DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Guiding Framework for Effective Correctional Programs

A simple guide to align programs with the principles of effective intervention

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Guiding Framework for Effective Correctional Programs

There is a large body of research that guides the development of effective programs for correctional populations based on evidence-based practices (EBP). The Minnesota Department of Corrections (MnDOC) continues to move toward data-driven decision making while supporting individuals we serve to choose a more positive, prosocial, and healthy lifestyle.

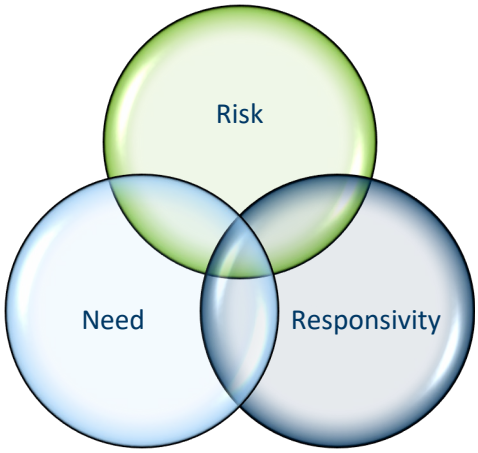
This guide is designed to assist staff, volunteers, and contractors in their development of group programming that is aligned with "what works" data so the MnDOC can offer the most effective programs possible for justice-impacted individuals.

You'll see the word *"recidivism"* throughout this guide. Recidivism typically means someone committed a new crime or got into legal trouble again after already being involved in the justice system. This could mean they returned to prison with a new criminal conviction or returned to prison (or similar consequence) because of risky behavior while on supervision in the community. MnDOC is committed to providing programs that have reduced recidivism outcomes or show promise to reduce recidivism by using the Risk-Need-Responsivity model with fidelity.

The Risk-Need-Responsivity Model (RNR)

The **Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR)** (Andrews D. A., 2010) model is a foundational framework for effective correctional interventions. There is strong evidence that supports significant reductions in recidivism for programs that adhere closely to the RNR model (Smith P. G., 2009). RNR guides decision-making to allocate resources for programs that:

- use validated assessments to understand who needs programming;
- target needs of individuals that are most closely linked to their criminal behaviors;
- create the most optimal learning environment for individuals to learn new skills & practice new behaviors;
- produce outcomes that reduce risky thoughts, behaviors, and recidivism.



Risk

The **Risk** Principle helps to prioritize who gets into different programs.

- Higher risk individuals need more intensive and structured services as research has shown that they are more likely to continue criminal behavior in the future (Andrews D. A., 1990). Higher risk individuals are likely to experience:

    - less access to prosocial models
    - less access to meaningful educational pathways and employment
    - less opportunity to learn how to safely manage negative emotions
    - dangerous substance use
    - and unstructured and unsupervised free time

    This means programs for higher risk individuals should

    - be long enough to ensure new skills and behaviors can be taught and practiced with increased proficiency
    - be structured so expectations are reinforced regularly & sessions have a consistent flow
    - and include continuous feedback with positive reinforcement & corrective disapproval as needed
- Lower risk individuals need less-intensive services as research has shown they are
    - more likely to self-correct thoughts and behaviors
    - connected to supportive people
    - more motivated to change

Key Takeaway: *The Minnesota Department of Corrections invests in program resources that have the greatest impact on higher risk individuals.*

Examples of current MnDOC correctional facility & community programs that target higher risk individuals:



Thinking for a Change (T4C) 5.0

Habilitation Empowerment Accountability Therapy (HEAT)

Achieving Change Through Value-Based Behavior (ACTV)

Moving On (for women)

Need

The **Need** Principle tells us to target dynamic factors that directly contribute to criminal behavior. We call these "***criminogenic"*** needs of individuals we serve.

