

Supervising People at Extremely High Risk

The vast majority of people under supervision are assessed, using an actuarial risk/needs instrument, as being at low, moderate, or high risk of recidivism; however, it is estimated that approximately 5% of the overall justice population is assessed as being at extremely high risk.^{1,2}

Who Are People at Extremely High Risk?

Researchers are still developing a better understanding of the characteristics of people at extremely high risk of recidivism and how they respond to interventions. Those who are assessed as extremely high risk may have:

- a strong association with criminal subculture (e.g., family members or associates who have a history of, or who are actively involved in, illegal behavior; strong ties to antisocial peers; more hardened attitudes; more pronounced antisocial thoughts and beliefs)
- a lengthy history of programming failure
- psychopathy traits
- a lack of motivation to change

How Should We Supervise People at Extremely High Risk?

Appropriate interventions can positively impact people at a moderate or high risk of recidivism; however, the level of impact on those who are extremely high risk is less apparent. Some researchers are of the view that people at extremely high risk can benefit from effective interventions, hypothesizing that they differ from those at moderate and high risk more in terms of the range and severity of their criminogenic needs than in terms of the kind of criminogenic needs. However, the length and intensity of risk reduction interventions needed for those at extremely high risk may be unrealistic for most agencies, given their limited resources. Agencies with sufficient resources should provide treatment and services to people at extremely high risk,³ but the primary focus for agencies with fewer resources should be on community well-being and safety.

The following page shows specific suggestions that agencies with limited resources can keep in mind when supervising people at extremely high risk.



PROGRAMMING AND PEOPLE AT EXTREMELY HIGH RISK

Many people assessed as being at extremely high risk of recidivism are not offered the programming and services that might reduce their risk, even in agencies with sufficient resources. Those who are offered programming and services often do not complete treatment. They may be asked to leave because of poor behavior, or they may stop going because of feelings of victimization, suspicion of other people's motives, a lack of commitment to change, or difficulties participating in programming. People at extremely high risk tend to have challenges learning, a history of poor grades, and negative attitudes toward school, and they often do not stick with tasks that they find difficult. In other words, many of the characteristics that increase their risk of recidivism also make it challenging for them to complete treatment.

¹ Agencies with a large percentage of people assessed as extremely high risk should verify that assessments are being completed accurately and that people are not mistakenly being categorized as extremely high risk.

² For purposes of this brief, "risk" refers to the likelihood of recidivism; it does not refer to the severity of the law violation.

³ See the brief *Supervising People at Moderate and High Risk* for information on supervision strategies that agencies with more resources can use with people at extremely high risk.



Create small caseloads of people who have been assessed as extremely high risk.



Have staff whose strengths lie in using authority effectively, rather than in engaging in behavior-change interventions, supervise these caseloads.



Use intensive supervision, where contacts occur frequently, unannounced, in the field, and during nontraditional hours.



Focus appointments on ensuring compliance with conditions and on community well-being and safety.



Use supportive technologies, such as GPS monitoring, to ensure close surveillance.



Develop partnerships with law enforcement for additional surveillance. When appropriate, share intelligence information, with the goal of preventing community harm.



Use motivational interviewing strategies to increase people's willingness to participate in behavior-change interventions.



Remember that people's risk levels can change, their levels of motivation can change, or they may experience life-changing events that lead to an increased willingness to work on skills and live law-abiding lives.