

# Brain Injury and the Juvenile Justice System



Justice-involved youth with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) have more psychiatric distress, an earlier start to criminal behavior, earlier substance abuse, more lifetime substance use and suicidality.

67%



As high as 67% of detained youth have a **history of brain injury**. The brain injury occurred **before** the criminal offense in the majority.

3.38 times



Juvenile offenders are almost **3.4 times more likely to have a TBI** than non-justice involved youth.



69%



With a TBI, they have a **69% higher chance of re-offending**.

## BEST PRACTICE

The Juvenile Justice System should:

- **SCREEN** for prior history of Brain Injury
- **ASSESS** Cognitive & Functional Impairment
- **EDUCATE** staff on Brain Injury
- **EDUCATE** the person about their Brain Injury
- **PROVIDE** and **TEACH** Accommodations
- **CONNECT** person served with Community Resources

## COMMON PROBLEMS

After Brain Injury, we often see problems with:

- Attention, memory and new learning
- Slowed speed of processing
- Organization, problem solving & impulsivity
- Irritability, frustration & agitation
- Balance, dizziness & headaches
- Poor awareness of deficits & difficulties
- Difficulty being flexible, poor self-monitoring

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Juvenile Justice personnel may see:

- Looking uninterested because they cannot pay attention
- Appearance of defiance because they cannot remember the rules
- Slow to follow directions because they cannot process quickly
- Getting into fights because of irritability, anger and impulsivity
- Falling into things, often getting hurt
- Difficulty in school or holding a job
- Vulnerability to being exploited by others
- Cannot express themselves, becoming frustrated, then aggressive

Many studies have shown that while youth crime is a growing international concern, harsh sentences and punitive approaches **increase** the chances that youth will re-offend.

-Coalition for Juvenile Justice

# Common Accommodations for Brain Injury Challenges

Here are some common and simple accommodations:

- Working for shorter periods of time
- Getting rid of distractions around you, like noise or movement
- Taking notes (on paper, in a notebook, on a phone or computer)
- Using a phone to set timers to remember appointments
- Repeating information to the person
- Slowing down when talking; giving them more time to respond
- Giving the person a list of house rules, written directions, or pictures to help them understand and remember
- Coaching the person with the injury to “Stop, think and plan” then act
- Coaching the person to take deep breaths when feeling angry or anxious



Take Note

## Tools for Best Practice

**Brain Links' Strategies & Accommodations Tool:** <https://www.tndisability.org/rehabilitation>

**Symptom Questionnaire:** <https://mindsourcicolorado.org/adult-symptom-questionnaire/>

**Cognitive Strategies Guidebook:** <https://mindsourcicolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Strategies-and-Accommodations-Guidebook-CJ-Professionals-5.6.19.pdf>

**Brain Injury Screening Resources:**

- **OSU TBI Identification Method:** <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/neuroscience-research-institute/research-centers/ohio-valley-center-for-brain-injury-prevention-and-rehabilitation/osu-tbi-id>
- **NASHIA's OBISSS:** <https://www.nashia.org/obissprogram>



## Tennessee Resources

**Brain Links' Website** with many resources:  
[tndisability.org/brain](https://www.tndisability.org/brain)

**Brain Links' Toolkits** (for Service Professionals and Survivors): <https://www.tndisability.org/brain-toolkits>

**TN Department of Health TBI Program:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/3v5jrdt3>



**Tennessee Brighter Futures' Resource Pages & Training for Brain Injury:**

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-brain-injury>



**Resource Pages & Training for Juvenile Justice:**

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-juvenile-justice>

**TN Brighter Futures is organized and facilitated by Brain Links through a contract from the TN Department of Health TBI Program.**

### References:

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Juvenile Justice Resources

