

Youth Justice Worker interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Youth Justice Worker roles typically assess your ability to work with challenging young people, your understanding of the justice system, and your resilience in a high-pressure environment. You will be asked to demonstrate both practical casework skills and the personal qualities needed for this work.

- **Process:** Questions that ask you to walk through how you would carry out a core task, such as an assessment or case plan.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for a real example from your past, using the STAR method to explore your skills.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement, problem solving and ability to stay calm under pressure.
- **Technical:** Questions about legislation, frameworks and case management systems like ICMS or CRIS.
- **Safety:** Questions that probe how you balance community safety with the rehabilitation needs of a young person.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about building rapport, communication and engagement with young people who may be hostile or distrustful.

Usually a panel interview with a casework manager and a senior practitioner. It may include a written scenario or case note exercise, followed by a structured interview. Some employers also require a psychological assessment or a practical task like drafting a case plan. The interview typically runs for 45 to 60 minutes and covers your understanding of youth justice principles, your ability to build rapport with young people, and how you manage risk and boundaries.

1. Walk me through how you would assess a new young person referred to your caseload.

Why they ask

This tests your understanding of assessment frameworks and your ability to work systematically.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step walk-through: start with file review, then interview, then collateral information, then risk formulation and case planning.

Example answer

"First, I review any existing files and court orders to understand the young person's history, offences and current legal status. Then I schedule a one-on-one interview in a private, safe space. I use a structured assessment tool like the Youth Level of Service or a similar framework to explore their education, family, health, peer relationships and attitudes. I also gather information from family, schools and other agencies where consent allows. After that, I formulate the risk and needs, identifying criminogenic factors and strengths. I then draft a case plan with specific goals, responsibilities and timeframes, and discuss it with the young person so they understand and agree to it. Finally, I record everything in ICMS and set review dates."

2. Tell me about a time you had to de-escalate a tense situation with a young person.

Why they ask

Assesses your conflict resolution skills and ability to stay calm under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"In a residential unit, a young person became agitated after a phone call with family and started shouting and kicking a door. My task was to ensure safety for everyone, including him. I stayed calm, kept my voice low and moved others away from the area. I gave him space but stayed visible, and after a few minutes I asked if he wanted to talk. He agreed, and we sat in a quiet room. I listened without interrupting, acknowledged his frustration, and helped him identify what had triggered him. We then worked on a plan for his next call. He calmed down and returned to the common area. No one was hurt, and he later thanked me for not escalating things. I recorded the incident and followed up with his case manager."

3. You are supervising a young person in custody who is refusing to attend an education program. How do you respond?

Why they ask

Tests your problem-solving and ability to balance rehabilitation with custodial rules.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: stay calm, explore reasons, apply boundaries, seek support, document.

Example answer

"I would first approach the young person calmly and ask why they are refusing. There may be an underlying issue like bullying, a learning difficulty, or anxiety. I would listen and validate their feelings without agreeing to break the rules. I would remind them of the expectation to attend and explain the consequences of not attending, but also offer choices, like trying a different program or having a support person present. If they still refuse, I would follow the unit's procedures, which might include a conversation with the education coordinator or a case conference. I would document the incident and continue to work on engagement. The goal is to get them back into learning, not to punish them into compliance."

4. What do you know about the Youth Justice Act and how it applies to your work?

Why they ask

Checks your legislative knowledge and ability to apply it in practice.

How to structure your answer

Knowledge recall plus practical application: outline key principles, then give an example of how you apply them.

Example answer

"The Youth Justice Act in my state sets out the principles for dealing with young people in the justice system. It emphasises rehabilitation, diversion from custody, and the importance of family and community. In practice, this means when I make decisions, I must consider the least restrictive option, the young person's best interests, and their cultural identity. For example, if a young person breaches their order, I do not automatically recommend custody. I look at why it happened and whether additional support can get them back on track. I also ensure that any intervention is proportionate and that I document how I have applied the Act's principles. I keep up to date with amendments through departmental training and legal updates."

5. How do you balance the safety of the community with the rehabilitation needs of a young person?

Why they ask

Assesses your ethical reasoning and understanding of dual responsibilities.

How to structure your answer

Ethical reasoning framework: identify both sides, explain how you weigh them, give an example.

Example answer

“Community safety and rehabilitation are not opposites; they work together. If a young person is supported to address their offending behaviour, they are less likely to reoffend, which makes the community safer. My approach is to conduct thorough risk assessments and set clear boundaries, while also connecting the young person to programs that address their needs. For example, if a young person has a history of violence, I would ensure they are supervised closely in the community, but I would also enrol them in anger management and education. I involve the courts and police when necessary, and I always document my decisions. If the risk becomes too high, I would recommend a more restrictive setting. The balance shifts depending on the individual and the circumstances.”

6. How would you build rapport with a young person who is hostile or distrustful of authority?

Why they ask

Tests your engagement skills and understanding of trauma.

How to structure your answer

Rapport-building steps: be consistent, show respect, listen, find common ground, set boundaries.

Example answer

“I would start by being consistent and reliable. Young people who distrust authority often have had adults let them down, so I show up when I say I will. I speak to them with respect, using their preferred name and not talking down to them. I listen more than I talk, and I do not push for personal information too quickly. I might find common ground through a shared interest, like sport or music, and use that to start conversations. I also set clear boundaries and explain my role, so they know what to expect. If they test me, I stay calm and follow through on consequences without being punitive. Over time, small consistent actions build trust. I also involve cultural mentors or respected community members if that helps.”