



Implementing the Risk Principle: Measurement, Assessment, and Appropriate Response

Nebraska Community Aid and Juvenile Justice Conference
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Key term: **Intervention**

- Most everything we do in our justice systems are designed to “**intervene**” with behavior in some way
- What can we realistically expect from various interventions?
- What are the smartest way to use our interventions?
- What collateral (or unintended) effects might our interventions have/hold? (read: iatrogenic)



Interventions in justice systems

- Diversion
- Education
- Suspensions/expulsions
- Online/alt education
- One-time classes
- Fines
- Day reporting
- House arrest
- Electronic/GPS monitor
- Supervision (probation)
- Intensive Supervision
- Detention (juv. jail)
- Long-term incarceration
- Post-release supervision




Interventions – what we can expect

- ▶ Some interventions have the capacity to shape/control behavior in the short term (examples from previous list?)
- ▶ Some have capacity to evoke long-term behavioral change (see previous list as well)
- ▶ We should be **realistic** about what we can expect; **we shouldn't expect behavioral change from certain interventions** that aren't designed for it




Limited resources? Consider the Risk Principle

- What is meant by “risk”
- The **actuarial** risk or likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior
- Perhaps easiest to think of in terms of categories
 - Low (risk)
 - Moderate (risk)
 - High (risk)



Actuarial risk – an example

- Boys under age 25 require (often much) higher insurance rates, relative to girls
- Why?
- Boys are higher risk, **on average**
- Will all boys drive risky?
- Will all boys get in an accident?
- Why the higher insurance rates? Because we have good, research-based (**actuarial**) reason to expect those outcomes
- In short: We are justified in our response (the response being, requiring higher insurance rates)



The use of an actuarial risk-assessment greatly aids in determining risk – what we can likely expect

- Youth that are assessed as **low risk**.
 - Low probability of getting in trouble
 - Most will not come back; a few will
- Youth assessed as **moderate risk**.
 - Moderate ‘middling’ probability of getting in trouble
 - Some will not come back; some will
- Youth assessed as **high risk**.
 - The “highest” (relative to other cat’s) probability of trouble
 - Some will not come back; most might



The Risk Principle of interventions

- **Reliably** identify/categorize population into risk levels
- Make a **plan for intervention driven by risk level**

- **Low risk** youth need the **least amount** of intervention
- **Moderate risk** youth need **at least some** intervention
- **High risk** youth need **the most of what we have to offer**



Violations of the risk principles

- ▶ When low risk youth receive too much intervention
 - ▶ They're largely functional to begin with
 - ▶ They don't need a lot of intervention
 - ▶ When they receive too much, we increase likelihood they'll get in trouble – we increase their risk
 - ▶ **We interfere with the good, functional things that were making them low risk in the first place**



Violations of the risk principles

- ▶ When a high risk youth receives not enough intervention
 - ▶ They are largely not functional – or “functional” in inappropriate ways
 - ▶ They need a lot of intervention (remember what we can expect from interventions, depending on what they are/do)
 - ▶ When they receive too little, they are not getting enough of what they need
 - ▶ **We don't intervene enough w/their risk level, leaving them high risk and likely to get in trouble**



But to make risk-based classifications, we need...

- ▶ An objective, standardized method of actuarial risk assessment.
- ▶ Tried and true – initial/developmental research shows validity
- ▶ Ongoing research shows validity
- ▶ Staff training (if applicable) is part of agency culture
- ▶ Staff feel confident and have faith in the process (don't see it as useless)



For youth, what should be assessed re: criminogenic risk?

