Forensic CBT:
An Innovative Training Program for
Community Corrections Practitioners

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• Tom Hogan - Consultant Retired from Court Support Services Division of Connecticut
• Forensic CBT Coaches - Court Support Services Division of Connecticut
• Susan Glass & Court Support Services Division of Connecticut Staff
• Bureau of Justice Assistance

This project is about…

the extent to which CBT interventions
and techniques can be incorporated into
probation work

(feasibility study)

Other CBT Probation Initiatives Outside
of Connecticut

• Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) James Bonta, Ph.D., Corrections Research Unit, Public Safety Canada

• Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) Edward Latessa, Ph.D., University of Cincinnati
A view from the other side of the desk…

A view from around the world…


Part 1:

Characteristics and Foundational Principles of the Forensic CBT Program
U.S. Department of Justice Grant

- Starting October 1st of 2012, Connecticut’s Court Support Services Division (CSSD) received a two year “SMART Probation” grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance
- The grant sought to enhance the supervision skills of 40 probation officers through the development of a program called “Forensic Cognitive Behavioral Therapy”
- Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) partnered with CSSD to develop and implement the program. University of Southern Maine agreed to be the research partner for this project and conduct the process evaluation
- This program is being piloted with two cohorts of probation officers who were selected by their supervisors to participate

Research Design

- Cohort #1 (n=20)
  - (FCBT skills building) (9-months)
  - Work samples
  - Coaches (n=9) (9-months)

- Cohort #2 (n=15)
  - (Comparison)
  - Work samples

Process Evaluation Methodology
- Coding recordings of three supervision sessions (work samples) before and after training program
- Tracking clients’ compliance with treatment referrals, drug tests, and probation violations before and after officers participated in the FCBT program

Outcome Evaluation
- Probation completion rates
- Rearrest rates

Foundational Principles of the Forensic CBT Program

- Curiosity and willingness to try new strategies
- Reciprocal relationship between the program developers and POs participating in the project (We learn from each other)
- Openness (with an important caveat)
Foundational Principles…

- Intellectual Capital

  (Forensic CBT Coaches)

- Hearing what actually happens

  (Essential Equipment)

- Coaching and skills building model

  (Versus training & quality assurance)

  - Delivered to probation officers in small doses of two sessions per month over a 9-month period of time. The officers practice one skill before the next is introduced and receive coaching to improve their skills.

  - Recordings are reviewed and discussed in groups that include program developers, coaches, and POs.

* The overwhelming majority of adult POs stay in their positions for 20-years or more
Foundational Principles…

- Knowing how to ‘launch’ into productive conversations is a critical skill
- Interactions are brief and focused (25 minutes)
- Focus conversations on risk-relevant factors rather than conditions of probation
- Move away from non-strategic supervision (e.g., “How’s it going?”) and chaos-driven supervision (i.e., crisis of the week)

How One Launches Into Moves is Critical…

FCBT “Scripts”
Foundational Principles…

- Integration of different theoretical streams

**Part 2:**

What Does Forensic CBT Sound Like in Real-World Probation Interactions?

(*...and how does it differ from standard practice?*)

- Collaborative relationship (e.g., helping, caring)
- Structured and organized (e.g., agenda setting, focus)
- Conceptualization of key thinking and behavior patterns related to risk-relevant areas
- Eliciting thinking that *precedes* poor decisions in risk-relevant areas
- Providing clients with out-of-session assignments
The Initial Contact

• In the first 60-seconds of the initial meeting, the stage is often set for successful (or unsuccessful) engagement

• The way POs introduce themselves, describe their roles, and explain the supervision process will influence how clients respond

Audio Sample

• Before forensic CBT training
  (initial contact)...

Developing an Opening Statement

• 4 components to an opening statement. The PO...
  – introduces him or herself and clarifies his or her role
  – provides a general statement about the purpose of supervision
  – conveys sense of collaboration
  – ends with an open question that invites a response from the client
Audio sample

- After forensic CBT training
  (initial contact)...

