

New Jersey Juvenile Detention Association Annual Training Conference

Schedule of Workshops

Wednesday, September 16, 2026
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Session 101: **She Matters: Engaging Justice Involved Girls with Purpose & Compassion**
Instructor: **Jew-Lia Thigpen & Katie Duffie**

This presentation explores the unique experiences, challenges, and strengths of girls involved in the juvenile justice system. Participants will examine the impact of trauma, relationships, identity development, and systemic barriers on girls in youth detention settings. Through a strength-based lens, the session highlights practical strategies, including role play, for fostering meaningful connections, promoting resilience, and building the emotional, social, and life skills necessary for positive growth and successful restoration.

Attendees will gain tools to create supportive environments that empower girls, strengthen their sense of self-worth, and encourage healthy decision-making.

Session 102: **Mental Health Disorders**
Instructor: **Dr. Nicholas Montello, Director of Bergen County Division of Family Guidance**

This course will discuss common mental health conditions often exhibited by youth in the juvenile justice system. Topics will include youth depression, anxiety, and related clinical disorders. A discussion of isolation, social connectedness and its impact on juveniles will also be discussed. The course is designed to be accessible for a general audience and for a participant with a variety of levels of knowledge of mental health. Course will give a brief overview of behaviors and conditions and to inform the work performed by juvenile detention staff. Participants can expect to learn about common mental health conditions, relevant statistics, self-care, and to recognize how their approach and interventions with youth can interact with these conditions and issues.

Session 103: **Leadership Foundations**
Instructor: **Superintendent Edward Costanzo, Youth Justice Commission**

This session is a specialized leadership training designed to strengthen character, influence and relational effectiveness of professionals working with at-risk and justice involved youth. It moves beyond traditional compliance-based approaches and focuses on developing staff who lead with integrity, consistency and purpose – understanding that who you are is just as important as what you do. Participants will strengthen their leadership and character foundation, improve their ability to connect with and influence youth, develop practical strategies to guide youth toward better decision-making, lead in a way that promotes long-term positive outcomes – not just short-term compliance.

Wednesday, September 16, 2026
1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Session 104: **Human Trafficking**
Instructor: **AVANZAR & Detective Jason Maloney, NJSP**

Collaborative work in the field of Human Trafficking is crucial. To impact the crime takes a multidisciplinary team working together for the same goal; supporting the healing of the victims while prosecuting the perpetrators. In this session you will be provided with an overview of the continuum of abuse that creates a high vulnerability to being recruited into human trafficking. How to identify a victim or someone in the recruitment process will be explored. You will gain knowledge of the complexities of trauma and the bodies responses after repeated exposure along with recommendations for engagement. Though interactive role-play activities participants will also practice building rapport, fostering trust, and utilizing effective communication techniques that will help engage this population. A look at the law and how it pertains to all forms of trafficking and exploitation of our youth and why it takes a collaborative team to have an impact on this heinous crime.

Session 105: **Youth Gang Culture in New Jersey**
Instructor: **Reyna Ruback & Willard Roberts, NJ Youth Justice Commission**

Gang-related activity continues to impact communities across New Jersey. The New Jersey Youth Justice Commission (YJC) works with schools, community organizations, and law enforcement agencies to address youth gang involvement through prevention, intervention, and education. This training provides an overview of youth gang culture, including recruitment and initiation practices, gang structures, warning signs, reasons youth join gangs, and common gang-related activities. Participants will also learn to identify gang symbols, including hand signs, tattoos, graffiti, clothing, and social media influences.

The session will examine several prominent gangs, security threat groups and hate groups, including the Bloods, Crips, 18th Street, Latin Kings, MS-13, and White Supremacist organizations. This course is designed for educators, youth-serving professionals, law enforcement personnel, and community stakeholders seeking to strengthen their awareness of gang-affiliated youth and effective response strategies. In addition, the training highlights emerging trends in youth gang culture, online recruitment tactics, and evolving threat groups, helping participants stay informed as new gangs, extremist movements, and security concerns arise within communities.

Session 106: Regulation Before Intervention: Staff Wellness & Nervous System Based Strategies for De-escalation in Juvenile Detention Settings

**Instructor: Lauren Casas, LPC, ACS & Melissa Murphy, LPC, ACS
Preferred Behavioral Health Group**

Juvenile detention staff are asked to manage escalating behaviors while working in environments that are fast-paced, unpredictable, and emotionally demanding. This session explores how staff wellness, trauma-informed neuroscience, and body-based regulation strategies intersect to create safer, more effective interactions with youth. Participants will learn how adversity shapes the nervous system, how to recognize signs of dysregulation in real time, and how to use simple, evidence-aligned tools to help youth shift from survival states to calmer, more connected states. This is a highly interactive session that blends brief teaching segments with hands-on activities, demonstrations, and small-group practice.

Thursday, September 15, 2016

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Session 201: **Bridging The Gaps: Understanding and Supporting Immigrant Youth**
Instructor: **Gabriella Silva, Esq & Susannah Volpe, Esq, Office of Public Defender**

Using a variety of modalities, including lectures guided by PowerPoints, small group discussions, large group games, interactive role plays, and question and answer sessions, we will address issues arising for system-involved immigrant youth.

The session will begin with an overview of the immigration path for many non-US citizen youth arriving in the USA. We will then discuss how immigrant youth may become systems-involved, including addressing concerns particular to noncitizen youth which may not arise in the cases of their US citizen peers. We will conclude by providing tips and strategies to recognize and advocate for noncitizen youth whom participants may encounter in their daily practices.