- Prior court/police involvement (if any)
- Educational performance
- Employment performance (if applicable)
- Friendship network
- Most important/critical familial relationships
- Substance use/abuse
- Emotional/mental health
- **Cognitions/thought processes; attitudes**



Discussing a few risk factors & their importance

- **Educational performance**; the educational environment
 - Indicators re: level of functionality
 - Behavioral indicators exist w/in educational environment
 - Teachers/school as source of risk-based assess. info.
 - Potential source of reward
 - Potential source of consequence
 - Adequate educational performance can indicate “buy-in” to a **conventional delinquency-free lifestyle** (attitudes/cognitions)



Discussing a few risk factors & their importance

➤ **Friendship network**

- Heavy influence on youth's behavior
- Good ideas (and bad ideas) stem from friendships
- Friends serve as impetus for behavior
- Friends serve as reflections (values) re: behavior
- Drug/alcohol use tied up w/friendship networks
- **Friendship network provides insight into values, attitudes, beliefs & cognitions**



Discussing a few risk factors & their importance

- ▶ **Familial relationships** (most commonly parental)
 - ▶ Home can be source of insulation from delinquency, or, can encourage (even unwittingly) delinquency
 - ▶ Family/home-life can provide sources of reward or consq.
 - ▶ Family of origin served as models for behavior
 - ▶ Warm vs. Cold; Permissive vs. Restrictive
 - ▶ Family of origin (and family of current) is where and how **cognitions, attitudes, values are shaped**



Discussing a few risk factors & their importance

➤ **Substance use/abuse**

- Behavior itself is illegal
- Distorts cognitions and behaviors
- Leads to other risky behaviors
- Health
- Impedes appropriate development (including cognitive)



Discussing a few risk factors & their importance

- ▶ **Cognitions/attitudes/values/belief systems**
 - ▶ Cognitions drive everything else
 - ▶ Why & how we value substance use
 - ▶ What friendship networks & engagement we choose
 - ▶ How we treat/respond to family members
 - ▶ How we value & engage in conventional lifestyle



Assessing relevant risk factors

- A method with existing support in the literature
- Assess items in a **dynamic** (as opposed to **static**) method
- Information gathered leads to a score(s) of some type
- Scores/info easy to interpret; easy to use
- Staff training (and re-training/re-certification) is critical
 - Interview?
 - Source(s) of information



Assessing relevant risk factors

- ▶ Important to plan for periodic (every 2-3 yrs) tests of validity
 - ▶ Is the score/process statistically related to likelihood of getting in trouble
 - ▶ Does the score/process **meaningfully & usefully** differentiate between levels of risk/criminogenic need?
- ▶ QA – extremely important – inter-rater reliability; inter-rater agreement
- ▶ Admin./leadership needs to plan for this



Responding to risk – the actuarially **low risk** youth

- Consider the aforementioned relevant risk factors
- Let's pause and think about what a truly low-risk youth would look like, via the lens of those factors
- What do we want to be careful of?
- What's the “easy response” (if not typical response) when we prescribe justice-related **interventions**?
 - When intervening, we can have too much of a good thing – must be careful with justice-related responses



Responding to risk – the actuarially **low risk** youth

- Despite being low risk, the youth might need some intervention
- Assessment information plus **individualized** case planning is important
- Assuming youth has active risk factors (criminogenic needs):
 - Intervention needs to be prescribed...
 - ...at an intensity level that can address the risk factor w/out disrupting the insulators
 - Ask ourselves: Will this “requirement” make it harder for this youth to succeed?




Responding to risk – the actuarially **low risk** youth

- Gather all relevant data
- Determine indeed – low risk (low likelihood of more trouble)
- Consider all possible interventions – some behavioral, some not – and consider their intensity
- Make the best decision re: how to address (or if to address) the risk factor/criminogenic need, while not disrupting functionality




Responding to risk – the actuarially **high risk** youth

- ▶ Consider the aforementioned risk factors
 - ▶ Let's pause and consider what a truly high-risk youth would look like, via the lens of those risk factors
 - ▶ We should still be careful of the “easy response”
 - ▶ Assuming we have a “kitchen sink” to throw at the problem(s), is that the wisest response?
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Responding to risk – the actuarially **high risk** youth

- ▶ The youth is high risk – presumably has at least a couple if not several active risk factors/criminogenic needs
 - ▶ Assessment information plus **individualized** case planning is important
 - ▶ Combination of appropriate “accountability” interventions, along with “behavioral interventions” are best
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The best interventions for youth

- Cognitive-behavioral programs show the most promise
 - Best way to implement responsivity (more on this later)
 - Best way to intervene with relevant risk factors
 - Show most promise for long-term behavioral change
 - Staff can be trained – not just “treatment/programming” staff – to use cognitive-behavioral principles
 - Quality assurance is key
 - Ability to vary intensity based on risk/need is key



