

# Occasional Paper

of the Wayne County Juvenile Assessment Center

Fall 2007

## **JIFF: *Juvenile Inventory for Functioning*** *A Guide for Service Providers to Share with Parents, Caregivers, and Youth*

By Dr. Kay Hodges, © 2007

### **What is the JIFF?**

The Juvenile Inventory for Functioning (JIFF) identifies behaviors and symptoms that affect how a youth functions in everyday life. Research shows that when a young person has significant problems in day-to-day functioning, those problems can interfere with his or her development. All youths have problems from time to time. It is critical, however, to prevent problems from interfering with the youth becoming a happy, well-adjusted adult.

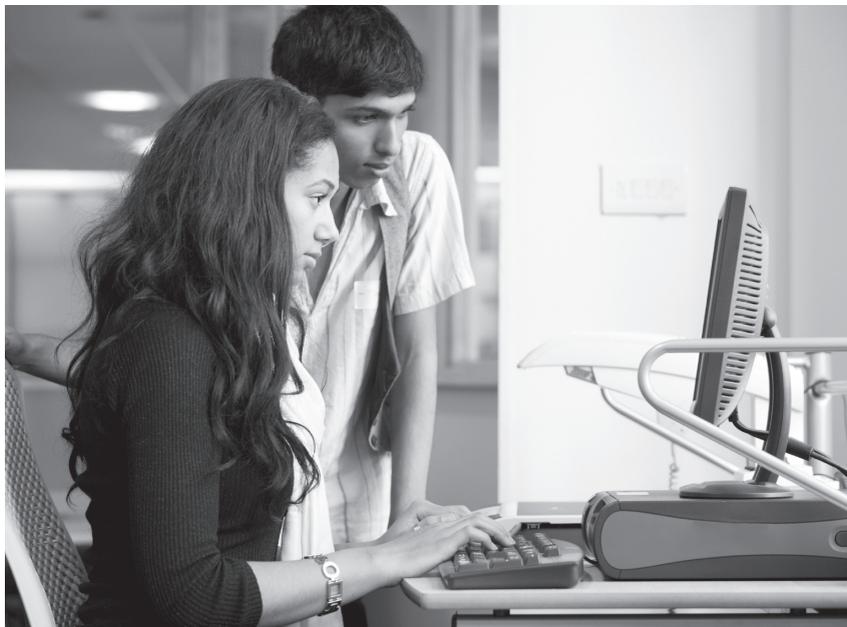
The JIFF was designed for youth referred to juvenile justice, child welfare and school counseling. The youth may have gotten into some trouble, or been

referred because of a specific incident or behavior. To help a child, it is important to look at the child's overall needs.

### **Who Completes the JIFF?**

The JIFF is a computerized interview that is self-administered. That means the computer reads the questions and possible answers for the youth, and the youth chooses the answer on the computer screen. Most kids really like it. The majority of the time, the youth completes the interview. When possible, the parent (or other caregiver) is also asked to complete the interview. When

the parent completes the JIFF, the parent gives his or her view of the child's functioning.



*As part of the JIFF interview, youths answer questions and input answers directly into a computer.*

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## How does the JIFF work?

The JIFF computerized interview asks what is happening in the child’s life in 10 different areas of functioning. Generally, someone should

be available during the interview to assist if there are any questions.

<b>JIFF’s 10 AREAS OF FUNCTIONING</b>	
At School/Your Job	Behavior, grades, attendance, fulfilling responsibilities
At Home	Behavior in the home, obeying rules
Family Life	Life in any home in which the child spends time
You & Your Friends	Interactions with friends; peer pressure
You & Your Neighborhood	Respect for others’ rights; obeying laws
Your Feelings	Management of emotions such as depression and anxiety
Dealing with Bad Feelings	Behavior or ideas harmful to youth
Alcohol & Drugs	Use of alcohol or other drugs
Thinking	Logical and rationality of thoughts/actions
Your Health	Actions and behaviors that affect health