Session 202: **Youth Substance Use in the Justice System: Risks, Trends, and Response**
Instructor: **Tameka Chatman, MA, LCADC, SAP, Rutgers University Behavioral Health Ctr**

Substance use is highly prevalent among youth involved in the justice system and can increase the likelihood of continued involvement into adulthood. This course provides a comprehensive overview of addiction, including its prevalence, major drug categories, and the evolving landscape of emerging substances. Participants will explore key risk and protective factors influencing youth substance use, along with important biopsychosocial considerations and the short- and long-term consequences of use. Through interactive large- and small-group activities and discussions, participants will enhance their understanding and build practical knowledge to inform their work with youth.

Session 203: **Unlocking Potential: Breaking the Cycle: Collaborative Strategies to Engage, Motivate & Inspire Youth in Corrections**

Instructor: **Alexis Dixon, Supervisor of Special Education, NJ Youth Justice Commission**
Christopher “Talib” Charriez, Higher Education in Prisons Consultant & Fellow
With McNealy Education Consortium, Marquette University

Christopher “Talib” Charriez is a justice impacted scholar, educator, and community organizer whose work bridges higher education, reentry & grassroots power. Talib’s commitment to power organizing grows from a deep understanding of powerlessness-having spent 24 years incarcerated, from adolescence to adulthood –and his belief in education, faith and collective action as pathways to transformation.

Driven by a shared mission to uplift justice-involved youth, Talib and Alexis will deliver a powerful, transformative workshop for correctional and educational staff. They specialize in turning disconnected environments into spaces of motivation, hope and academic drive. Through teamwork strategies and actionable engagement tools, Talib and Alexis will inspire staff to become powerful catalysts for change in the lives of justice-impacted youth.

Thursday, September 17, 2026
1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Session 204: Bias, Prejudice, and Stereotypes, How Do They Affect Us
Instructor: Chief David D'Amico, Middlesex County Dept of Corrections & Youth Services

Prejudice and discrimination often are root causes of human conflict, which explains how strangers come to hate one another. Prejudice and discrimination affect everyone. In this interactive workshop we will examine the definitions of prejudice and discrimination, discuss examples of these concepts, and cause of these biases. Our perception is how we view, respond and react to every experience.

This workshop is designed to understand what stereotypes and biases are. We will discuss how to recognize our own biases and how to move beyond them to a more balanced ability to evaluate and understand people.

Session 205: Strength Under Stress: Skills to Stay Grounded & Guide Youth
Instructor: Alina Pliatskovskaia, Erin McCormick, Kate Dorando
Ocean County Care Management Organization

This training is designed to equip attendees with practical tools for managing moments of overwhelm in the workplace and supporting youth through de-escalation. Participants will explore the impact of compassion fatigue and burnout, learn to recognize both internal and external triggers, and build awareness of how these factors influence responses to stress. The session also introduces accessible mindfulness strategies and simple yoga techniques that can be used personally or alongside youth to promote grounding, emotional regulation, and a return to calm. By the end of the training, attendees will leave with a toolkit of strategies to enhance their own well-being and strengthen their ability to guide young people through challenging moments.

Session 206: Establishing Boundaries
Instructor: Superintendent Loretta Nichols, Atlantic County Youth Center

This course emphasizes the importance of establishing and maintaining professional boundaries with youth detained at juvenile facilities. There will be activities geared to assist with understanding the difference between a professional relationship versus a social relationship. The course will explore how to provide care and service in a professional manner to prevent confusion, exploitation, and physical safety for both the youth and staff. Participants will be able to identify appropriate boundaries, identify stressful situations that create vulnerability, and prevent over and under involvement with youth.

Friday, September 18, 2026

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Session 301: Working With Sexually Abusive Offenders
Instructor: Superintendent Loretta Nichols, Atlantic County Youth Center

The course is a two-part course that will cover the range of adolescent sexual behaviors from typical, to concerning, to illegal. After establishing the range of sexual behavior – we will engage in a review of the types of risk assessment, clinical treatment, and treatment goals. This discussion will also highlight contact (sexual assault) versus non-contact offenses (Child Sexual Abuse/Exploitation Materials) and the type of treatment of each offense type. Supervision strategies for corrections officers, probation officers, and parole officers will be discussed. Current research will be used as basis for discussion. Participation from the professionals in attendance will be encouraged so we can view facets of the treatment and supervision of juvenile offenders.

Session 302: Building Confidence
Instructor: Superintendent Loretta Nichols, Atlantic County Youth Center

How does it feel to be unsure of yourself in your job? What do you do if you don't know how to react. Why is the way you interact with people and how you present yourself so important. This session is designed to build your confidence and give you practical skills on how to deal with that situation. You will be provided with insights on ways to be more successful when working with young people.

Session 303: Suicide Prevention / Self Care
Instructor: Diana Gatti & Carl Jones, Youth Justice Commission Training Academy

Suicide Prevention and Self-care Training provides participants with both skills to support individuals at risk and personal strategies to maintain their own mental well-being. The goal of this training is to help those working with at-risk youth identify warning signs of suicidal ideation, including behavioral, emotional, and situational cues, and apply crisis intervention techniques for de-escalation, active listening, and safe engagement during a mental health crisis with a focus on self-care and personal wellness. It will concentrate on stress management to prevent burnout and maintain resilience. The discussions will include boundary setting when supporting others at risk, mental health maintenance, empathy and compassion fatigue prevention, and peer support and resilience building.

The training aims to create a competent, compassionate, and supported workforce capable of delivering safe, effective suicide prevention while protecting their own mental health. It blends professional service with personal wellness practices, ensuring that those who support others at risk are also supported in their own well-being. Fostering a supportive environment for both youth and colleagues encourages mutual care and shared coping strategies.