

RAISING TEENS

A LETTER TO PARENTS OF TROUBLED TEENS

IN VOLUNTARY YOUTH TRANSPORT

CLINICAL OUTCOMES VERSUS ETHICS

THE TROUBLED TEEN INDUSTRY

WHEN HELP TURNS INTO HURT

11TH EDITION - APRIL 18TH



STOLEN

the truth of involuntary youth transport

On a seemingly ordinary Wednesday, a 15 year old girl was abruptly woken up to find two strangers in her room. It was 3 am, pitch black, and there were two unknown, muscular men looming over the foot of her bed.

Petrified, she started screaming for help. One of the men moved to block her door, and as he switched on the light, briefly blinding her, the other man moved closer to her side.

"We can either do this the easy way or the hard way." The man said as he threw off her comforter, exposing her entire body.

Terrified and confused, she jumped out of bed and bolted toward the window to try and escape.

"I guess we're doing this the hard way," he said as he grabbed her and pulled back into the room, pinning her arms behind her back.

"Get her shoes, we're going." He ordered the other man, who was still barricading the door. He threw her shoes in his backpack before going to assist in restraining the girl, who was still desperately screaming and thrashing against their force.

"YOUR PARENTS PAID US TO DO THIS"

Together, they dragged her out of her house and shoved her into the back of an unfamiliar car parked in the driveway. One man sat in the driver's seat, the other beside her in the back.

Believing that she was being kidnapped, she tried anything to escape. Crying and clawing at the child-locked door handle was no use, so she grabbed the metal seat belt buckle and began smashing it into the window, trying to break the glass.

In an instant, the man beside her had her arms restrained in tight metal handcuffs. As she continued to struggle, he grabbed her and began repeatedly slamming her head into the car door.

As she screamed and sobbed, begging for help, for anyone to save her, he finally yelled, "Your parents paid us to do this!" before smashing her head into the door one last time.

The adrenaline melted from her body as she collapsed in her seat. She looked out the car window at her house. The warm, familiar light of the inside of her home faded as it escaped through the open front door and into this dark and desolate night.

There, standing in the doorway, she saw the silhouettes of her parents, watching. She wouldn't see them again for nine months. She wouldn't be home for another year after that.



**SHE WOULDN'T SEE
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Emily, the 15 year old girl, had recently been struggling with her mental health. Diagnosed with anxiety and depression, Emily was suffering from deep feelings of loneliness. She was engaging in risky behaviors to try and cope with her intense feelings. She began self-harming and expressed that she had thoughts of dying.

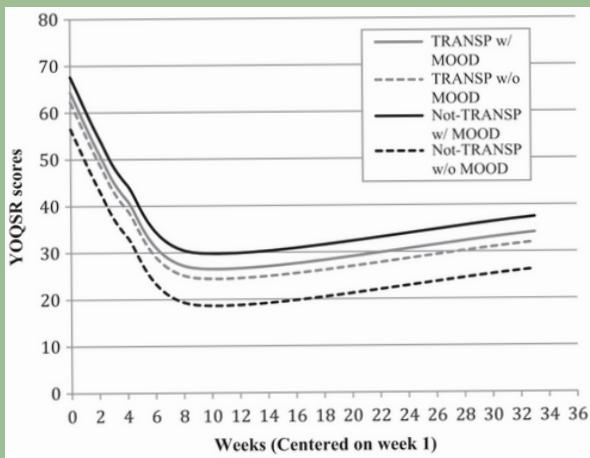
Her parents had grown concerned and decided that she was in need of a high level of care. Without informing her, they had looked up programs for troubled teens and landed on a wilderness therapy program in another state. In communication with the program's admissions office, it was recommended that they hire a transportation service to bring Emily to their location.

These services are known as involuntary youth transport (IYT) and are commonly used to bring teens to mental health treatment facilities. Involuntary youth transportation's intended purpose is to get unwilling children the help they need, used as an intervention in crisis scenarios.

This seemingly intense practice of forcibly removing children from their homes and into treatment was researched to prove its effectiveness. Anita Tucker from the University of New Hampshire conducted a study that evaluated 350 adolescents in a wilderness therapy program and compared the clinical outcomes of the youth who were transported versus those who were admitted voluntarily.

INVOLUNTARY YOUTH TRANSPORT

The data collected showed that the adolescents' mental health in the wilderness therapy program significantly improved regardless of how they had ended up there. They even found that the youth brought there by IYT were more likely to have larger decreases in the specific reasons that they were admitted for, suggesting that IYT likely doesn't interfere with a treatment program's effectiveness.



