPICS: Structured skill building • New Freedom assignment • Referral for further assessment • Apology letter 	
Group B	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reprimand by staff • Apology letter • Essay/research and learning project • Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) project/assignment • Loss of privilege • Loss of curfew • Referral for further assessment 	
Group C	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of privilege • Loss of curfew • Referral to community programs • Referral for further assessment • Education/work intervention/activity 	
Group D	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral to community group programs • ETC referral • Education/work program referral • Community service • School-based response 	
Group E	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased reporting/instruction • Day/evening reporting • Supervisory conference with juvenile program manager • Judicial reprimand 	
Group F	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of privileges • CBT project/assignment • Mediation • Restorative group conferencing • Behavior contract 	
Group G	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home confinement • Home confinement with electronic monitoring • Housebound • High-Intensity Team Supervision (HITS) • Tracking • Electronic monitoring 	

Note: Rewards will vary by court/county and will be developed as a training exercise and as part of implementation.