Cognitive-behavioral interventions

- ▶ These are actually two different things
 - ▶ Often they are melded together, when we discuss
 - ▶ Implementing in a high-quality capacity takes a lot of effort
 - ▶ All staff delivering any amount need training & certification
 - ▶ Many curricula available
 - ▶ Avoid doing things half-baked
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Cognitive interventions

- Means **cognitions** – thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, value systems – are at the core of the programming
- Means that the **cognitions** that are directly related to the risk factor/criminogenic need are the **focus**
- All (or the vast, vast majority) of all programming activities are geared toward addressing those cognitions
- Exercises, activities, role playing, modeling by staff, discussions, examples...




Behavioral interventions

- Means that the programming and treatment activities are delivered using **behavioral strategies**
- Rewards are an active, and meaningful part of everything
- Corrections (some say “consequences”) are likewise an active and meaningful part of things
- Staff are trained in being verbally rewarding – genuinely, meaningfully
- The program and/or agency has a reward structure in place that acknowledges and reinforces achievement and skill development
- Youth are not “promoted” unless skills have been achieved, tests passed, etc.



Cognitive-Behavioral interventions

- ▶ **Cognitions, that are related to the risk factors/criminogenic needs are the primary, and meaningful, focus of all activities**
 - ▶ **All programming delivered via the vehicle of behavioral techniques – rewards, and consequences, that acknowledge skill development and achievement (large and small), consistently, constantly.**
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Cognitive-behavioral interventions

- ▶ Programmatic quality is paramount
 - ▶ Janky programs that enjoy the label “cognitive-behavior” are going to erode confidence in the modality
- ▶ Staff training
- ▶ Staff re-certification
- ▶ Plan for program evaluation – controlled studies
- ▶ Coaching, observation by master trainers is key
- ▶ Frequent check-ins, feedback, etc. to maintain quality
- ▶ Determine whether programs can vary intensity based on risk

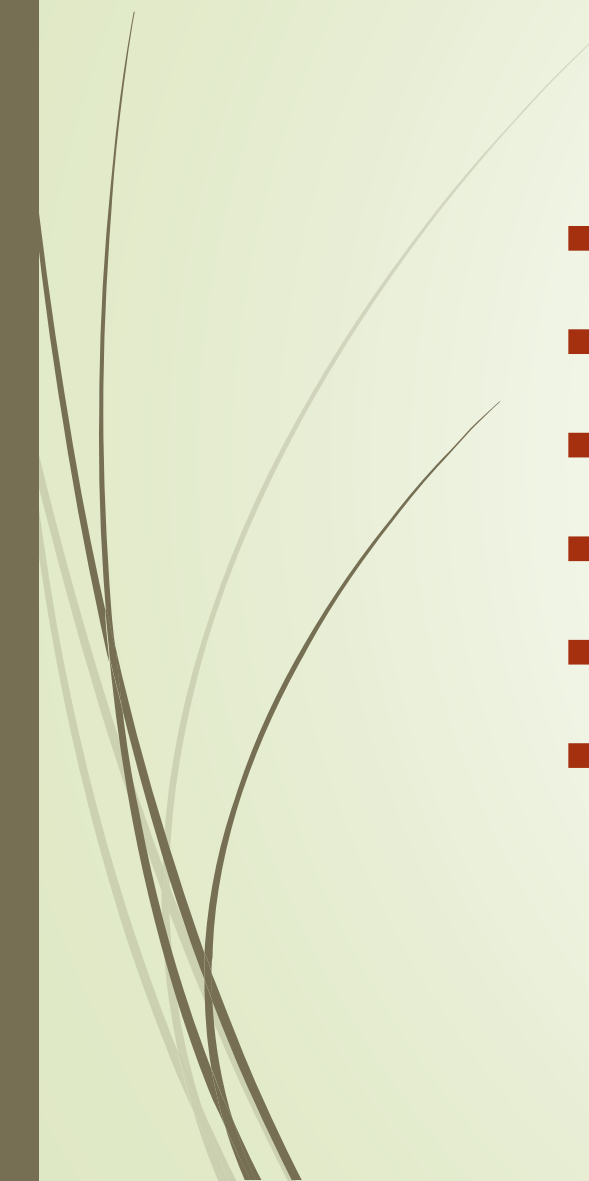


Cognitive-behavioral interventions w/in the context of supervision

- Newest research shows aforementioned techniques – cog.-beh. – can be applied to supervision
- Evolution re: the role of community supervision
- What was believed to be impossible re: behavioral change
- New approach w/in the context of supervision has been demonstrated as effective – recidivism reduced

