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CHILDREN'S DISCUSSIONS OF LYING ARE MORE COMPLETE IF ASKED ABOUT OTHER CHILDREN LYING RATHER THAN THEMSELVES

Courts often test child witness competency by asking them to discuss the difference between a truth and a lie. However, young children may refuse to discuss the consequences of lying because they view lying as something they would never do, which can lead to an underestimation of their competency as witnesses. A study of maltreated 5- and 6-year olds found that they were more willing to discuss lying when asked about what would happen to a hypothetical "other" child who lied, as opposed to themselves. Children who were asked about the consequences of their own lying refused to respond or responded "I don't know" to more questions than did children who were asked about the consequences of a hypothetical child lying. There were no differences between the two groups in the proportion of questions in which the child referred to a negative consequence of lying, suggesting that children asked to discuss another child's lies understood the importance of telling the truth as much as children asked about their own lies. Overall, results indicated that in order to elicit more information about lying, children should be asked about the consequences of a hypothetical child lying rather than themselves (i.e., if this girl told a lie to the judge, what would the judge do?). The authors also noted that many of these maltreated children had vocabulary delays. Therefore, children who testify should be assessed for language delays, and practitioners should be sensitive to their special vulnerabilities.

Lyon, T. D., Saywitz, K. J., Kaplan, D. L., & Dorado, J. S. (2001). Reducing maltreated children's reluctance to answer hypothetical oath-taking competency questions. *Law and Human Behavior*, 25, 81-92.

GUN SAFETY INSTRUCTION MAY NOT STOP YOUTH FROM HANDLING OR FIRING GUNS

A group of researchers at Emory University studied 8- to 12-year-old boys' reactions to finding toy guns and a real gun (disabled, but recorded when the trigger had been depressed with enough force to discharge the weapon). Each boy and a similar-aged peer or brother was observed in an examination room for up to 15 minutes via a one-way mirror. The pairs of boys were given permission to play with toys on a counter, but were instructed not to touch anything else. Stored within one drawer were two water pistols; within another drawer was a real handgun. Of the 64 boys in the study, 48 (75%) discovered the handgun. Sixty-three percent of boys who discovered the handgun handled it, and 33% of those who handled it fired the weapon. Only one boy left the room immediately after finding the handgun; three boys went to find

an adult only after handling the gun. Results concerning the boys' previous knowledge of guns and their behavior in the observation room revealed that 93% of those who handled the gun, and 94% of those who pulled the trigger reported having some kind of previous firearm safety instruction. Ratings by parents of their sons' interest in guns did not accurately predict whether a boy would handle or fire the found gun. Only 33% of boys rated as "high" interest by their parents handled the gun, while 78% of boys rated as "moderate" interest and 65% of boys rated as "low" interest handled the gun. A similar percentage of the boys in each level of interest in guns (33% of high interest, 33% of moderate interest, and 35% of low interest) pulled the trigger. Boys from gun-owning and non-gun-owning families were equally likely to handle the gun and to pull the trigger. The authors drew three conclusions: parents need to be informed that gun safety instruction may not keep children from handling or firing firearms; safety regulations and policies need to be enforced; and firearms need to be engineered to stricter safety standards.

Jackman, G. A., Farah, M. M., Kellerman, A. L., & Simon, H. K. (2001). Seeing is believing: What do boys do when they find a real gun? *Pediatrics*, 107, 1247-1250.

YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF BOOT CAMPS MORE FAVORABLE THAN YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF TRADITIONAL FACILITIES

Advocates for juvenile boot camps argue that they encourage youth towards more positive attitudes and behaviors, while critics argue that they lack the therapeutic environment youth offenders need. In this study of 26 boot camps and 22 traditional facilities, youth in boot camps perceived their experience as more therapeutic and less hostile than youth in traditional facilities. Youth in boot camps also perceived their environment as being more restrictive of personal freedom. Youth in boot camps reported larger positive changes for prosocial attitudes, depression, impulsivity, anxiety, and social bonds. However, this may simply be because youth in boot camps (who were initially less anxious and depressed) viewed their environment more positively, so were more likely to react positively. Youth with a history of family violence seemed to do better in traditional facilities. Thus, boot camps may be ineffective and possibly detrimental to those with a history of family violence. Only small changes in factors related to recidivism (prosocial attitudes, social bonds, and impulse control) occurred in either group, indicating that both types of facilities may have a very limited impact on future delinquent activities. The authors noted that since few of the facilities record follow-up information on the youth after discharge, the staffs have little ability to judge the effectiveness of components of their programs.

MacKenzie, D. L., Wilson, D. B., Armstrong, G. S., & Gover, A. R. (2001). The impact of boot camps and traditional institutions on juvenile residents: Perceptions, adjustment, and change. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 38, 279-313.

