

Building Rapport

The working alliance between corrections professionals and people under supervision can have a significant positive impact on outcomes. Rapport is a key aspect of an effective working alliance. Having rapport is about possessing the engagement skills to connect with other people, communicate effectively with them, and enhance their level of motivation. Rapport is based on trust, helpfulness, and professionalism; it is not based on the sociability of the relationship.

Why Build Rapport?

Having rapport is essential to corrections professionals' dual role of facilitating behavior change and holding people accountable to rules and expectations. Research has found that rapport:

- **helps** people see staff as wanting them to succeed
- **increases** corrections professionals' credibility
- **improves** communication between staff and the people they are supervising
- **facilitates** an atmosphere where people are more likely to confide in corrections professionals and ask for help
- **increases** people's motivation and willingness to engage in behavior-change interventions
- **creates** a sense of loyalty and accountability toward corrections professionals, where people do not want to let them down
- **improves** short and long-term outcomes, including increased willingness to comply with conditions of supervision, greater physical and emotional safety for corrections professionals and people on supervision, lower recidivism rates, and decreased future drug use

Without rapport, corrections professionals' behavior-change interventions will likely not be as impactful as they otherwise might be.

Strategies for Building Rapport

There are many strategies for developing positive rapport, including the following:

- **Be warm and genuine.** Create an atmosphere of interest and concern. Be transparent and follow through with promises. Develop mutual trust and communication.
- **Be respectful and listen actively.** Listen attentively and try to understand. Be aware of your communication style and how you use your authority. Encourage people to express themselves. Avoid interrupting.
- **Clarify your goal.** Show people that you want them to succeed and that you believe they can make positive changes. Explain the purpose of your interactions and your expectations. Allow them to ask questions and better understand the process of supervision and what may or may not occur. ▶

CORE CORRECTIONAL PRACTICES

Core correctional practices (CCPs) are effective strategies for improving outcomes. The four CCPs are:

- 1 **Building working alliance**
- 2 **Effective case planning and management**
- 3 **Engaging in skill practice**
- 4 **Appropriately using rewards and responses to noncompliance**

A meta-analysis found greater recidivism reduction among those who were supervised by corrections professionals trained in CCPs compared to those supervised by those who were not.

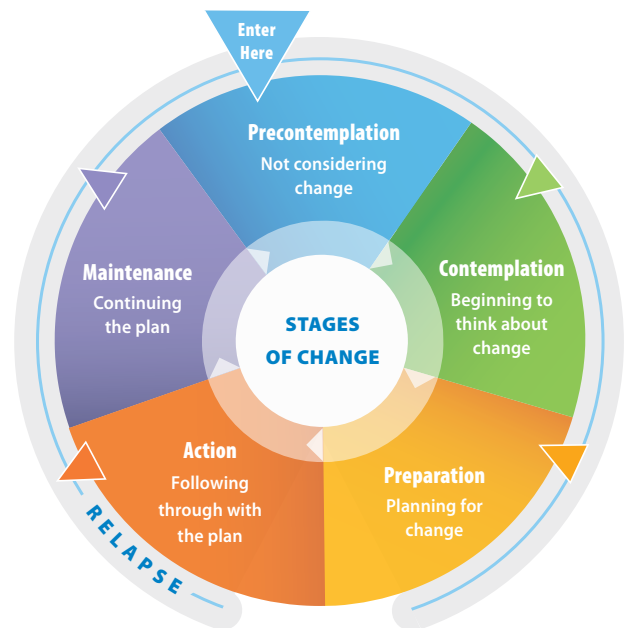
- **Be empathetic.** Recognize the past and present circumstances that may have contributed to people’s challenges. Do not minimize their problems or feelings. Provide access to services that they need to be successful.
- **Encourage.** Recognize people’s strengths. Express an attitude of hope and optimism. Support self-efficacy and empowerment. Affirm people’s progress and support their efforts toward change.
- **Be nonjudgmental.** Separate the behaviors from the person. Focus on the future rather than on the past.
- **Use a collaborative approach.** Involve the person in developing relevant and attainable goals. Use nonconfrontational approaches such as motivational interviewing to facilitate change.

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person’s motivation and commitment to change. It is key to helping develop an effective working alliance and guiding a person through the stages of change. MI involves four essential skills:

- 1 Asking open-ended questions
- 2 Affirming people’s strengths in order to increase their belief that they can change
- 3 Listening reflectively (i.e., paraphrasing what is heard both to demonstrate listening and to confirm understanding)
- 4 Summarizing (i.e., linking together and reinforcing ideas)

The use of MI has been correlated with reductions in recidivism.



Challenges and Solutions to Building Rapport

High caseloads and staff turnover can make it challenging for corrections professionals to develop rapport with the people they are supervising. The following are some possible solutions:

- **Align caseload sizes with risk level.** Staff working with people at low risk of recidivism, who require little to no intervention, would have caseload sizes of about 200 people. Staff working with people at medium or high risk, who benefit the most from intervention, would have caseload sizes of about 50 people. This would give staff more time to build rapport and help people address their criminogenic and stabilization needs.
- **Increase communication** with people on supervision beyond face-to-face contacts, for example, by using email, text messages, or video calls.
- **Ensure that case plans move** with people from one staff member to another so that people can continue making progress and building on successes rather than starting from scratch. Having to start all over would be a source of frustration that would lessen people’s rapport with their new corrections professional.