
JAIL BULLETIN

NUMBER 22

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The Jail Bulletin is a monthly feature of the Crime Commission Update. The Bulletin may be used as a supplement to your jail in-service training program if officers study the material and complete the attached "open book" quiz. The Bulletin and quiz may be reproduced for use by your staff. We welcome any jail training material you would like to contribute to the Bulletin.

CRISIS/CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN A JAIL SETTING

What is Crisis/Conflict?

A crisis-conflict can be defined as an emotionally significant event causing an intense, upset state in a person's life. The crisis-conflict state most always is preceded by a highly observable and well defined precipitating event. When in this state, a person's affective (emotional) feeling level is extremely high in contrast to their rational, thinking, reasoning (cognitive) level. The main goal of intervention is to reestablish equilibrium between the extreme dimensions . . . to help the person through the crisis/conflict and no more.

People experience a broad range of crises/conflicts throughout their lives. . . no one is immune. They must cope with deaths, personal failures, rejections, poor health, loss of a job or status, and a myriad of other similar situations. For most, the crisis/conflict is integrated into normal personality functioning and everyday life is resumed. For others, problems go unresolved and resurface again and again with each new crisis/conflict that is experienced.

In a crisis/conflict, timeliness is everything. Although a crisis/conflict is temporary, the way it is handled can have long lasting effects. When the difficulty is handled quickly and appropriately, the individual may grow (change) from the experience, learning new problem-solving approaches (calm assessment versus frenzied out-of-control behavior) and developing ways to avoid or handle crisis/conflict situations in the future. When the crisis/conflict situation is not faced and dealt with, the individual may emerge with even greater frustration, alienation, and/or depression. In corrections, this individual will tend to consume the most staff time; they will tax the interpersonal skills of correctional staff.

The Inmate Profile

Our correctional facilities house a group of socially "devalued" men and women, most of whom do not consciously want to be there, who may have more than their share of people problems. They tend to regard themselves as more sinned against, than sinning. Usually they consider that their being incarcerated is due not to their own failings, but rather to a combination of unfortunate circumstances and other people's unreasonableness. They are experts at using the defense mechanism of rationalization and often rationalize their crimes before committing them. Many have little anxiety about their own acts and misdeeds but tend to dwell on how poorly they are treated to the point of creating "tunnel-vision" problems . . . problems greatly exaggerated coupled with strong affectations (emotions) and very little cognition (thought).

Some inmates consciously want and seek out help to improve their circumstances and others do not. Some are inhibited and intimidated by deep pathologies of emotional dependency, feelings of inadequacy, basic lack of trust, psychosexual conflicts, authority problems, schizoid (deterioration in the level of everyday life functioning) patterns, and antisocial identifications, all of which are further accentuated, formalized and reinforced by and through the inmate community. And, unfortunately, corrections staff sometimes contribute to these inmate problems.

Then there is the daily attrition of self-respect. Assume with me for a moment that inmates have human feelings even as you and I -- not noble or exotic, merely the poor, troubling concerns we all share: Are we getting ahead; do people we meet like us; are we valuable in work and happy at home; are we using our lives as well as we might? Well, if our own answers to these are uncertain, we have our spouses (children/parents) to buoy us, and tomorrow is another day. But consider the inmate; to every question of personal value, he hears a resounding no! Society (his friends and neighbors among others) has pronounced him evil, unfit, and deserving to be isolated and castigated. So much for his past and present worth. For his future, he is to improve himself through occasional socializing with other disconsolate misfits; grow intellectually through severance from books, ideas and culture; learn affection through separation from loved ones, employment through idleness and self-respect through hatred.

-The Law of Corrections & Prisoners Rights
Chapter 2, Page 14

With this inmate profile in mind, it quickly becomes apparent that we are faced with a formidable challenge . . . we must integrate our regulatory and security duties with the day-to-day management of complex human problems if we are to manage inmates successfully.

Developmental Attending

Developmental attending is a method of managing people and their problems on a day-to-day basis. It is further defined as a highly communicative relationship between people. It is developmental because the method is (1) to work out possibilities, (2) to promote individual growth, and (3) to make notice of resources available. It is attending since the corrections staff person is in a take-charge position, is eminently involved, and is ready for service.

When day-to-day staff-inmate attending is seen as a normal part of corrections routine, readily available to inmates without "serious problems", problem resolution comes early when issues/problems first come to light. When staff attending is seen as distant and threatening, issues or problems don't surface until they become severe. The goal of "developmental attending" is to create and maintain open communications between staff and inmates through intelligent, informational investments.

Investments

"Developmental attending" is an answer, but for it to work corrections staff must make some investment in inmates. Investment means spending some time gathering information about inmates so that there is some common ground, ("common ground" meaning a basis for mutual interest or understanding, a mutually trusting relationship) upon which to build mutual trust. This information could be . . .

1. Who is the inmate? Can you acknowledge by name?
2. What work interests does the inmate have?
3. What other interests (sports, hobbies, etc.)?
4. What family interests?
5. Does the inmate have physical/mental problems?

There is, of course, much to be learned of a person. The important aspect of this relational development is not to become preoccupied with "caseworking", playing "super-sleuth", or getting on a first-name basis with the inmate but to merely establish some "common ground". Sound investments build mutual respect and trust.

Mutual Trust

Mutual trust is the cornerstone of effective communication. Not much cooperation is possible without it. When the level of trust is low, people are gripped with worry and fear, and expend their energies in protecting themselves, watching out for others, and limiting personal involvement/commitment. Conversely, when the level of trust is high there is the "felt assurance" that others will respond appropriately, that reasonable expectations can be expected, and that any issue/problem can be handled with a minimum expenditure of energy.

