



# Children, Youth and Mental Illness

*Working with the Juvenile & Criminal Justice System – What You Need to Know*

Currently, 8.5 million youth age 18 and under are uninsured. And among those with private or public insurance, mental health coverage frequently is minimal or non-existent. As long as this fact remains true, children and youth who are affected by mental illness and other emotional disorders are vulnerable.

## Facts about Children, Teens and the Juvenile Justice System

- 15,000 children with psychiatric disorders were improperly incarcerated last year because no mental health services were available.<sup>1</sup>
- Youth with serious mental illness make up 25% of the population in the juvenile justice system, and their numbers are increasing.<sup>2</sup>
- Youth with co-occurring disorders often are incarcerated rather than treated.<sup>3</sup>
- Detention centers in 33 states hold mentally ill youth without charges due to lack of mental health services.<sup>4</sup>
- Children as young as 7 years old are locked in detention centers across the country because they have a mental illness and there are no services.<sup>5</sup>
- In over half of the reporting centers in California, children had attempted suicide.
- Between 50% to 75% of youth in juvenile justice facilities suffer from diagnosable mental health disorder and frequently do not receive counseling, treatment or support.<sup>6</sup>

***“The use of juvenile detention facilities to warehouse children with mental disorders is a serious.” Senator Collins, Maine.***

## What Needs to be Done to Make a Change

- If you have a child who is in detention or involved with the juvenile justice system now, get support through the Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health. Call our national office or your state chapter or visit [www.ffcmh.org](http://www.ffcmh.org).
- Help educate people in your community who can change laws. Give them a copy of these facts. Talk to them about the harm of placing children with mental illness, behavioral disorders and/or substance abuse issues in detention.
- Fight for parity (equality) to ensure mental illness is covered by insurance companies as equal as any other medical condition. Help reduce stigma everywhere. Correct negative talk about mental illness. Remember, mental illness is a no-fault disease that is not a crime.

<sup>1</sup> House Committee on Government Reform, Nationwide Study on Juvenile Detention Centers, 2004

<sup>2</sup> DHHS, 2002

<sup>3</sup> DHHS, 2002

<sup>4</sup> House Committee on Government Reform, Nationwide Study on Juvenile Detention Centers, 2004

<sup>5</sup> House Committee on Government Reform, Nationwide Study on Juvenile Detention Centers, 2004

<sup>6</sup> Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ), 2000 Report: Handle with Care – *Serving the Mental Health Needs of Young Offenders*, p. 11.