

Office of Children's Mental Health: Focuses on improving outcomes for emerging adults in the criminal justice system

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Office of Children's Mental Health Director Linda Hall today announces the publication of a new fact sheet [Improving Outcomes for Emerging Adults in the Criminal Justice System](#) and what our communities, schools, parents, and policymakers can do to make a difference.

Emerging adults (ages 18-25) who break the law have the potential to lead safe and productive lives. Understanding the role of crime in their life and the value of positive, healthy social connections are critical for getting them back on track.

- Brain development occurs up to age 26 and still places emerging adults (18-25) at risk of impulsive behavior and susceptibility to peer pressure, particularly if their early years have been traumatic or they have unmet mental health needs.
- Crime by emerging adults tends to reflect a temporary life stage rather than a long-term criminal tendency.
- Emerging adults represented 10% of the population and 21% of incarcerated people.

The Wisconsin Division of Juvenile Corrections has helpful approaches for juveniles that could be useful in working with emerging adults in Wisconsin's correctional system. These include:

- Ensuring that young people have promising community connections upon

release.

- Striving to keep young people closer to their communities while in detention.
- Utilizing trauma-informed approaches.
- Facilitating virtual and in-person family visits.
- Use of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) and other best practices.

What We Can Do

Policymakers

- Ensure all minors are held in juvenile facilities until they reach the age of 18.
- Apply some of the practices used for juvenile offenders to the emerging adult population.
- Use “emerging adults” as a category in Wisconsin’s correctional reporting systems to better track the needs, risks, and services offered to this age group.

Communities

- Assist emerging adults with re-entry by offering programs and incentives to help them continue their education and professional skills.
- Start a “Ban the Box” initiative with local employers to ensure individuals with a criminal background are not discriminated against in their employment journey.
- Create spaces and opportunities for families to remain connected during incarceration of emerging adults.

See the [complete fact sheet](#)

See [previous fact sheets](#)