

Supervising People at Moderate and High Risk

The risk principle states that the intensity of correctional intervention should match a person’s likelihood of recidivism, as determined by an empirically based risk/needs assessment. The higher the risk, the more intensive the intervention.¹

Research has shown that people assessed as being at moderate or high risk of recidivism are the most likely to benefit from correctional intervention. We can, therefore, have the most significant impact on community well-being and safety when we focus resources on this population.

How Should We Supervise People at Moderate and High Risk?

The following strategies have been shown to be effective when supervising people at moderate and high risk:

- **IDENTIFY A PERSON’S CRIMINOGENIC NEEDS—ESPECIALLY THEIR DRIVER.** Use a validated risk/needs assessment to determine a person’s criminogenic needs, and identify which need is the driver of the illegal behavior. Focus interventions on the most influential needs for which a person is assessed at a high or moderate risk, especially antisocial cognition, antisocial personality/temperament, and antisocial associates.
- **LINK CONDITIONS TO A PERSON’S ASSESSED CRIMINOGENIC NEEDS.** Ensure conditions help people build the skills required to address those needs.
- **ADDRESS STABILIZATION FACTORS.** Stabilization factors can impede a person’s ability to successfully fulfill court-ordered requirements and live law-abiding lives. Assess a person’s stabilization factors, prioritize them based on the level of impact, and address them in case plans and referrals.
- **DEVELOP A COLLABORATIVE CASE PLAN.** Work with the person to set goals and action steps that address their most influential criminogenic needs and stabilization factors.
- **DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL ALLIANCE.** Developing professional alliance, or rapport, with the people they are supervising will increase corrections professionals’ success at influencing and guiding behavior change and improving outcomes. Staff should be warm, genuine, respectful, empathetic, encouraging, and nonjudgmental; listen actively; and use a collaborative approach.

EXAMPLES OF STABILIZATION FACTORS

- **Untreated medical or mental health condition**
- **Unstable or no housing**
- **Dependence on a controlled or illegal substance**
- **Lack of access to transportation**
- **Familiar or partner violence or conflict**

¹ For purposes of this brief, “risk” refers to the likelihood of recidivism; it does not refer to the severity of the law violation.

- **BE RESPONSIVE.** To promote engagement and to maximize learning and behavior change, tailor interventions to each person’s traits and circumstances—that is, their responsivity factors. Examples of responsivity factors include age, culture, gender, language, learning style, motivation, race, and trauma.
- **USE COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SOCIAL LEARNING.** The most impactful programs aimed at changing illegal behavior and reducing recidivism are cognitive behavioral interventions. These programs help people understand the relationship between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; learn prosocial ways of thinking and behaving; and practice and use these prosocial ways of thinking and behaving in their day-to-day lives. Following social learning theory is also important. According to social learning theory, people learn behaviors by observing those around them and by practicing the behaviors they see.
- **PROVIDE THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF DOSAGE.** Dosage is the amount of intervention focused on risk reduction. It can be provided in one-on-one appointments, group programming, referrals, and take-home assignments. The dosage target for people at moderate risk is 200 hours, and the dosage target for people at high risk is 300 hours. Staff who work with people at moderate or high risk should ideally have caseloads in the 40–50 range so they have the time to help people achieve their dosage targets.
- **STRUCTURE APPOINTMENTS PURPOSEFULLY.** Spend 20 minutes or more in one-on-one appointments, with the majority of that time devoted to addressing criminogenic needs.
- **RESPOND EFFECTIVELY TO BEHAVIORS.** To encourage behavior change, corrections professionals should reinforce compliant and prosocial behaviors and respond to noncompliance, with rewards outnumbering responses to noncompliance by a ratio of at least 4:1. Agencies should have a structured process to ensure that responses are customized to the person, proportionate to the behavior, communicated clearly, linked to criminogenic needs, and provided in a timely fashion.
- **ENGAGE FAMILY.** Family and social networks can play a critical role in promoting law-abiding behavior. When appropriate, they can be included in management strategies and in the case plan. For example, they can help their loved ones practice skills and, if needed, work with them to complete assignments. Referrals may be needed to assist family members.



20-MINUTE APPOINTMENT STRUCTURE

- **Check-in (4–5 minutes):** Build rapport, check for crises, and monitor compliance with conditions.
- **Review (4–5 minutes):** Review the take-home assignment from the previous appointment.
- **Intervention (10 minutes):** Teach, demonstrate, practice, and give feedback on new skills.
- **Take-home assignment (1 minute):** Give an assignment related to the skill practice.

Skill practice is key to ensuring that behavior change takes hold.