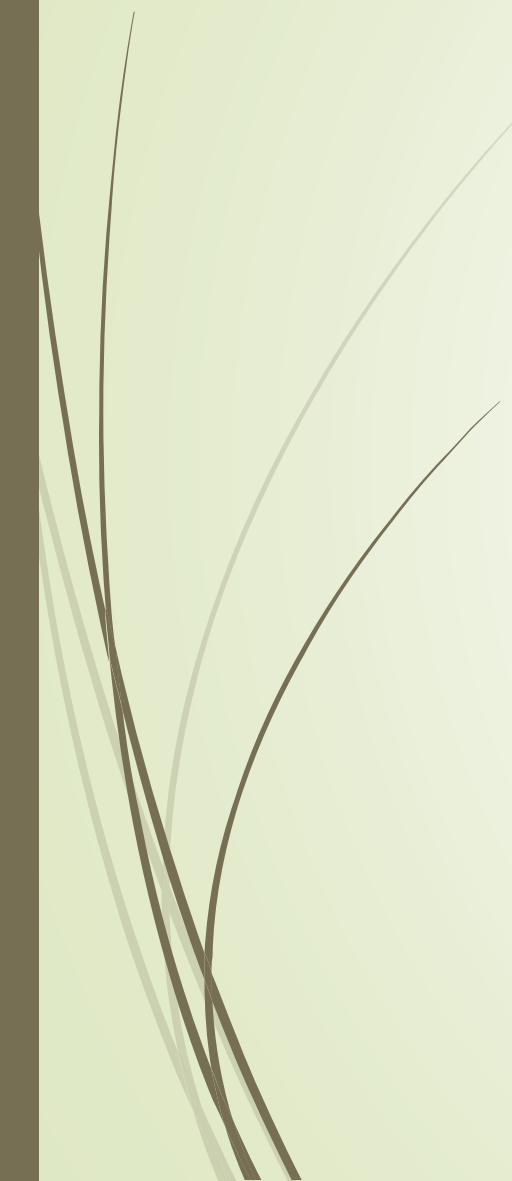


Case Planning

- Its relevance – biz as usual vs. newer models
 - Driven by relevant risk factors
 - Is it meaningful – to staff really use it?
 - Does it incorporate input from the youth?
 - Does it incorporate input from the family?
 - Does it really chart progress in a meaningful way?
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Case planning

- Use of “soft” or “intermediate” measures
 - The How I Think questionnaire
 - The Criminal Sentiments Scale
 - The PICTS (for older youth)
 - Professionals view toward responsivity factors
 - And again – individualized input from youth
 - Is the programming the youth is engaged in actively discussed?
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Responsivity – again, focus on the individual

- Often thought of as “barriers to successful engagement” in treatment, or supervision
 - Can encompass a host of different items
 - Not easy to assess – most often agencies do it in a non-standardized qualitative way
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Responsivity

- What barriers often keep a youth from “success” – successfully engaging in our interventions?
- Think about motivation as a responsivity factor
 - Does it vary from one youth to another?
 - What role does motivation play in successful engagement?
- Responsivity means taking the **individual characteristics** into account; allowing them to help drive interventions



Planning for evaluation

- ▶ How do we know what we're doing is working?
 - ▶ Validation studies re: risk were mentioned previously
- ▶ Program evaluation – treatment “audits” – CPC, CPAI
- ▶ Controlled studies (absolutely true control group)
- ▶ Use of intermediate targets (aforementioned inventories, re: cognitions, for example)
- ▶ Other methods of assessment designed to determine progress



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