

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/striking-a-balance-for-successful-reentry>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Two core tasks of leadership are to define reality and instill hope. Although more often applied to things like business management or military command, this guidance also applies to reentry practice for youth returning home after a period of institutional placement.

The reentry process is always complex. It simultaneously offers glimpses of a new beginning and assigns burdens from the past. For both the young person who is reentering as well as for staff charged with facilitating that reentry, it can be tempting to lean heavily on one side or the other: to choose either reality or hope. But this is a false choice. Supporting successful reentry requires us to nurture a delicate balance of both.

Most kids returning home from custody know the reality. They can quote the recidivism statistics, they know what they've struggled to do in the past, and they know how hard it is for human beings to change. More importantly, they are keenly aware of the stories that are developing around them in their families, schools, and neighborhoods—they have problems with authority and are going to end up just like.

Among our APT clients we see variation in how kids respond to the reality. Some become overwhelmed and can see only impending failure. Others veer off toward hope and talk excitedly about all the lofty goals they're going to accomplish in their first week home. One kid may need us to help him believe that with his family's support he can make it through community supervision; another may need us to rein in the aspirations a bit so that disappointment isn't imminent. In either case, our role is to inject elements of the opposite expectation: to help them strike the balance between reality and hope.

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