*The JIFF interview identifies key issues in a teen’s life.*

## How does the bar graph show the JIFF results?

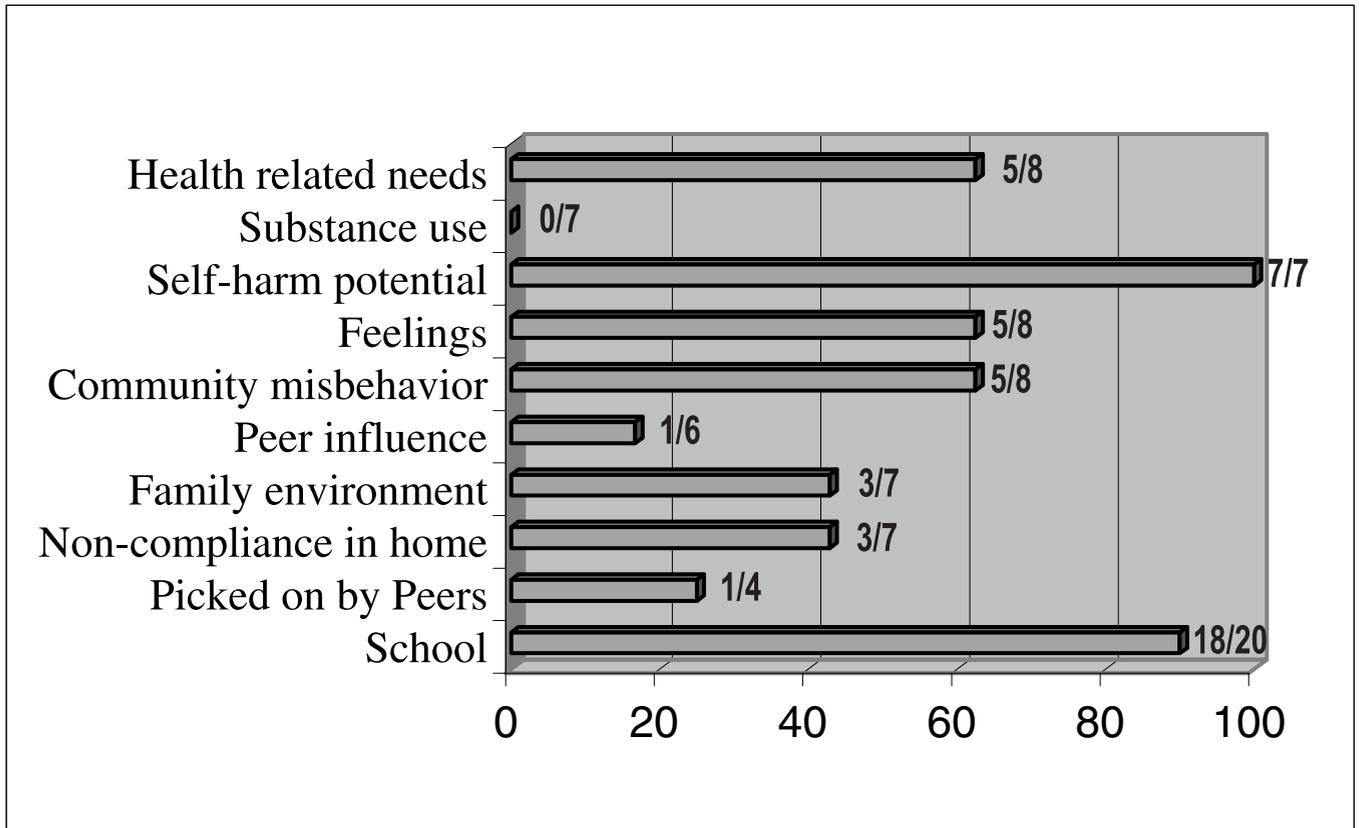
Once the child has finished answering the questions, the JIFF will generate a bar graph showing the youth’s needs in each of the 10 areas. The names for the 10 areas in the JIFF interview generally correspond to the 10 categories in the JIFF bar graph, although there are some minor differences. The “Picked on by Peers” bar graph category takes items from several sections of

the interview. There is no bar graph for the “Thinking” section of the interview. The longer

the bar, the more problems that were reported, suggesting a need for services.

The following chart is an example of a JIFF-generated bar graph:

*Percent of problems reported by area*



*Fraction to the right of each bar gives problems reported/total questions.*

## How can the JIFF be used for designing the youth’s service plan?

The professional and the family together use the bar graph to design a service plan specific to the youth’s needs. The JIFF program nominates goals based on the answers given during the interview. The goals will correspond to the needs expressed. The family and the professional will then:

- Decide whether or not to accept each of the goals nominated by the program

- Add any additional goals (if necessary)
- Select the “priority level” for each goal
- Select services to address each goal.

The JIFF Service Plan should be individualized based on the youth’s needs! It focuses on the youth’s strengths and skills, addressing all areas of the youth’s life. It shows exactly which services in the community were selected to help with each goal.

Example of a completed service plan:

Priority	Goal	Services
High	Increase compliance with the law	Juvenile justice monitoring
Medium	Increase participation in pro-social activities with appropriate peers	YMCA social skills group
High	Mental health evaluation to assess depression	Community Mental Health Agency

### Special message for parents

If the people working with you and your child are using the JIFF, they are interested in your child as a person – they are not focused on one event. You can use the JIFF to help support your child’s needs now, in order to avoid problems in the future.

You are the most important source of information about your child’s behaviors and strengths, and about your family’s needs. The professional working with you should show you the bar graph generated by the JIFF and work with you to design the service plan. Make sure that everything makes sense to you. Don’t be afraid to ask the professional to explain his or her opinions or to suggest specific goals and services. The professional will appreciate your involvement in helping to ensure that he or she fully understands your child’s needs!

Remember that the JIFF was designed to help you identify goals and locate services to help your child – not to judge you! Make sure that your opinions are heard!

### After services have begun...

You are your child’s best advocate. One way to advocate for your child is to focus on whether your child’s functioning is actually improving in ways that are important to you.

Your child (and you) can do the JIFF periodically (for example, every three months) to check your child’s progress toward improvement. Think of it as a “check-up” to ensure that your child is really benefiting from the services provided.

If your child is not showing improvement in the most important areas, you may want to advocate for a change in services. Such evaluation helps ensure that the Service Plan continues to meet your child’s needs. If your child is making progress, be sure to celebrate!

### JIFF facts

- The JIFF assesses a youth’s day-to-day functioning. It looks at the youth’s overall needs – not just one incident or behavior.
- The JIFF is easy – it is a computerized interview that a youth (or parents) complete on their own.
- The JIFF helps to identify goals and services customized to the youth’s needs.
- The JIFF looks at the child’s overall needs – not just one incident or behavior.
- The JIFF can help parents advocate for their children – to get the support they need.
- The JIFF can be used to determine if the youth’s functioning improves.