Changes in Mood Disorder of Youth in the Studied Wilderness Therapy Program

However, it's important to recognise that the collected data supporting the use of IYT is limited since it was sourced from a single study conducted on only one program. The study merely collected data on the youth's mental state at the time of admission to the program and at the time of their discharge. Can their reported therapeutic progress truly be accurate if the youth are in fear from the very beginning?

In some cases, an intervention of this magnitude is needed, but what are those situations?

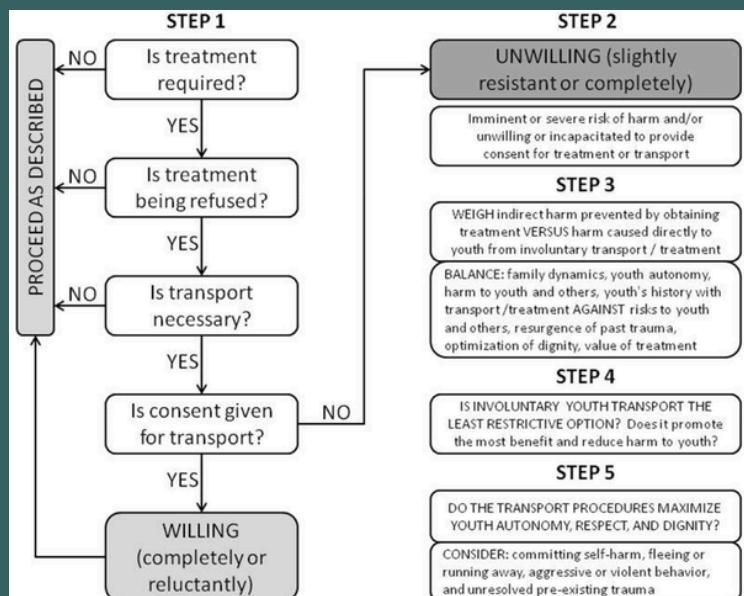
IYT companies stress that it "should only be used when the youth poses an imminent risk to self or others," meaning repeated suicide attempts, anorexia to the point of endangering their own health, or drug overdose.

Research by Doug Magnuson from the University of Victoria shows that IYT is detrimental and deeply harmful to youth who are depressed, anxious, or have a history of trauma.

The guidelines the IYT escorts are instructed to follow are rarely used in practice, creating a traumatic experience for the youth. The extreme force and coercion used in IYT is inherently unethical and even questionably legal.

The laws and regulations of IYT vary with each state, and there is no national standard. States with high concentrations of youth treatment programs are known to have more relaxed child laws, allowing for these instances to happen.

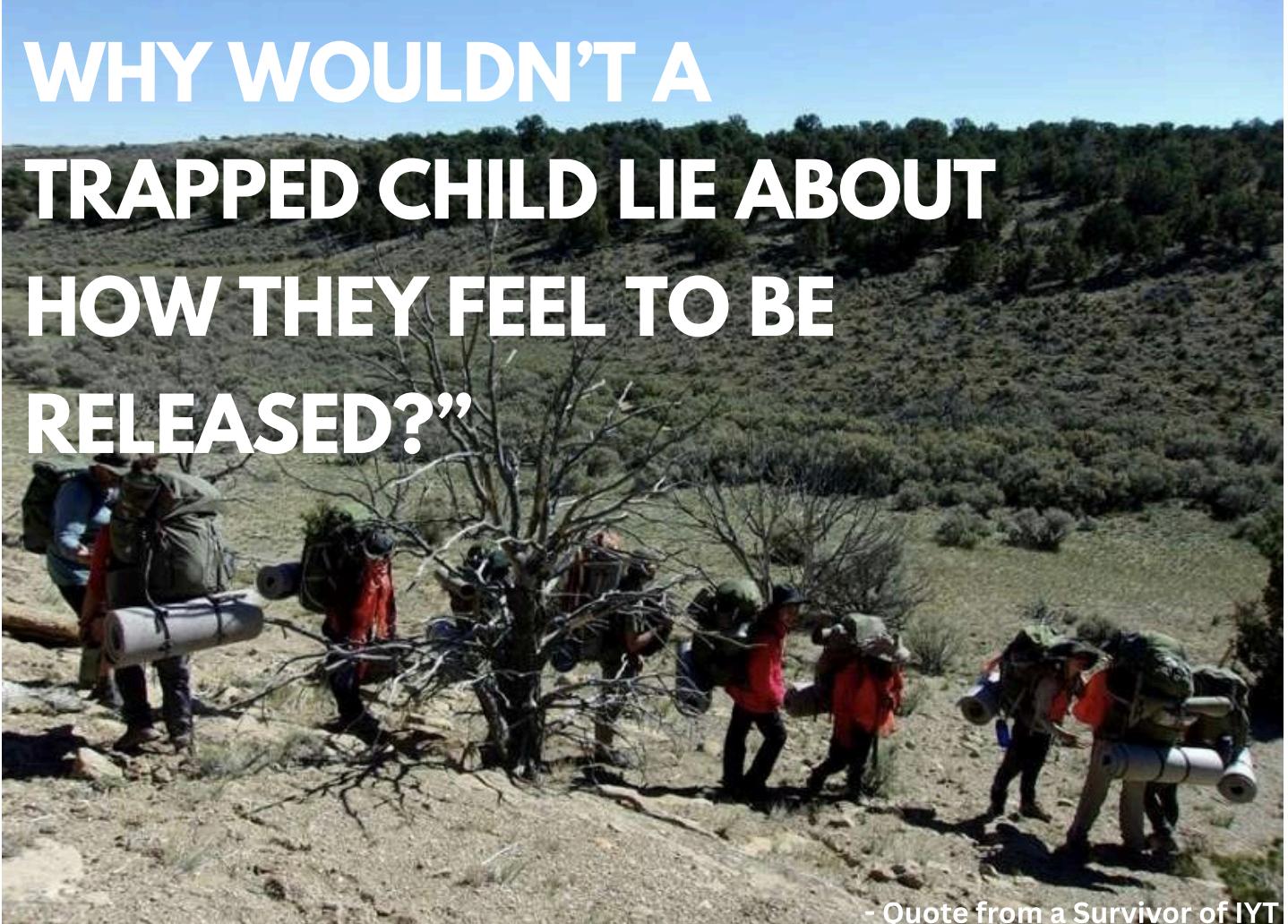
Current Model used to Determine if Involuntary Youth Transport is Necessary