Initial Contact Script
(Integrating CBT, RNR, & MI)

“Hello ______, thanks for coming in on time today. My name is Brenda. I’ll be your probation officer. Part of my job is to uphold the expectations of the court and the conditions of probation. Another part of my job is to provide support and information about community resources and to help you gain skills and knowledge to successfully complete your probation and keep you from returning to the court in the future. We will work together on identifying some of your strengths and some of the things you’ve struggled with. We will also focus on those things you think might put you at risk for having future problems. How could being on probation be helpful to you?”

Audio Sample

- Before forensic CBT training
  (typical supervision session)...


Emphasis on OARS skills as a foundation. POs work toward
- increasing reflections
- emphasizing open questions
- weaving occasional affirmations into the conversation
- ending supervision sessions with summaries that highlight the most important issues discussed, change talk, and thinking patterns related to decisions

Change talk
- Recognizing, eliciting, and reinforcing clients’ reasons and means for behavior change

### Examples of Change Talk and Sustain Talk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Talk</th>
<th>Sustain Talk</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevention change talk</td>
<td>Prevention change talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matching change talk</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment (I was sure my wife would think I was crazy . . . and D. Mitchell (eds.), Forensic CBT: A handbook for clinical practice. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### MI Training Activities are Recalibrated Around Risk Relevant Factors

Example exercise: Converting closed questions to open questions
- “Are you staying out of trouble?”
- “You’re not hanging out with anyone I wouldn’t want to see you with, are you?”
- “Are you staying clean?”

Example exercise: Reinforcing change talk
Client says: “I’ve lost a lot. I’ve lost years out of my life. I can’t ever get back time.” Next thing you would say...

Client says: “I know most people don’t think a dishwashing job is all that much, but when I’m in my work uniform waiting for the bus and I see those dudes across the street doing nothing, it kind of makes me feel good.” Next thing you would say...
Recognizing and Responding to Change Talk
(Forensic CBT Recording Assignment)

Record an interaction with a client to elicit change talk. What is the most urgent for you now? What is most important to you now? What is most urgent for you now? What is most important to you now?

• If you did decide to change __________, why would that be a good thing?

Audio sample

• After forensic CBT training
  (eliciting change talk around a risk relevant factor) …
Values and Life Priorities

Borrowed heavily from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)


Values versus Goals

Values: are big life directions that require ongoing attention across a lifetime

Goals: can be completed and have a clear end point

e.g., a parent might have the goal of attending their children’s soccer games and dance recitals. The goal might end once the child outgrows these activities, while the underlying value of “being an involved parent” will manifest itself in a variety of ways throughout different phases of the children’s lives.

e.g., a client might have a goal of successfully completing parole, and therefore attend a mandated domestic violence program. That goal might end once parole supervision is completed, while the underlying value of ‘having positive family relationships’ will continue to manifest itself in a variety of ways long after supervision ends.

Why Discuss Values?

• Working with clients to avoid high risk behaviors (avoidance goals) is only part of the change process; helping them develop behavioral paths to a life worth living (approach goals) is an equally important component

• The exploration of values is used to establish anchor points to guide future behavioral choices; aiding in minimizing behaviors that will interfere with core values and developing behavioral activation plans likely to lead to a more prosocial and meaningful life
What about clients with antisocial values?

Discussions with justice-involved clients around values and goals usually reveals desires for opportunities to provide for family, connect with others, have meaningful work, etc. In the majority of instances, antisocial patterns are typically inconsistent with client values, and a reflection of unskilled attempts to meet one’s values and cope (albeit unproductively) with the challenges of life. Assuming the majority of clients have inherently antisocial values shuts the door for powerful discussions about what matters most.

