

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

F-13

Pre-Adjudicatory Assessment: Do or Do Not...

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Conducting pre-adjudicatory assessments is rife with opportunity, both to the benefit and detriment of the youth we serve. Balancing the risks and rewards requires understanding the system in which you are working and communicating clear boundaries with stakeholders. Critical to the process is implementing your own clear processes with stakeholders and communicating effectively. Pre-adjudicatory assessment can sometimes be mistaken by stakeholders as a matter of course, so it is important to keep in mind that doing a pre-adjudicatory in one situation may not be a good idea in another.

In Alabama, we have a bifurcated juvenile justice system, so each of our 67 counties abide by the same policies, but each county may interpret or enforce the policies differently, at a local level. This adds another layer of complexity to an already complex issue. It requires that the assessor understand the systems within each of the counties where he or she may provide assessment. An assessor may choose to offer pre-adjudicatory assessments in some local jurisdictions and not in others due to differences in implementation of policy.

Juvenile courts may value pre-adjudicatory assessments as a way to assist in determining if a youth can be managed safely in the community and recommendations for supervision. In Alabama, there are few treatment providers for youth adjudicated of a sexual offense and no providers in most of the 67 counties. In addition, Alabama chose to implement the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), increasing the consequences for youth adjudicated for sexual offenses. Guidance from a pre-adjudicatory assessment can help courts manage these cases more effectively, allowing youth to remain in the community, when indicated and decreasing commitments to residential programs, unnecessarily.

In this session, we will discuss the benefits of providing pre-adjudicatory assessments and some potential pitfalls to avoid. We will also provide attendees with examples of how we establish clear expectations from stakeholders and communicate about legal rights with youth and their families. We will present our own model for pre-adjudicatory assessment, based on ATSA guidelines for best practices as an example of how providers can implement their own policies.

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Learning Goals:

- Provide participants with views on pre-adjudicatory assessment from legal and clinical perspectives,
- Present a model for pre-adjudicatory assessment based on ATSA guidelines, and
- Offer some concrete tools for the pre-adjudicatory assessment process.

Mandi R. Fowler, PhD, LICSW, PIP

As the Associate Director of Youth Services Institute (YSI), Mandi Fowler provides clinical oversight for the institute's community based programs that provides trauma informed treatment services to youth with illegal sexual behavior and children with sexual behavior problems. She also directs many of the institute's research activities. She is currently part of a multidisciplinary leadership team implementing Trauma Systems Therapy (TST) in the Tuscaloosa community. Dr. Fowler is a nationally certified therapist for youth with illegal sexual behavior and children with sexual behavior problems, and a nationally certified therapist in Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT).

Jill R. Beck, JD

As the Director of Youth Services Institute, Jill Beck oversees the entity's two main projects – an inpatient, trauma-focused juvenile justice facility for girls and an outpatient therapeutic program in 19 counties across Alabama for children who have sexual behavior problems or have committed sexual delinquencies. She is also a key member of a leadership team working to implement Trauma Systems Therapy in Tuscaloosa County. Ms. Beck is a former Tuscaloosa County Deputy District Attorney who specialized in the prosecution of domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault in adult and juvenile courts.