

## YOUTH JUSTICE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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### **Abstract**

In contemporary youth justice in England and Wales, there is too much emphasis on offence- and offender- focused approaches and an insufficient focus on promoting positive outcomes for children in conflict with the law. What is more, since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the voices of children embroiled in the Youth Justice System have been marginalised and their participatory rights rendered invalid. Both children and Youth Offending Team workers are finding involvement in the Youth Justice System (e.g. assessment, planning, intervention, supervision and review) to be a disempowering and disengaging experience. In this paper, we outline a number of contemporary tensions and conflicts in relation to youth justice law, policy and practice: the highly political context of youth justice, the criminalising risk, prevention and early intervention agendas and the unique and specialised nature of youth justice services. We also introduce a focus for future developments and 'creative possibilities' for youth justice. Specifically, we advocate for Children First, Offenders Second (CFOS), a progressive and principled model of youth justice that advocates for child sensitive, child appropriate services, diversion and the promotion of positive behaviours and outcomes for children, underpinned by evidence-based partnership working and the engagement of children (and parents) at all stages of the youth justice process.

### **Keywords**

Youth justice; children first; engagement; participation; positive prevention.