Audio sample

• After forensic CBT training
  (discussion about values and life priorities)…
**Risk-Need-Responsivity**

- Integrated throughout each component
  - Setting the agenda and focus on risk-relevant factors such as substance use, criminal companions, dysfunctional family relationships, and employment
  - Eliciting and reinforcing change talk around specific risk areas
  - Using scripted CBT sequences to identify thinking that is connected with poor decisions in risk areas most relevant for the client

**Criminal Thinking**

- Thinking patterns associated with antisocial and self-destructive behaviors (a set of beliefs that affect choices and behaviors, which if unaltered, influence one’s life trajectory)
  + Provides a specific focus on thinking patterns that permeate day-to-day decision-making
  + Patterns can be reliably assessed, and criminal thinking instruments are readily available, free to use, and easily administered and scored
  - In discussions POs may over-pathologize clients

**Criminal Thinking Instruments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th># of Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS; Walters, 1995)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (CSS-M; Simourd, 1997)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure of Criminal Attitudes &amp; Associates (MCAAs; Mills, Kroner, &amp; Hemmati, 1999)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Christian University Criminal Thinking Scales (TCU CTS; Knight et al., 2006)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure of Offender Thinking Styles (MOTS; Mandracchia et al., 2007)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminogenic Thinking Profile (CTP; Mitchell &amp; Tafrate, 2010)</td>
<td>8</td>
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Criminal Thinking Patterns

Self and Others

(1) Identifying with, and seeking approval from, criminal associates (e.g., “I don’t have anything in common with people who live a straight life.”)
(2) Disregard for others, lack of empathy, lack of remorse, and callousness (e.g., “There’s no point worrying about people you hurt.”)
(3) Avoiding intimacy and vulnerability (e.g., “If I open up to someone, they will take advantage of me.”)
(4) Hostility and suspiciousness toward criminal justice personnel (e.g., “The cops are the real criminals.”)
(5) Grandiosity and entitlement (e.g., “All women want me.”)
(6) Seeking dominance and control over others (e.g., “Nobody can tell me what to do.”)

Criminal Thinking Patterns

Approaching and Reacting to the Environment

(7) Demand for excitement and thrill seeking (e.g., “There is no better feeling than the rush I get when stealing.”)
(8) Exploiting and manipulating situations/relationships for personal gain (e.g., “It doesn’t make sense to work full-time if you can get on a government program.”)
(9) Hostility toward rules, regulations, and laws (e.g., “Laws are there to hurt you, not help you.”)
(10) Justifying, minimizing, and excuse making related to harmful behaviors (e.g., “If I don’t sell drugs in my neighborhood, somebody else will.”)
(11) Willfully lazy attitude, path of least resistance (e.g., “Everything will take care of itself.”)
(12) Giving up in the face of adversity (e.g., “When I don’t understand things I give up.”)
(13) Underestimating negative consequences (e.g., “I’ll never go to jail for selling drugs because I know all my clients.”)

Criminogenic Thinking Profile (CTP)

62 items; Provides scores in the following areas:

- Disregard for others: lack of concern, empathy, and/or remorse
- Demand for excitement: low tolerance for boredom, impulsivity
- Poor judgment: underestimating negative outcomes
- Emotionally disengaged: avoidance of emotions -> vulnerability/intimacy
- Parasitic/exploitive: exploitive, evading responsibility
- Justifying: justification/minimization of antisocial behavior
- Inability to cope: giving up easily/ineffective problem solving
- Grandiosity: overestimating abilities, skills, inner qualities
Audio sample

- After forensic CBT training
  (Conversation about “inability to cope”)…

Traditional CBT
Risk-Need-Responsivity

• Many programs the focus is on the thoughts that come after behaviors (i.e., justifying). We are more focused on thoughts that preceded specific instances of risky and self-defeating behavior that occurred in the clients life

