

BITS

Brief Intervention Tools



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Brief Intervention ToolS (BITS)

A Primer for Users

Welcome BITS users! BITS, or Brief Intervention ToolS, are designed to assist the corrections professional in helping individuals involved in the justice system make positive decisions — ones that will give them the confidence and skills to avoid illegal behavior. The tools are purposefully short (one page in length) so that they are easy to use and applicable in a wide variety of circumstances.

Evidence-based practices have provided the corrections professional with clear direction regarding *what* to focus on (dynamic risk factors, or “criminogenic needs”) and *how* to address these areas (by building skills using a cognitive behavioral approach). We know, as well, that the one-on-one contact between a corrections professional and an offender can have a profound effect on future rearrest rates. To achieve this effect, the offender must learn new skills to be able to effectively respond to harmful patterns of thinking and behaving. The corrections professional, therefore, needs *useful* tools and techniques to teach the medium and high risk offender prosocial skills. These skills can be learned in a cognitive behavioral training (CBT) program. However, because of program capacity limitations and other barriers, not all offenders in need of CBT can attend. The corrections professional’s role as an agent of change is an extremely important one, especially under these circumstances. Taking on the change agent role may mean assuming an approach to working with offenders that is different from traditional monitoring and supervision; it certainly means engaging offenders in discussions and activities that result in changes to both their thinking and behavior.

This primer has been developed for the “agent of change” corrections professional and seeks to accomplish two objectives:

1. To demonstrate how BITS can be used in most situations involving an offender’s antisocial or destructive behavior, such as absconding, failing to keep appointments, using drugs/alcohol, spending time with negative peer groups, etc.; and
2. To describe how the various interventions available to corrections professionals today — notably, CBT, the Carey Guides, and BITS — are similar and different, and when to use which of these tools.

Why BITS?

Those of us who have worked one-on-one with offenders have learned a common lesson: we have limited time, so every minute counts. This means that our interventions need to fit into short appointments, and they need to be impactful. This is not to say that lengthier, more in-depth interventions aren’t appropriate; they are, of course. But too often corrections professionals don’t have the time or training to work with offenders in these more complex ways. The Brief Intervention ToolS (BITS) were created for corrections professionals working with juvenile and adult offenders who want to effectively address key skill deficits in short, structured interventions. To make the job of the corrections professional just a little easier, BITS are:

- **Short.** Each tool is only one page (front and back) and therefore can be completed during a brief intervention.
- **Situational.** Offender issues frequently arise spontaneously as a result of specific situations they encounter. Each situation, such as when an offender gets in trouble while associating with negative peers or becomes upset over the fact that his anger pushed away his girlfriend, represents a “teachable moment.” Under these circumstances, the corrections professional will not have time to carefully develop a multi-step plan, but putting off the discussion might mean losing the teachable moment. This is a perfect BITS opportunity. The corrections professional can address the situation quickly by simply tearing off a worksheet and working through it with the offender “on the spot.”

■ **User-friendly.** To be of practical value, tools must be easy for corrections professionals to administer under spontaneous circumstances. They must be clear and straightforward so corrections professionals can easily and confidently explain and process the tools with offenders. Equally, offenders must be able to readily understand the “teachable moment” concepts in the tools and apply new learnings with confidence. In this way, offenders are most likely to remember and repeat the new skills following the brief intervention. Therefore, each tool is designed with as few steps as possible to enhance memory retention.

■ **Versatile.** There are a multitude of skills we could teach offenders to help them be more successful, but not all of these skills are equal in terms of their contribution to crime reduction. BITS address six offender skill deficits identified through a series of interviews with corrections professionals; these six skill areas were identified as the most versatile (useful under many circumstances) and therefore the most important to teach offenders. Focusing on these core skill areas, the tools can be easily applied to a variety of situations, as illustrated in Table 1.

■ **Few in number.** Sometimes less is more. BITS include just six tools so that the corrections professional can easily identify the right tool for the right circumstance.

■ **“Plug and play.”** Many of the tools available to the corrections professional today require moderate or extensive amounts of training. BITS are different; they are intended for use with little or no advance preparation.¹ In this way, they are like “plug and play” electronics — ready for immediate use. The intent is that both the offender and the corrections professional will be able to pick up BITS and run with them.

Table 1 illustrates the versatile nature of the six Brief Intervention Tools by demonstrating how one tool can be appropriately used to address various case scenarios.

Table 1 Use of BITS in Various Case Scenarios						
Case Scenario	Thinking Traps	Overcoming Thinking Traps	Problem Solving	Decision Making	Who I Spend Time With	Overcoming Automatic Responses
Dirty UA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Failure to keep appointments	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Shoplifting	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Fight at park	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Take-Home Assignments. A cognitive behavioral approach to supervision and case management requires that offenders do something other than just show up for appointments. Take-home assignments are an effective way to ensure that offenders are thinking about and practicing the skills they learned long after the supervision appointment is over. It is only through applying the new skills to their daily life experiences that offenders will deepen their learning and form new habits. While BITS do not contain take-home assignments *per se*, the corrections professional is encouraged to have offenders complete the tools, apply the lessons to their daily lives and process the results with their corrections professional during their next appointment.