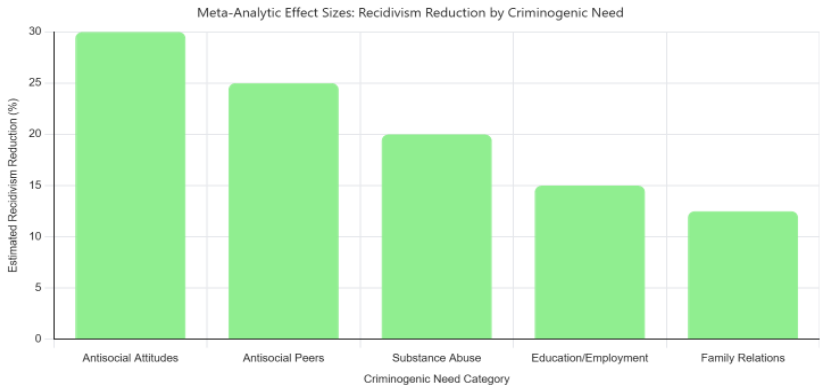
General Dynamic Criminogenic Needs	Example Behaviors
Antisocial Attitudes	Stealing a car assuming the owner has insurance to replace it
Antisocial Peers	Gang involvement
Antisocial Personality Characteristics	Uncontrollable anger, impulsiveness, urge to take risks
Substance Use	Uses alcohol to the level it impacts ability to drive safely
Family Conflict	Domestic violence
Lack of Stable Employment/Education	Identity theft to generate income without legal employment
Lack of Prosocial Leisure Activities	Uses free time to hang out with friends that use drugs

In addition to the criminogenic needs listed above, local research of Minnesota's justice-impacted populations has also shown that the following needs closely contribute to criminal behavior:

Minnesota Specific Criminogenic Needs	Example Behaviors
Unstable Housing	Chronic homelessness
Antisocial Self-Identity	Belief that one will always be "bad"
Lack of Hope for the Future	Belief that nothing is worth changing for

The following chart represents consistent meta-analyses (e.g., Andrews & Bonta; Lipsey 2009; Smith, Gendreau & Goggin) of reductions in recidivism when programs target specific criminogenic needs.

Programs that target multiple criminogenic needs have the most impact on reducing risky thoughts, behaviors, and ultimately recidivism.



Generally, programs that target non-criminogenic needs may be important for overall wellbeing and personal growth, however, are less likely to be associated with why someone commits a crime. Therefore, when *only* non-criminogenic needs are addressed in programming, research has shown there is little to no effect on recidivism outcomes (Cullen, 2000).

Examples of Non-Criminogenic Needs *we sometimes see in programs*

Anxiety/Depression	Empowerment	Eating Healthy
Injury Recovery	Budgeting	Time Management
Faith/Religion	Resume Building	Trauma
Yoga/Meditation	Arts/Crafts	Parenting Education

Key Takeaway: *The Minnesota Department of Corrections invests in programs that target multiple criminogenic needs*.

Examples of current MnDOC correctional facility & community programs that target criminogenic needs of individuals:



Substance Use Disorder Treatment

Decision Points

EMPLOY

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention-Employment Adult

Sex Offense Treatment Program

Responsivity

The **Responsivity Principle** reminds us that individuals may learn differently from their peers based on their experiences, strengths & abilities, and motivation. To ensure that individuals can learn the skills needed to address their criminal behavior, programming must adapt to individual needs.

There are two types of responsivity to think about when developing programs for the justice-impacted population:

- **Specific Responsivity:** tailor programs to personal experiences and learning styles to create an optimal and safe environment for participants to learn new behaviors. Examples (not an exhaustive list) of specific responsivity include:
    - Gender- programs designed for women should only include women participants and facilitators should have experience and training in trauma-informed services.
    - Culture- traditions and practices within a specific culture should be embedded into program delivery. For example, programs serving members of the Ojibwe community may use smudging prior to class starting to help settle the mind and prepare for the session. Another example of culture would be programs use preferred pronouns if serving LGTBQ participants.
    - Learning Ability- programs could embed mentors or tutors to assist participants with lower reading levels or provide more visual props to aid learning.
    - Motivation- program staff and facilitators should be trained in motivational techniques, including motivational interviewing and effective reinforcement to increase participants' desire and ability to learn what the program is teaching.

Here is a list of other common specific responsivity indicators that are often seen for individuals who are incarcerated or on supervision in communities. In order for participants to succeed in programs, these needs may need to be considered.



