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How About How Kids Handling Kids? October 31, 2007

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St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

Illinois children accused of crimes often don't receive adequate legal help and regularly plead guilty before a defense can be made, according to a new statewide study to be released today.

The net result is that more kids than necessary are incarcerated, and those youngsters are also then more likely to run afoul of the law later in life, say the authors of the Illinois Juvenile Defense Assessment Project.

(snip)

The authors also believe that early and excessive pleas "compromise the judicial process." According to the research, between 70 percent and 100 percent are resolved by plea deals.

(snip)

"Kids don't even understand that getting a probation officer means a conviction," Crawford said. "The fact that they don't know what's happening is appalling to me."

Contradictory — they're trying to say that excessive incarceration and excessive use of probation as a result of plea deals are both problems at the same time. And it should be noted that a very high percentage of adult criminal charges are pled out.

The authors involved in the project recommend a host of changes that would benefit children in the system.

Some simple fixes such as not using shackles in the courtroom and new language for court instructions that kids can understand.

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Lawyers talking to each other in simple English? Good luck with that.

Lost in all of this is a very simple solution — juveniles should stop committing crimes. That way, they won't have to worry about jail, probation, shackles, court-appointed lawyers, and plea deals.

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