It has been said that it is foolish to trust blindly, but to distrust without reason is no less destructive. Successful people usually are trusting and are therefore better enabled to work in concert with others. Whereas, marginal or unsuccessful people are unwilling (or unable) to trust and become discontent with others.

Now, being a trusting person does not mean that one is deaf, dumb, or blind to events occurring around them. There are individual levels of trust and they are measured by an awareness of the person's past performance (example: an inmate who has a long record of arrests and convictions involving assault would probably be someone to treat with respect as all other inmates, yet being aware of his/her capacity for problem behavior, without labeling to the extent we inhibit growth. Being congenial (believable, pleasant, sociable) with others is usually the beginning of the development of mutual trust.

What to Watch For

Corrections personnel must be extremely aware of inmate behaviors which might signal that an inmate is experiencing a crisis/conflict situation. Behaviors which express anger, denial, hostility or withdrawal can be brought about by an event that contains "bad news." This "bad news" can emanate from the inmate's family, or from their place of employment, the courts, or corrections personnel. Whenever or however it comes, changes in behavior can occur, such as . . .

1. Change in attitude - an inmate who is usually cooperative and friendly suddenly becomes sullen, aggressive, and short-tempered.
2. Change in personality - an inmate who is normally outgoing and talkative becomes introverted, withdrawn, moody, stressed, and/or depressed.
3. Change in habits - an inmate who conscientiously does good work and takes pride in appearance and living quarters becomes slovenly and ill-kempt.

There can be other signs of change, especially when you view inmates as individuals. It is important to realize that you cannot recognize changes unless you know something about the inmate's normal demeanor. The more information you possess about an inmate, the more aware you will be of changes in . . .

1. Appearance - What is typical appearance, dress, hair style, grooming?
2. Living Quarters - Are living quarters neat, pictures of family and friends, evidence of religious items, hobbies visible?
3. Group Affiliation - What is inmate's racial, ethnic, or material, egoistic, geographical attachment?
4. Activities - Is there involvement in institutional programming?

5. Temperament - Is the inmate normally quiet, hyperactive, short tempered, sullen thoughtful?
6. Habits - What are inmate's work, social habits, sleeping, eating, TV?

Through "development attending", you create a relationship of mutual trust (the inmate knows that he can talk to you and that you will listen) so that when the crisis/conflict occurs you and the inmate can . . .

1. Focus on the crisis/conflict;
2. Keep things calm;
3. Help the inmate deal with his feelings (emotions), and
4. Effect a problem resolution.

In sum, "developmental attending" is . . .

1. Achieving a relationship with another (inmate) through investments which create mutual trust.
2. Being firm, fair, and honest in inmate dealings/discipline.
3. Challenging the inmate's "higher good" . . . bringing the inmate up to a positive level rather than relating at a negative level (calm, efficient conversations rather than shouting matches, arguments, name-calling, or "having-to-get-in-the-last-word" situations).

Principles of Crisis/Conflict Reduction

1. Carefully size-up the situation (what do you see, feel, hear . . . gather facts, not hearsay).
2. Communicate with other corrections staff to effect backup if needed.
3. Separate inmate(s) in crisis/conflict and deal with inmates one-on-one in private. Communicate with the inmate(s) in a calm, quiet voice.
4. Put the problem in perspective, help the inmate to realistically assess the situation, engage in active exploration of the problem and identify only the most important information.
5. Breakdown the problem into manageable pieces and work through those one at a time, starting with those which can be worked on most directly/immediately.
6. Help the inmate become aware of his feelings and the feelings of others, including expression both positive and negative.
7. Help the inmate to pace his efforts and thereby maintain control in as many areas of functioning as possible.

8. Help the inmate face up and deal with his problem(s) . . . no scapegoating or blaming others . . . insist that he maintain ownership of his problem(s).
9. Help the inmate to reorganize his life situation so that he may understand risk and the attendant consequences.
10. Document the crisis/conflict intervention and share the information with other corrections staff.
11. Support the inmate with timely, empathetic interventions after the crisis/conflict to see how the inmate is doing.
12. Take time when dealing with an inmate. The time you take to acknowledge or to really listen to an inmate even though you may have heard their statements before, will be investments of time that will be well worth your efforts and may well prevent a crisis/conflict situation in the future.

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3. -Adapted from material contributed by:
Jay Kucera, Correctional Training Officer
Lancaster County Department of
Corrections
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QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the Bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspections.

SUBJECT: CRISIS/CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
IN A JAIL SETTING

NAME _____

DATE _____

1. Define crisis/conflict. _____

2. Most inmates fault themselves for their incarceration.

TRUE

FALSE

3. List three types of information given that is useful to build mutual trust.

4. Three types of behavior changes that may signal a crisis/conflict are:

Change in _____

Change in _____

Change in _____

5. Some other signs of changes may be (list four):

CREDIT: 1/2 HOUR CREDIT FOR JAIL INSERVICE TRAINING REQUIREMENT

ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR OR TRAINING OFFICER

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A PERSON'S LIFE.

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TRUE

FALSE

3. List three types of information given that is useful to build mutual trust.

WHO IS THE INMATE, CAN YOU ACKNOWLEDGE BY NAME?

WHAT WORK INTERESTS DOES THE INMATE HAVE?

WHAT OTHER INTERESTS? (SPORTS, HOBBIES, ETC.) WHAT FAMILY INTERESTS?

DOES THE INMATE HAVE PHYSICAL/MENTAL PROBLEMS?

4. Three types of behavior changes that may signal a crisis/conflict are:

Change in ATTITUDE

Change in PERSONALITY

Change in HABITS

5. Some other signs of changes may be (list four):

APPEARANCE, LIVING QUARTERS, TEMPERAMENT, GROUP AFFILIATION,

ACTIVITIES, HABITS

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