A Note About Skill Practice. In an effort to keep the tools simple and comfortable for those corrections professionals more at ease with a traditional supervision role, BITS do not require that corrections professionals engage in skill practice with offenders. However, corrections professionals are strongly encouraged to demonstrate the skills they’re teaching offenders, and to conduct skill practice sessions when they have time and as their knowledge, comfort, and own skills allow.

¹ While training on the use of BITS will likely enhance the corrections professional’s confidence and the effectiveness of the tools, it is not required.

BITS, The Carey Guides, or CBT?

To maximize outcomes, it's important to use different approaches when addressing offenders' criminogenic needs. At the same time, too frequently the optimal choice for addressing those needs is not available due to resource limitations, or the options available may not be the most appropriate given an offender's responsivity needs (e.g., learning disabilities, mental health). BITS, the Carey Guides, and CBT are designed to increase offender skills in order to reduce recidivism. As a general rule, consider the following in determining the most appropriate intervention strategy for a medium/high risk offender:

■ **Use CBT** when the dominant criminogenic need is antisocial thinking/beliefs or antisocial personality and the offender would do well in a group setting, preferably made up of participants of the same gender. This approach provides the greatest intensity and dosage.

■ **Use the Carey Guides** to support a long-term case management strategy. Introduce the Guides in the early stages of supervision and include their use in case plans. Let offenders know that the Guides will be used to structure one-on-one appointments and will support skill development in key criminogenic and case management need areas. The Guides can be used alongside CBT as a reinforcement, or instead of CBT when the offender cannot access CBT or has criminogenic needs that the available CBTs do not address.

■ **Use BITS** for three possible purposes:

- a. As a quick response to an issue that presents itself during supervision. The tools can help offenders gain insight into difficult situations while those situations are fresh in their minds. Most commonly, use of *Overcoming Thinking Traps*, *Who I Spend Time With*, and *Problem Solving* will address this purpose.
- b. As a way to avoid relapse. Offenders have an unfortunate habit of repeating past, negative behaviors. The Brief Intervention Tool *Overcoming Automatic Responses* helps offenders identify patterns of behavior that are prompted by particular conditions and develop a plan to avoid automatic, negative behavioral responses when these conditions arise.
- c. As a method to help an offender get unstuck. When an offender gets "stuck" and cannot seem to move forward, there are two tools that can help: *Thinking Traps* and *Making a Decision*. For example, if the offender exhibits the antisocial thinking/beliefs criminogenic need, as demonstrated by repeating thoughts and behaviors that result in the same negative consequences, the corrections professional can use the *Thinking Traps* tool to prepare the offender for later discussions on how to overcome those traps. The *Making a Decision* tool helps offenders weigh the pros and cons of making a change in order to help them move past *status quo*.

A summary of the differences between these three intervention strategies is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2 Intervention Similarities and Differences			
	BITS¹	The Carey Guides	CBT
Cognitively based	Yes	Yes	Yes
Behavioral	No ²	Yes	Yes
Dosage	Low	Medium	High
Estimated time required per appointment	Varies	15 - 20 minutes	90 minutes
Use	As a quick response to help offenders get unstuck, or to avoid relapse	As part of ongoing case management	As a direct service referral

As noted previously, the Brief Intervention Tools were created for those working with offenders who do not have the time and/or skill training to apply a cognitive behavioral approach in their one-on-one appointments. While the use of BITS would be enhanced by more time and advanced knowledge and skill among corrections professionals, neither is essential. That is, BITS are designed to be used by the majority of corrections professionals who have not necessarily been exposed to or acquired cognitive behavioral skills, and who have limited time to devote to individual offenders.

Table 3 illustrates some of the key roles that professionals working with offenders play, the knowledge and skills needed for these roles, and the tools that would be most helpful.

Finally, Table 4 connects some of the most influential criminogenic needs to the skill areas that should be targeted in case management. The specific Brief Intervention Tool, Carey Guide, or other possible program referral is matched to the skill deficit area.

¹ After using BITS, the corrections professional may discover that the presenting issue requires ongoing skill practice. In such cases, the corrections professional should add skill practice to the case plan.

² Take-home assignments and skill practice are strongly encouraged but are not a built-in component of the tools.

Table 3

Key Roles of Professionals: Knowledge and Skills Needed and Useful Tools

Skill Level of the Professional	Role of the Professional: Traditional Corrections Professional (Supervision & Monitoring)	Role of the Professional: Case Manager	Role of the Professional: Service Provider
EBP knowledge of risk, need, and responsivity principles	✓	✓	✓
EBP knowledge of social learning and cognitive behavioral approach	✓	✓	✓
Skill and comfort in using a cognitive behavioral approach		✓	✓
Skill and comfort in using skill demonstration and skill practice		✓	✓
Group facilitation skills			✓
Tools to be used	BITS	BITS Carey Guides	Carey Guides CBT
Anticipated impact on recidivism	Partial	Good	Best

**Table 4
Criminogenic Need Preferred Response Guidelines**

Criminogenic Need	Traits and Tendencies for This Risk Factor	Skill Areas to Target	BITS	Carey Guides	Possible Program Referral
1. Antisocial history³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct disorder before the age of 15 - History of skipping school, running away, fighting, using weapons, hurting animals, damaging property, lying, stealing - Disregard for social norms and rules/opposition to authority figures - Multiple prior offenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid high risk situations - Think less destructively - Avoid trouble 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Thinking Traps</i> - <i>Overcoming Thinking Traps</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Violence and Lethality</i> - <i>Dosage and Intensity</i> - <i>Responding to Violations</i> - <i>Rewards and Sanctions</i> 	<p>For external control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Day reporting (with or without extensive programming) - Drug court program - Curfew - Community service (if closely supervised) - Electronic monitoring - Voice verification
2. Antisocial attitudes, values, and beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possesses one or more of these thinking patterns: entitlement, irresponsibility, cold heartedness, justification, power orientation, criminal rationalization - Blames others - Does not demonstrate remorse - Not truthful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognize thinking errors - Think less destructively - Develop thinking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Thinking Traps</i> - <i>Overcoming Thinking Traps</i> - <i>Decision Making</i> (if ambivalent about change) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Antisocial Thinking</i> - <i>Moral Reasoning</i> - <i>Drug Dealers</i> (if applicable) - <i>Empathy</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CBI, Thinking for a Change - Other available CBI programs
3. Antisocial associates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Associates involved with criminal activities - Associates involved in drugs/alcohol - Associates influence or persuade others to commit crime - Gang affiliation - Associates lack involvement in prosocial community activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Break up friendships - Develop social skills - Avoid trouble - Keep out of fights - Avoid high risk situations - Learn how to say no to peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Decision Making</i> (if ambivalent about change) - <i>Who I Spend Time With</i> - <i>Problem Solving</i> - <i>Automatic Responses</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Antisocial Associates</i> - <i>Engaging Prosocial Others</i> - <i>Prosocial Leisure Activities</i> - <i>Interpersonal Skills</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recreation (gym, etc.) - Life skills program - Support group involvement

³ This is the only criminogenic need (risk factor) that is static (that is, that cannot change). As used here, it includes lack of responsibility to treatment and the need for external control.

**Table 4
Criminogenic Need Preferred Response Guidelines**

Criminogenic Need	Traits and Tendencies for This Risk Factor	Skill Areas to Target	BITS	Carey Guides	Possible Program Referral
4. Antisocial personality/temperament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of impulse control - Tendency to act before thinking - Tendency to lose temper easily - Reckless and irresponsible - Lack of empathy for others - Trouble maintaining relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem solve - Develop emotional control - Ask for help - Avoid trouble - Manage anger - Deal with anger in others - Be assertive - Manage conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem Solving - Overcoming Thinking Traps - Overcoming Automatic Responses - Decision Making (if ambivalent about change) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional Regulation - Moral Reasoning - Prosocial Leisure Activities - Anger - Interpersonal Skills - Problem Solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CBI, Thinking for a Change - CBI, Moving On - Life skills program - Other cognitive programs - Mental health referral (if applicable) - Community service
5. Family/marital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family does not <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ support its members emotionally and otherwise ■ problem solve in a way that maintains the integrity of the family unit ■ express emotion ■ place emphasis on others' concerns - Poor communication - Significant conflict in the home (including abuse/neglect) - Family members involved in criminal or delinquent activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resolve conflict - Show appreciation - Strengthen positive family relationships - Handle family issues - Know the difference between positive and negative family influence - Know one's buttons and how they are pushed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who I Spend Time With - Overcoming Thinking Traps - Overcoming Automatic Responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Antisocial Associates - Engaging Prosocial Others - Involving Families - Overcoming Family Challenges - Intimate Partner Violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family counseling - Pastoral counseling - Recreation (gym, activities) - Parenting classes - DV program

Table 4 Criminogenic Need Preferred Response Guidelines					
Criminogenic Need	Traits and Tendencies for This Risk Factor	Skill Areas to Target	BITS	Carey Guides	Possible Program Referral
6. Substance abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued use of substance despite significant life disruptions - Increased tolerance to drugs/alcohol - Increased use over time - Inability to stop use - Preoccupation with obtaining drugs/alcohol - Decreased prosocial activities - Deterioration in interpersonal relationships - Use at the time of the offense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognize addiction and relapse - Get involved in prosocial leisure activities - Learn how to avoid high risk situations - Learn how to say no to peer pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Overcoming Automatic Responses</i> - <i>Overcoming Thinking Traps</i> - <i>Decision Making (if ambivalent about change)</i> - <i>Problem Solving</i> - <i>Who I Spend Time With</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Substance Abuse</i> - <i>Co-occurring Disorders</i> - <i>Impaired Driving</i> - <i>Meth Users</i> - <i>Prosocial Leisure Activities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local substance abuse treatment - Addiction support groups - Mental health center - Use of alcohol monitoring devices (e.g., SCRAM, Ignition Interlock)



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