**“IF A TRAPPED ANIMAL
WILL CHEW OFF ITS OWN
LEG TO ESCAPE,**

**WHY WOULDN’T A
TRAPPED CHILD LIE ABOUT
HOW THEY FEEL TO BE
RELEASED?”**



- Quote from a Survivor of IYT



HELP AT WHAT COST?

Emily was driven for hours, across multiple state lines, in a car with these two strangers.

Her arms were handcuffed behind her back the entire time and were so tight that the metal digging into her skin left bruises for weeks. She had lost the circulation in her hands for so long that she still has permanent nerve damage in her fingers.

Over the course of the drive, she heard the IYT escorts, commonly referred to as 'goons', make fun of her and talk poorly about other kids they had transported.

When she asked what was happening, they told her that she was going to a behavior modification program for a few weeks and that she could call her parents when they got there.

SHE WAS LIED TO.

Emily would be in the Utah wilderness for months. Isolated and scared, her only comfort was the deep winter snow and the growing loneliness inside her.

With only weekly communication from her parents through monitored and censored letters, she couldn't help but feel unwanted and abandoned.

She would later be sent to a therapeutic boarding school for over a year before finally being allowed to return home.

Her house, even her room, was unchanged, but Emily would never be the same.

HOW COULD THIS EVER BE ETHICAL?

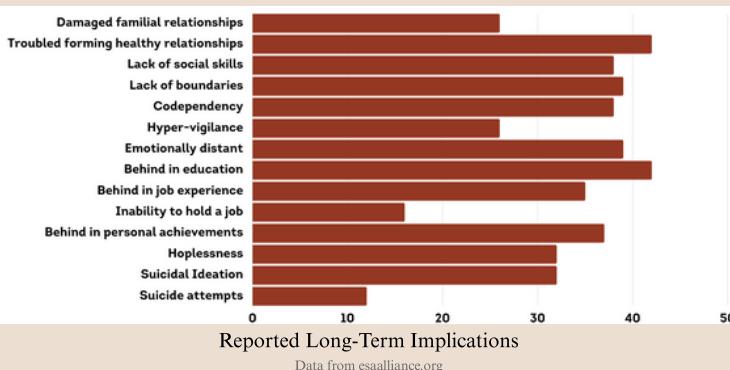
THE OMITTED EFFECTS OF IYT

The terror and abuse Emily endured, all starting early that Wednesday morning when she was 'gooned', still haunt her to this day. She now suffers from intense PTSD, struggles to forgive her parents & the programs for what they put her through, and wonders how her depression symptoms ever constituted this level of lifelong pain and mental torment.



Every survivor's story is unique, and yet there is still a blatantly obvious common theme.

The abuse, all starting with involuntary youth transport, has been ignored far too long.



As a parent or guardian with the power to subject your child to this, I urge you to contemplate your own ethical standards. Knowing that the clinical data supporting IYT is dismissible, that traumatic experiences are typical, and not unpredictable accidents, is it really worth it?



Hug your child, tell them you love them, and be there when they need support.

That's more good than these programs could ever provide.

Sincerely,

Emily

