

**Policy & Practice Recommendations Regarding Police Interactions with Children and Youth**  
Commentary Submitted to Cleveland Mayor Jackson, U.S. District Attorney Dettelbach and  
Ohio Task Force on Community Police Relations  
**Executive Summary, March 2015**

The following summary highlights key data and recommendations submitted for consideration by the Schubert Center for Child Studies, joined by several CWRU faculty associates, to improve interactions between children and youth and police and the justice system. The full commentary and reference citations can be found at: <http://schubert.case.edu/files/2015/03/Final-Police-and-Youth-Letter-3.19.15.pdf>

**Background: Police Encounters with Children and Youth and the Importance of Understanding Child and Adolescent Development to Inform Effective Policing**

Youth contacts with police in the U.S. are significant. Nationally, 4 to 5 million youth ages 16 to 19 have face-to-face encounters with police annually. This estimate omits a number of children, including those under 16 who may encounter police at school or at home during a parent arrest. Racial disproportionality exists in juvenile arrest and detention rates. In addition to the recent fatal shooting of 12 year old Tamir Rice, the USDOJ Investigation of the Cleveland Division of Police identified examples of patterns of excessive use of force involving interactions with juveniles that raise concerns.

Principles of child and adolescent development provide critical insight on potential interactions between police and young people. Children are still developing and are fundamentally different from adults, including neurologically, psychosocially and emotionally. Key differences between adolescents and adults include decreased impulse control and future orientation, increased reward seeking and risk taking, and greater influence by the presence of peers. Children with intellectual deficits, developmental delays, mental illness and other special needs may further impair or skew judgment. The importance of adolescent development on law enforcement is highlighted in a March 2015 paper entitled "The Effects of Adolescent Development on Policing" released by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the March 2015 report by the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing.

**Policy Recommendations to Improve Interactions and Outcomes Between Police and Children & Youth**

We suggest policy changes in four areas directly impacting children and adolescents: (1) incorporate developmentally-informed law enforcement strategies; (2) adopt trauma-informed policing; (3) address implicit bias; and (4) reevaluate the role of police in the school setting (see link to full commentary for more details).

***Recommendation 1: Incorporate Developmentally-Informed Policing***

Training on child development is essential for law enforcement officers to understand the differences between children, youth, and adults and how to appropriately respond to young people. To do so, we recommend:

- (a) Include at least one member with child development expertise on the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission.
- (b) Incorporate specific training on adolescent development into the standard police recruit training program and require all existing officers to receive training on adolescent development.
- (c) Adopt model juvenile *Miranda* warnings and interviewing techniques as a matter of best practice.

- (d) Require parental notification prior to interviewing or placing a child in detention and consider policy changes limiting waiver of counsel for juveniles.
- (e) Adopt measures to ensure procedural justice, in combination with substantive due process protections, to strengthen the relationship between law enforcement, youth and the broader community.
- (f) Reframe police recruitment strategies to attract and retain officers whose primary goal is public service.

***Recommendation 2: Adopt Trauma-Informed Policing***

Adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse, neglect, witnessing violence and parental incarceration can be traumatic and have both immediate and have life-long consequences on healthy development. In addition to employing a developmentally informed strategy for policing, we also suggest training on the impact of trauma during childhood and potential police interactions. As such, we recommend:

- (a) Incorporate strategies to minimize child trauma during parental arrest.
- (b) Minimize the use of “Stop and Frisk” and unnecessary stops of adolescents.
- (c) Educate officers on the experience of microaggressions and racism as trauma.

***Recommendation 3: Address Implicit Race Bias***

Implicit bias is the unconscious “positive or negative mental attitude towards a person, thing, or group” and may conflict with one’s expressed beliefs. Implicit biases persist and may be powerful determinants of behavior precisely because people lack personal awareness of them. While implicit biases of all kinds are common, police officers should be aware of how implicit biases about race can unconsciously influence their decision-making and ways to counteract this bias in tactical procedures.

- (a) All officers should be provided training on implicit bias and implicit bias reduction strategies.

***Recommendation 4: Reevaluate the Role of Police and Exclusionary Discipline Practices in School***

By virtue of their status as a minor and public school student, certain segments of the population may regularly encounter police in their school environment. Despite the fact that juvenile violent crime and the rate of nonfatal victimizations against students both at and away from school is at its lowest in the last two decades, schools across the country, and in Ohio, have seen an increase in law enforcement presence in schools in an effort to address school safety. There is some debate over whether the increased placement of law enforcement officers in schools fosters greater trust and understanding between children and authorities or leads to increased criminalization of student conduct and removal of children from school. Minimally, we recommend:

- (a) A comprehensive review of the use and impact of police in our community’s public schools and related discipline policies, including the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and throughout the state of Ohio, in order to make public recommendations for appropriate school-police policy and practice improvements.
- (b) School districts which choose to have school-based police officers (whether municipal, school district or private security) should have a memorandum of understanding to clarify roles and expectations of law enforcement and the parameters of the school-police partnership.

Together these recommendations will lead to a more informed and effective police force and justice system, particularly in its interactions with children and young people, that will better serve the public’s shared interest in safe communities, fair administration of justice and positive community relationships.

For more information about the Schubert Center for Child Studies and the full commentary, please go to: <http://schubert.case.edu/>