

## Strength-Based Bill of Rights for Teens in the Juvenile Justice System

<http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/print/1610>

To help communities promote the strengths of young people in the juvenile justice system, Dr. Laura Burney Nissen developed the following strength-based bill of rights in 1998.



1. I have the right to be viewed as a person capable of changing, growing, and becoming positively connected to my community no matter what types of delinquent behavior I have committed.
2. I have a right to participation in the selection of services that build on my strengths.
3. I have a right to contribute things I am good at and other strengths in all assessment and diagnostic processes.
4. I have a right to have my resistance viewed as a message that the wrong approach may be being used with me.
5. I have the right to learn from my mistakes and to have support to learn that mistakes don't mean failure. I have the right to view past maladaptive or antisocial behaviors as a lack of skills that I can acquire to change my life for the better.
6. I have the right to experience success and to have support connecting previous successes to future goals.
7. I have the right to have my culture included as a strength, and services which honor and respect my cultural beliefs.
8. I have the right to have my gender issues recognized as a source of strength in my identity.
9. I have the right to be assured that all written and oral, formal and informal communications about me include my strengths as well as needs.
10. I have a right to surpass any treatment goals which have been set too low for me, or to have treatment goals that are different than those generally applied to all youth in the juvenile justice system.
11. I have a right to be served by professionals who view youth positively, and understand that motivating me is related to successfully accessing my strengths.
12. I have a right to have my family involved in my experience in the juvenile justice system in a way which acknowledges and supports our strengths as well as needs. I have a right to stay connected to my family no matter what types of challenges we face.

13. I have the right to be viewed and treated as more than a statistic, stereotype, risk score, diagnosis, label, or pathology unit.
14. I have a right to a future free of institutional or systems involvement and to services which most centrally and positively focus on my successful transition from institutions.
15. I have the right to service providers who coordinate their efforts and who share a united philosophy that the key to my success is through my strengths.
16. I have the right to exercise my developmental tasks as an adolescent — to try out new identities, to learn to be accountable and say I'm sorry for the harm I've caused others — all of which is made even more difficult if I'm labeled a "bad kid."
17. I have the right to be viewed and treated as a redeemable resource, potential leader and success of the future.