



## Harris County Youth Diversion Center

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Behavioral health and justice system stakeholders across Texas are searching for new strategies to divert youth with mental illness and substance use disorders away from the juvenile justice system to community-based care. In Harris County, the Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, Harris County District Attorney's Office, Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, Harris County Commissioner's Courts, Harris County Resources for Children, and Rice Kinder Research Institute have come together to open a new Youth Diversion Center to support diversion and connection to treatment for youth in the community.

The [Harris County Youth Diversion Center](#) serves as an alternate location to juvenile detention for youth ages 13-17 who have committed low-level, non-violent crimes, that temporarily need respite care due to a behavioral health crisis. Eligibility for services is determined by the Harris County District Attorney's office and the Juvenile Probation Department.

### Program Goals

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#### Improve equity

Countering significant disparities from arrest through juvenile justice system



Mitigate negative impacts of arrest  
Particularly BIPOC and LGBTQAI+ youth



Provide alternative to traditional processing  
Reduce stigma and recidivism, and connect youth to community services



Reduce risk of criminal socialization  
Provide role models and positive peers, instill discipline, and improve school engagement



Decrease caseloads & law enforcement costs  
Reduce number of youths sent to detention facilities and number of cases for judges, prosecutors, etc.

Implementing a community-based model, the Youth Diversion Center provides needed structure and support during a critical intersection for youth in custody. The program aims to keep youth engaged in school, provide them with behavioral and mental health supports, and provide safe housing. The Youth Diversion Center offers comprehensive rehabilitation services, such as crisis intervention and family counseling/reintegration, to prevent youth from falling deeper into the criminal justice system. Upon release, youth are connected to long-term behavioral health services in the community to prevent recidivism.



**View of the Youth Diversion Center's interior.**

The Youth Diversion Center opened its doors in May 2023. The program is a twelve-bed facility that is designed to provide services to 6 males and 6 females. The program aims to serve 200 youth in the first year and serve 600 youth through the second and third year thereafter. All children admitted receive physical health assessments provided by the Integrated Health System upon intake and regular ongoing assessments to determine when they are ready to be discharged from the program.

[Click here](#) for more information on the Harris County Youth Diversion Center.

#### **Other Youth Respite Programs in Texas:**

- [Williamson County's Youth Respite Center](#) is a 16-bed Youth Therapeutic Respite Program that provides a safe environment for youth in crisis, between ages 5 and 17.
- The [Hill Country Youth Crisis Respite](#) Center serves teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 who are experiencing a need for a short-term "break" from a pending or existing stressor. Referrals can be self, or family initiated. Referrals may also come from schools, law enforcement, mental health facilities, hospitals, and local mental health professionals.
- [The Youth Crisis Respite House](#) is Heart of Texas Behavioral Health Network's 6 bed facility that provides short term respite services for youth ages 13-17, who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- [Assessment Center Framework-](#) The National Assessment Center Association (NAC) created this framework to guide implementation of assessment centers to divert youth from juvenile justice involvement.
- [Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration-](#)Through this report, The Sentencing Project Identifies six program models that consistently produce better results than youth incarceration.

- [National Guidelines for Child and Youth Behavioral Health Crisis Care](#)- Offers best practices, implementation strategies, and practical guidance for the design and development of services that meet the needs of American children and their families experiencing a behavioral health crisis.
- [Making the Case for a Comprehensive Children's Crisis Continuum of Care](#)- This guide by National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors reviews the essential components of a crisis continuum.