Language barriers	Childhood trauma	Transportation
Physical health or handicap	Religiosity	Digital literacy
Child care	Mental health	Difficulty with group dynamics

Examples of current MnDOC correctional facility & community programs that target specific responsivity of individuals:



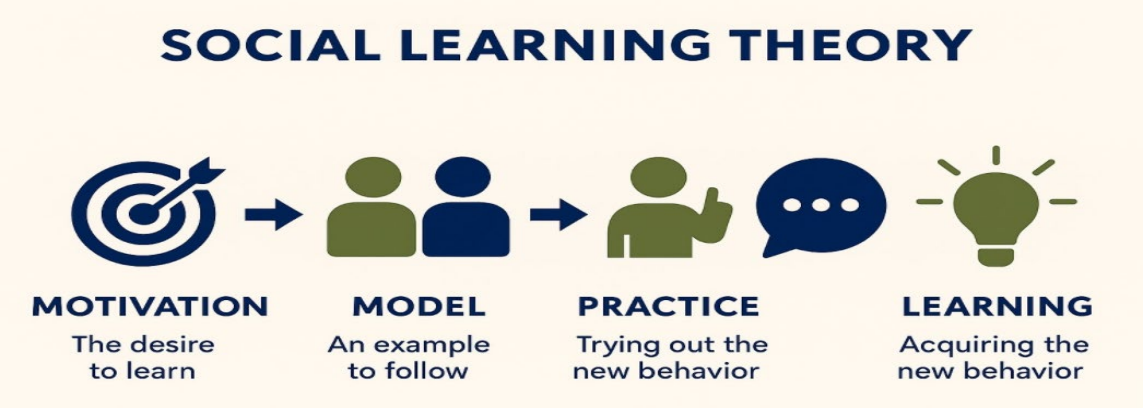
Native American Cultural Education Program

Trauma Skills Group

Enneagram Prison Project

Emotional Intensity Group

- **General Responsivity:** deliver programs using effective learning modalities that target criminogenic needs, such as cognitive behavioral or structured learning approaches. Research has shown that *generally,* most people learn new skills using these approaches. They include step-wise models, identification & restructuring of risky/antisocial thinking, real-situation practice, and feedback to enhance learning and proficiency of new skills and behaviors.



Examples of current MnDOC correctional facility & community programs that target general responsivity of individuals:

Decision Points

Thinking for a Change 5.0

Moving On

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention-Employment

Cognitive Behavioral intervention-Interpersonal Violence



Key Takeaway: *The Minnesota Department of Corrections invests in programs that are responsive to individual needs and provide a safe & effective learning environment for participants to acquire new skills.*

Fidelity

While fidelity is not a formal part of the RNR model, we do know that fidelity monitoring of programs is important (Latessa, 2006). This can also be called quality assurance (QA) or continuous quality improvement (CQI) of programs. Whatever you might call it, it is the principle that guides how well each of the RNR principles are applied in your program, how well your program aligns with evidence-based practices, and provides a blueprint or next steps toward improving your program's outcomes for participants.

Strategies to apply fidelity monitoring can include:

- **Observation of sessions**: Regular observation by supervisors, managers, evidence-based practices staff, and/or peers trained in the curriculum and quality assurance measures ensure the curriculum is being followed in sessions as intended and facilitators are skilled in their program delivery.
- **Feedback & Coaching:** Regular feedback is provided to facilitators on program delivery. Recommended improvements are modeled and practiced as needed.
- **Training:** Facilitators have the formal training required to facilitate the program. Regular refreshers, updates to curriculum, and practice outside of classroom delivery are encouraged.
- **Formal Program Assessment:** The University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute created an evidence-based program assessment called the Correctional Program Checklist (CPC) that reviews all parts of a program for EBP and RNR adherence. The assessment report provides an adherence to EBP score, outlines strengths of alignment to EBP, and provides recommendations for better EBP alignment. All indicators on the CPC are connected to research on effective correctional programs.
- **Outcome Evaluation:** This is a structured way to determine whether a program is producing the results it was designed to achieve. Typically, the focus is recidivism outcomes, however, it could also include other measures of participants such as desistence, sobriety, sustained employment, educational achievement, or other positive change indicators. Outcome evaluations look at results and whether a program works to increase participant success.

For more information on quality assurance within MnDOC programs, please review policy 204.005 https://policy.doc.mn.gov/docpolicy

Key Takeaway: *The Minnesota Department of Corrections invests in programs that are continuously trying to improve outcomes for participants*.

