The majority of young people in the American juvenile justice system have diagnosable mental illnesses, including substance abuse, mental retardation, and learning disorders. However, these disorders often remain undetected and untreated. In this book, a team of experts examines the prevalence of mental disorders in this population and describes the means of screening for, diagnosing, and treating them effectively in a developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive manner. They also examine psychopharmacologic and psychotherapeutic approaches; innovative community-based programs as an effective alternative to detention; the human and economic costs of detaining youth; the interrogation strategies that make young people particularly vulnerable to self-incrimination; and the alarming trend of disproportionate minority confinement. Their comprehensive coverage includes discussion of the ethical dilemmas that arise when mental health professionals practice in a forensic setting, and outlining the need for preventive strategies, and for integrated approaches involving judicial, law enforcement, educational, and mental health professionals. This book will be of interest to both mental health and juvenile justice professionals.

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The Mental Health Needs of Young Offenders
Forging Paths toward Reintegration and Rehabilitation

Edited by

Carol L. Kessler, M.D., M.Div.
Louis J. Kraus, M.D.
This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Rita Francesca Deppisch Kessler, who instilled in me respect for the potential of all human beings.
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Foreword

In 1995, as the Training Director of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Columbia University, I brought a group of psychiatric residents to a local juvenile detention center. What we found was a far cry from the mandate of the Juvenile Court, according to the Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1899 that stated that the court was “to act as kind parents seeking to educate and rehabilitate rather than to punish.” We found that the inmates were principally African-American or Hispanic inner city kids (white youngsters hired lawyers who kept them out of jail, at least until adjudication). These young people were either high school dropouts or far behind their expected level of academic achievement. Two thirds of the adolescents carried at least one psychiatric diagnosis. Rehabilitation and education was definitely not a part of the 1995 picture.

Four years later I was elected to the Presidency of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. My first official act was to appoint a task force, headed by Dr. William Arroyo, to study the serious problems inherent in the juvenile justice system and to make recommendations for reform. The monograph resulting from the efforts of a group of dedicated members served as the model for this long-awaited book.

The mission of the committee that emerged from the task force states that the juvenile justice system “will become responsive to children and adolescents with mental disorders who are in the juvenile or adult justice system. It is imperative that a comprehensive continuum of mental health services are accessible to this population, that the system be strongly community-based, family centered, culturally competent, developmentally relevant, and well integrated with other child system components, including health education and child welfare” (Kraus & Arroyo, 2005).

This seminal work fulfills the mission of the committee. Their recommendations for mental health screening standards of care for juvenile detention facilities, and developmentally appropriate services are well defined and clearly stated.
I believe that everyone who reads this book will be convinced by the strong evidence presented for the need for a complete overhaul of the present system and that the time for change is now.

Clarice J. Kestenbaum, M.D.
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First and foremost I would like to acknowledge the young people and their families, with whom I have had the privilege to work as a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Their resilience in the face of innumerable psychosocial stressors is an inspiration to me. My hope is that communities will be motivated to provide supports, to prevent interventions that further their distress.

I would also like to thank the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and more particularly, the leadership of Clarice Kestenbaum, M.D. during her tenure as president. She had the commitment to dedicate her term to the establishment of the Juvenile Justice Task Force that was instrumental in bringing together many of the authors in this book, in what has resulted in various creative ventures. Among those ventures was the publication of a monograph on Juvenile Justice Reform on the Academy’s website. This monograph ultimately drew this publisher’s attention to the urgency of mental health needs amongst justice-involved youth.

Cambridge University Press has had the vision to bring this work to press, and I particularly acknowledge the patience and encouragement of Pauline Graham, of Betty Fulford, and of Dawn Preston.