• CBT sequence have been developed around 6 risk-relevant areas
CBT Sequences

- STD (Situation-Thoughts-Decision) high risk for justice involvement
- FTD (Friend-Thoughts-Decision)
- LTD (Leisure-Thoughts-Decision)
- TRTD (Toxic Relationship-Thoughts-Decision) family relationships
- SUTD (Supervision Use-Thoughts-Decision) drug testing
- EAA (Employment Attitude Analysis)

Audio sample

- After forensic CBT training

(CBT sequence “FTD analysis: Friend-Thoughts-Decision”...
Audio sample

- **After** forensic CBT training

(CBT Homework: “Thinking Helpsheet”)

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**Proposed Supervision Session Structure**

1. **Agenda**: Taking the lead and introducing agenda for the session
2. ** Loose Ends**: Quick review of loose ends/assignments from last meeting (e.g., follow up on referrals, CBT homework given to the client, job search update)
3. ** Forensic CBT**: Addressing criminogenic needs (e.g., eliciting change talk, CBT sequences, CBT exercises, discussions around values and life priorities, increasing awareness of the relationship between thinking patterns and decision-making)
4. ** Conditions**: Quick review of practical issues related to conditions that did not come up in the session (e.g., change of address, new police contact, employment changes, restitution)
5. **Summary**: Summarize what was accomplished and what the client should be doing between now and next session
6. ** Documentation**: Putting notes into file, copies, etc.

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**Helpsheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking pattern:</th>
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**Part 2: To be completed by client**

- Thinking pattern: ____________
- Family: ____________
- Employment or Education: ____________
- Leisure or downtime: ____________
- Other: ____________
- Actual Decision: Write down what you ended up doing ____________

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**References**


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**22/09/2014**
Part 3:

Lessons Learned
(Thus far...)

Is the Incorporation of CBT Skills and Techniques into Probation Supervision Feasible?

YES!

- With practice, POs can successfully integrate CBT interventions into their supervision

- We have only scratched the surface as to what is possible. There are numerous interventions that could be adapted and added to the menu of what POs do with their clients

Exit Surveys with the Cohort I Probation Officers

- Reactions to the Forensic CBT training program were very positive
- More efficient meetings with clients
- Clients liked the idea that probation officers cared about them
- Clients became more engaged
- CBT scripts kept the meetings focused on major issues
- Clients did the homework assignments
- When approached skillfully, the vast majority of clients wanted help in changing their lives
- Forensic CBT became self-reinforcing for POs who were willing to try it out. This is similar to what has been described in CBT projects with community corrections practitioners in Canada
Aren’t We Just Turning POs Into Counselors and Therapists?

NO!

• PO roles of behavior change and safety of others
• Consequences of supervision failure (not just a bad day for the client)
• Client deficits in motivation and awareness
• Brief sessions
• Focus is on client decision-making rather than symptom relief
• Emphasis is on thinking targets that are often dissimilar to those seen in anxious and depressed clients
• A focus on life areas and risk-relevant factors that have been statistically linked to continued self-defeating and destructive behaviors

Other Initial Impressions:

• Compassion
  - Compassion: “sensitivity to the suffering of others and a desire to alleviate suffering” (Kolts & Chodron, 2013)
  - Foundational for successful engagement in any type of helping relationship
  - POs with a diminished capacity to come to the table with a level of compassion for those with whom they work do not do well with FCBT

Other Initial Impressions:

• Culture
  - A strong culture is produced when cohesion exists around issues of values, conduct, and practices
  - A strong culture provides a system of informal rules and peer pressures that can be very powerful in determining PO behavior and performance
  - Culturally approved behaviors thrive while disapproved behaviors are discouraged or punished
  - We too often focus on changing policies and rules rather than focusing on changing culture

Unresolved Issues

- What is the impact of forensic CBT on client recidivism?

- How much dosage is needed for POs to learn these skills? (coaching and skills building)

- What is the best way of sustaining a culture that supports and maintains PO's Forensic CBT skills?

A different view from the other side of the desk…