

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the primary goal of the criminal justice system? Do you agree with the goal? Why?
2. Compare the following theories about why people commit crimes: deterrence, biological determinism, psychological determinism, behaviorism, social disorganization, and broken window.
3. What is the difference between rehabilitation and diversion programs?
4. Describe the characteristics of successful treatment programs for juvenile offenders.
5. What is the difference between probation and parole?

Change Agent Exercise

Voting is an important right that Americans enjoy. The officials we choose to elect have a major impact on the funding that is available for social services and the policies that shape many areas of our lives. Before people can vote, they must be registered to vote. Find out how people in your state can register to vote. Is everyone afforded the right to vote? What about prisoners or people who have committed a crime? Find out whether they have the right to vote. What do you think of these policies? Make sure you are registered to vote, and help others to register to vote.

Exercises

1. **Theories of Criminal Behavior**
Describe the central theories used to explain why people commit crimes. Choose one theory or a combination of theories that make the most sense to you. Discuss why the theory or theories you've chosen explain criminal behavior better than the other theories.
Using your theory as the underlying framework, describe a policy that could be implemented to reduce crime.
2. **The Death Penalty**
Should the United States continue to use the death penalty in cases of violent crime?
Do research on arguments on both sides of the issue. Describe why the death penalty is a controversial issue.
 - Is there adequate evidence to resolve the issue?
 - Is the current evidence contradictory?
 - What are the underlying values on each side of the issue?
 - Examine your personal beliefs on this issue. Does the death penalty affect your life? If so, how? Have you had personal experiences related to the death penalty?

- Choose one side. Brainstorm arguments that support your side. List and explain the strongest arguments.
 - Do the same for the arguments on the other side.
 - What gaps do you see in the information? What would you need to know to help convince you to favor one side or the other? Where might you find this information?
 - Which side do you favor? What specifically convinces you that this is the right side? Is this the same position or a different position than you had before researching this topic?
3. **Current Issues in Criminal Justice**
Find at least one article about the criminal justice system in a newspaper or a newsmagazine.
Describe the article.
How is the information in the article relevant to social work practice in criminal justice settings?
What questions does the article raise for you?
What would you like to know about the topic, and how could you find the information you seek?
 4. **Interpreting Data from the Criminal Justice System**
Does the article make you more or less interested in working in criminal justice social work? Why?
Examine the data below and answer the questions that follow. Ethnicity of juveniles in the Juvenile Justice System

White	33%
African American	41%
Latino	24%
Other	2%

 Ethnicity of Adults in the Criminal Justice System

White	37%
African American	35%
Latino	25%
Other	3%

 Ethnicity in the General Population

White	73%
African American	13%
Latino	11%
Other	3%
- How would you describe the differences between ethnicity in the general population and ethnicity in the juvenile and criminal justice systems?
What do you think accounts for the differences between ethnicity in the general population and ethnicity in the juvenile and criminal justice systems?