

Research in Brief

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Training Community Supervision Staff in the Use of Core Correctional Practices

KEY POINTS

- *How* probation and parole officers interact with people on community supervision is just as important as the programming the individuals receive.
- There is strong evidence that training supervision officers to improve their use of core correctional practices is an effective way to reduce recidivism for individuals on probation and parole.

Policy and Purpose

Research has determined that *how* probation and parole officers interact with people on community supervision is just as important as the programming that the individuals receive. *Core correctional practices* are specific techniques that correctional staff can use when they interact with individuals in their program to reduce recidivism.

Core correctional practices comprise:

- Effective use of authority (firm but fair approach when interacting with people on supervision);
- Appropriate modeling and reinforcement (the use of positive and negative reinforcement);
- Problem solving (teaching skills to resolve obstacles);
- Effective use of community resources (referrals to the most appropriate treatment services);
- Quality of interpersonal relationships (open, warm, and enthusiastic communication).¹

These skills should be used by supervision officers when they interact with people on their caseload, whether it is during the time the person reports or in programming or services that the individual receives.

Summary of Research

In an early meta-analysis, Dowden and Andrews found that interventions were more effective when staff utilized core correctional practices.² In this meta-analysis, the authors examined several hundred probation programs and found that those programs that incorporated elements of core correctional practices were more effective than programs that did not. But the authors also found that these skills were not used as often as expected, indicating a lack of attention to such skills in staff training. This spurred the development of a range of curricula to train probation and parole officers to use core correctional practices more effectively.

Chadwick, Dewolf, and Serin conducted a meta-analysis that examined the effect on recidivism of training programs to teach supervision staff how to use core correctional practices.³ The meta-analysis included evaluations of the following training and curricula: Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS), Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), Maryland's Proactive Community Supervision, Women Offender Case Management Model, and Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR). The studies were included in the meta-analysis if they: (1) incorporated a sample of community supervision officers who were trained in core correctional practices; (2) had a control sample that included individuals who were supervised by officers who were not trained

in core correctional practices; and (3) contained outcome information for both populations of people on supervision to show its effect on recidivism rates in comparison to the control group. Using these criteria, the authors included 10 studies. The results showed that individuals supervised by probation officers trained on these curricula in core correctional practices had lower odds of recidivism (about 13% lower) compared to those that were not supervised by officers trained in core correctional practices.⁴ Thus, **training supervision officers to improve their use of core correctional practices is an effective way to reduce recidivism outcomes for individuals on probation and parole.**

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Endnotes

- ¹ Dowden, C., & Andrews, D. A. (2004). The importance of staff practice in delivering effective correctional treatment: A meta-analytic review of core correctional practice. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 48(2), 203-214.
- ² Dowden & Andrews (2004).
- ³ Chadwick, N., Dewolf, A., & Serin, R. (2015). Effectively training community supervision officers: A meta-analytic review of the impact on offender outcome. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 42(10), 977-989.
- ⁴ Chadwick et al., (2015).

The strength of the evidence reviewed in this brief is assessed according to our Evidence of Assessment Criteria and Hierarchy of Study Design, which are posted online: robinainstitute.umn.edu/research-brief.