



**Message from Robert L. Listenbee
on HHS guidance related to trauma-informed screening, assessment, and
evidence-based practices in child-serving settings to improve child well-being**

Dear colleagues,

As many of you know, before becoming the Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, I co-chaired the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence with Joe Torre. As the two of us noted in the task force's final report, we are facing one of the most significant challenges to the future of America's children. Our report detailed the alarming, national scope of the violence and victimization our children experience and witness every day.

Exposure to violence is not limited to one community or group of children. It occurs among all ethnic and racial groups; in urban, suburban, and rural communities; among families and neighborhoods at every socioeconomic level; on tribal lands and in Alaska Native villages.

A growing body of research is finding that the vast majority of children involved in the juvenile justice system have been exposed to traumatic violence—and often several types of violence—at some point and sometimes repeatedly in their young lives. If we are to reform the juvenile justice system – and if we are to make communities and victims whole and help children have better health outcomes, thrive in school, stay safe, and become successful, we must rethink the way we treat our most vulnerable population.

Advances in neuroscience and child development are teaching us that the trauma children experience when they are exposed to physical, sexual, and emotional violence harms their ability to mature, and it scars them physically and emotionally well into their adult lives. The good news is that we know what works to address this problem.

Our task force report called on every professional who works with children to educate themselves on the impact of trauma on children's lives. It also challenged child-serving professionals to find the resources to implement programs that provide trauma-informed care. The attached guidance, issued recently by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Directors of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), sets forth a clear pathway for those who work with children to integrate the use of trauma-focused screening, functional assessments, and evidence-based practices in child-serving settings to improve child well-being. It also outlines federal financial resources for addressing child trauma. I congratulate my colleagues at HHS for clearly showing us the way forward and commend the attached document to you.

Robert L. Listenbee
Administrator
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention