













What Works and What Doesn't in Reducing Recidivism

Dr. Edward J. Latessa is a Professor and Head of the Division of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati. He has published over 75 works in the area of criminal justice, corrections, and juvenile justice. Dr. Latessa has directed over 60 funded research projects including studies of day reporting centers, juvenile justice programs, drug courts, intensive supervision programs, halfway houses, and drug programs. He is also a consultant with the National Institute of Corrections. Dr. Latessa's work is based, in part, on a large scale meta-analysis of research about what works with juvenile offenders. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight his findings related to effective practices in addressing juvenile delinquency.

Characteristics of Effective Programs for Offenders:

-  Using a theoretical foundation to create the program and its components
-  Identifying interventions that target risk factors and crime producing behaviors
-  Applying treatment models that demonstrate effectiveness in reducing recidivism
-  Employing a staff that understands the interventions, why they are being used, and how to apply them
-  Using risk and need assessment instruments to assess offenders
-  Varying treatment & services based on risk, needs & responsiveness of the offenders

What Doesn't Work with Offenders:

-  Targeting non-crime producing behaviors
-  Using programs that involve intense group interactions without regard to personal responsibility
-  Utilizing vague, unstructured rehabilitation groups
-  Improving neighborhood-wide living conditions without addressing the crime producing behaviors of higher risk individuals and families
-  Increasing self-esteem (without reductions in antisocial thinking)
-  Focusing on vague emotional and personal complaints that have not been linked with criminal behavior

According to Dr. Latessa's research, there is a growing body of literature about what does and does not work to reduce recidivism in juvenile offenders. His recommendations for the most successful models include programs that are behavioral in nature and specific to the risk level of the offender. Dr. Latessa also identifies the least successful models as those programs that are punishment-oriented and control-oriented programs.



Most Successful Treatment Models

- Social learning—including anti-criminal modeling and skills development
- Cognitive behavioral—including cognitive therapy, problem solving, rational emotive therapy, self-control skills and aggression replacement training
- Radical behavior—including classical conditioning and operant conditioning
- Family based therapies—including functional family therapy
- Targeting of specific crime producing needs—including treatment to specific types of offenders (e.g. sex offenders, violence, mentally disordered, etc.)



Least Successful Treatment Models

- Correctional boot camps using traditional military training
- D.A.R.E
- School-based leisure time enrichment programs
- "Scared Straight" programs where juvenile offenders visit adult prisons
- Shock probation, shock parole & split sentences adding time to probation and parole
- Home detention with electronic monitoring
- Residential programs for juvenile offenders using challenging experiences in rural settings

Principles of Effective Intervention

Studies from across the country consistently show that most people support the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders. It is also clear that the public wants programs that work. Dr. Latessa has identified three core principles of effective interventions with juvenile offenders: Risk Principle, Need Principle and Treatment Principle.

Risk Principle (WHO)—target higher risk offenders

- ◆ Target those youth with higher likelihood of recidivism
- ◆ Provide most intensive treatment to higher risk youth
- ◆ Intensive treatment for lower risk youth can increase recidivism

Treatment Principle (HOW)—use behavioral approaches.

The most effective interventions are behavioral:

- ◆ Focus on current factors that influence behavior
- ◆ Action oriented
- ◆ Offender behavior is appropriately reinforced

Need Principle (WHAT)—target crime producing risk/need factors. The major risk/need factors include:

- ◆ Antisocial/procriminal attitudes, values, beliefs and cognitive-emotional states.
- ◆ Procriminal associates and isolation from anticriminal friends
- ◆ Personality factors favoring criminal activities including:
 - restless aggressive energy, below average verbal intelligence and weak problem-solving skills
- ◆ A history of antisocial behavior
- ◆ Family factors including low levels of affection, poor supervision and discipline practices, and abuse/neglect
- ◆ Low levels of personal educational, vocational or financial achievement

By appropriately assessing and targeting crime producing behaviors/ needs, agencies can reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Crime Producing Needs

- ◆ Antisocial attitudes
- ◆ Antisocial friends
- ◆ Substance abuse
- ◆ Lack of empathy
- ◆ Impulsive behavior

Non-Crime Producing Needs

- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Low self esteem
- ◆ Creative abilities
- ◆ Medical needs
- ◆ Physical conditioning



Important Considerations:

- ▶ Offender assessment is the engine that drives effective programs—it helps you know who and what to target
- ▶ Design programs around empirical research—it helps you know how to target offenders
- ▶ Program integrity makes a difference—service delivery, disruption of criminal networks, training/supervision of staff, support for programs, and evaluation must be considered

Material for this newsletter was derived from the following sources:

Edward J. Latessa, Ph.D., Harry E. Allen. (2003) *Corrections in the Community . (3rd Edition)*. Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati, Division of Criminal Justice .

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