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MISSION STATEMENT: The *RAP Sheet* is intended to inform professionals across the state of Nebraska of current findings from social science research that could impact the delivery of services to children and families. Summaries of recent articles from academic journals (and occasionally book chapters) on the areas of child protection and juvenile justice are the focus, with smaller sections reserved for announcements and websites of interest. Other topics will be included in special issues as needed. Citations are provided in the format used by the American Psychological Association (APA), and are available through many university libraries. The *RAP Sheet* is funded in part by the State of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services System. Comments and suggestions are always welcome and can be sent to the editors or faculty advisor.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO DATING AGGRESSION MAY ESCALATE AGGRESSION

The frequency of dating aggression in high school relationships, and the responses to that aggression, are troubling. A study of 476 high school students found that 45.6% students who had been or were in a relationship reported ever experiencing physical aggression by a partner. In addition, only 9% (34) of those who had experienced physical aggression reported that this aggression was exclusive, which suggests that aggression is often met with returned aggression in these relationships. The highest rate of victimization was reported by African American (60%), followed by White (47%) and then Hispanic (41%) students. Not surprisingly, females were more likely than males to report victimization. More females than males reported that they reciprocated the aggression (42% of females vs. 26% of males), responded by crying (36% vs. 7%) and talked to friends (35% to 14%). More males than females reported that they were likely to do nothing in response to a partner's aggression (24% vs. 6%). Overall, students were relatively unlikely to use formal help resources, but instead responded aggressively, breaking up the relationship, informal help-seeking (mainly from friends and partner) and doing nothing. The authors noted that the high rate of aggressive responses versus the low rate of formal help-seeking was of concern, and that school and community-based interventions need to help students realize that non-aggressive responses are available. In addition, because talking to friends and partners was the help-seeking behavior mentioned most often, the need for peer support and education to ensure that peers are communicating the appropriate message is warranted.

Watson, J. M., Cascardi, M., Avery-Leaf, S., & O'Leary, K. D. (2001). High school students' responses to dating aggression. *Violence and Victims, 16*, 339-348.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SEVERITY OF PROBLEM BEHAVIORS ARE PREDICTORS OF TYPE OF JUVENILE OFFENDER PLACEMENT

Placement decisions about juvenile offenders are made on a case-by-case basis, with room for interpretation by the courts. These authors sought to understand the factors that were associated with different placements. File reviews of over 600 petitioned, adjudicated, or incarcerated juveniles revealed variables that distinguished between youth who had been referred for probation (and returned to the community), and youth who had been placed in residential treatment centers or incarcerated in the Department of Corrections. Not surprisingly, youth with histories of more severe behavioral problems (e.g., possession/use of firearm, chronic school truancy, prior treatment for substance abuse or mental health) and youth with parents who were less knowledgeable and/or motivated about their youth's problems were more likely to be incarcerated or placed in residential treatment than to be returned to the community. It is important to note that these variables predicted the type of placement even when controlling statistically for a large set of demographic and clinical variables. The authors' interpretation is that, all other things being equal, the severity of the youth's problems and the involvement of the youth's parents tend to be the strongest predictors of placement. Additional strong predictors included

the presence of a learning disability, and an untreated cannabis abuse problem, both of which were associated with a higher likelihood of being placed on probation.

Lyons, J. S., Baerger, D. R., Quigley, P., Erlich, J., & Griffin, E. (2001). Mental health service needs of juvenile offenders: A comparison of detention, incarceration, and treatment settings. *Children's Services: Social Policy, Research, and Practice, 4*, 69-85.

AGE DIFFERENCES IN JUVENILE CRIMINAL DECISION-MAKING

One reason that the juvenile court began as a rehabilitative model was the belief that juveniles are less mature, and thus less responsible, for the offenses they commit. However, the juvenile court has become increasingly punitive towards youth offenders. These authors argue that if developmental differences in adolescent criminal decision-making do exist, because adolescents have less developed decision-making capabilities, then a system that holds adolescents to adult-like standards of criminal responsibility and culpability may be inappropriate. In this study, 56 13- to 18-year-olds viewed a video clip in which a group of adolescents' poor judgment led to a crime with serious consequences. In general, adolescents at the youngest and oldest ends of the age continuum demonstrated more mature levels of development than those in the middle of the continuum (15-16 years old). Adolescents in the middle age range (15-16 years old) had the lowest levels of future orientation (the inclination to attend to long-range consequences), lowest levels of resistance to peer influence, were less likely to evaluate risks as more likely to occur, and were less likely to think that the youth should have been able to anticipate that someone might get hurt, as compared to younger and older adolescents. Younger adolescents may be merely imitating their parents or other adult role models, without having truly developed levels of maturity on these factors; middle adolescents, then, would be in a transitional stage of judgment. Alternatively, during middle adolescence youth may experience a developmental phase that is characterized by less mature decision-making. This research suggests modest support for the existence of developmental differences in juvenile criminal decision-making, which should be taken into account in sentencing, especially if poorer judgment in decision making is a phase common to all 15-and-16-year-olds.

Fried, C. S., & Reppucci, N. D. (2001). Criminal decision making: The development of adolescent judgment, criminal responsibility, and culpability. *Law and Human Behavior, 25*, 45-61.

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