Conclusion

It is not realistic to believe that any program can meet all the requirements needed to be a perfectly aligned EBP program. However, we know that by embedding the principles of effective intervention (RNR) into programs offered to the populations we serve, we are providing the best opportunities for program participants to gain new skills and be motivated to change unhealthy antisocial thoughts & behaviors. When we use the research to drive our decision-making regarding programming offered, we get closer to our mission of transforming lives for a safer Minnesota (Corrections, n.d.).

The following checklists are offered to assist in aligning your program with RNR principles and other effective strategies to increase successful program outcomes.

If you need additional assistance or information on evidence-based practices, please email ebp.doc@state.mn.us.

RNR Program Checklists

Program Checklist to adhere to the Risk Principle

		Examples
Use a validated risk assessment tool		*MnStarr, MnSafeD, LS/CMI, COMPAS, WRNA*
Have clear admission criteria based on risk		*This program targets medium and high-risk individuals*
Separate program participants by risk		*Medium risk participants are required to complete 15 sessions; higher risk participants complete 20 sessions*
Have clear expectations for participation & completion		*Participants must complete all assignments & be present for at least 90% of the sessions*
Have built in structured, written feedback for continuous learning		*Progress reports are provided at least monthly for all participants*

Program Checklist to adhere to the Needs Principle

		Examples
Use a validated criminogenic needs assessment tool		*ASR, LS/CMI, WRNA, Criminal Thinking Scale*
Have clear admission criteria based on needs of the population being served (based on assessment results)		*This program serves individuals who score high in antisocial thinking & peer domains*
Target multiple criminogenic needs in the program		*In addition to anti-social thinking and peers, this program targets substance use, leisure time, and creating a positive self-identity*



Program Checklist to adhere to the Specific Responsivity Principle

		Examples
Assess for at least two types of responsivity to assist program participants in learning		*Reading scores; learning style, motivation to change; ACES; mental health*
Admission criteria excludes populations that cannot be served effectively		*This program requires a minimum of an 8th grade reading level; at minimum, participants must be in the contemplation stage of change*
Alternatives to mainstream learning are provided in the program		*Mentors/Peers/Translators are available to assist participants as needed; large text workbooks are available*
Program staff are trained in responsive techniques that support learning		*Trauma informed; motivational interviewing; effective reinforcement and disapproval*
Program provides support for participants with specific barriers to attending classes		*Transportation; child care; translation services; mobility accessible*



Program Checklist to adhere to the General Responsivity Principle

		Examples
Program is delivered through an effective modality		*Cognitive behavioral; structured social learning; family based*
Program facilitators are prosocial models for participants		*Includes formal and informal modeling while with program participants*
Program facilitators are comfortable role-playing skills being taught in sessions		*Role plays are effective strategies to practice and acquire new skills*
Program staff are trained to routinely provide meaningful feedback to participants		*What went well/needs improvement on assignments, in class practice, etc.*
Program has built in incentives that help motivate individual participants		*Verbal affirmations; variety of tangible or token incentives; completion certificates*

Program Checklist to adhere to Fidelity

		Examples
Routine observations of sessions occur		*Supervisors, CQI staff, or trained peers observe at least once per quarter*
Feedback is provided to facilitators/program staff		*Post observation; participant surveys; pre/post tests; outcome results shared*
Program staff are trained and participate in ongoing training to stay current with curriculum changes		*Formal curriculum training refreshers, facilitation skills training, curriculum updates/rewrites*
Program thoroughly assessed at least every 5 years		*Recidivism outcome evaluation; CPC assessment*
Program is open to change and innovation to increase effective alignment with EBP		*Regular program meetings/consult; ongoing training; regular EBP literature review*

Program Checklist for other research-based effective program strategies

		Justification
Program participants limited to 10-12 per trained, active facilitator		*Too large of a class limits effective feedback opportunities on practice work*
Homework/Practice Work is given after most sessions		*Practice outside of the classroom is important for skill acquisition; homework is reviewed the following session*
Provide completion/discharge summaries		*Ensure the participant and other staff working with the participant are aware of what was learned and where ongoing support is needed*
Develop opportunities for post-program practice such as aftercare or regular check ins with facilitators		*Sustain learned skills through ongoing check in; discuss challenges/set-backs; rehearse graduated practice*

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