

STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING: OVERVIEW

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Risk assessments estimate the likelihood of a youth committing a new offense. Risk assessments inform placement decisions and help guard against unnecessarily placing youth out of their home or in a secure facility. Placing youth out of their homes removes youth from their families and the supports in the community that can have a positive influence on a youth's development. Secure placement specifically, can increase the chances that a youth will commit another offense¹ and has a negative effect on educational and work outcomes.² Risk assessments are meant to increase public safety, focus resources appropriately and ensure that youth with the same risk levels are treated similarly.

DYRS uses a validated risk assessment called Structured Decision-Making (SDM). An overview of important facts about the SDM is below.

The SDM is an evidence-based tool used to inform placement decisions.

- Developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and National Council on Crime and Delinquency
- Designed to increase public safety, focus resources, and ensure youth get comparable services
- Provides rationality, transparency, and uniformity to decision making

The SDM is used only at the time of commitment or recommitment.

- Designed to be completed once for initial placement decisions only
- Can only be redone if a youth is recommitted
- Because it is a static risk assessment and can only be used once, it does not take into account youth progress
- A low SDM should not be overlooked and a high SDM should not necessarily affect later decision-making

The SDM is only one tool used to inform decisions about placement.

- DYRS uses other tools such as CAFAS, Team Decision-Making, other assessments, and other factors to make placement decisions.
- The SDM is not used in placement decisions after commitment. Throughout commitment, DYRS uses all of the tools included above as well as evidence of youth progress to make placement decisions.

¹ National Research Council, *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach* (Washington, DC: National Research Council, 2013). www.nap.edu/catalog/14685/reforming-juvenile-justice-a-developmental-approach

² Anna Aizer and Joseph Doyle. "Juvenile Confinement, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges," *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 19102* (June 2013).

SDM uses a matrix of two scores—offense severity and risk level— to arrive at a level of restrictiveness recommendation.

- Offense severity: Most recent, most serious conviction
 - Typical breakdown of offenses
 - High-Violent Felonies, Weapons
 - Medium-Violent Misdemeanors, Property Felonies, Drug Felonies
 - Low- Property Misdemeanors, Drug Misdemeanors, status offenses, PINS
- Risk Level: Consists of social factors
 - Social Factors include:
 - Age at first arrest for first conviction
 - Number of prior convictions
 - Number of prior violent/assaultive convictions
 - Supervision
 - Relationships
 - Substance abuse
 - Number of out of home placements