

Program Overview

Effective delivery of cognitive behavioral treatment (CBT) requires consistency in modeling, reinforcement, language, and skill demonstration on the part of *all* staff. It is necessary that all staff understand these principles and that all staff utilize the techniques and behaviors. These skills include communication, modeling, de-escalation, and rule enforcement. To date, cognitive behavioral training has focused primarily on clinical staff. The end result of this is that non-clinical staff is often expected to manage the behavior of the clients without the benefits of CBT.

This training curriculum recognizes the vital role that non-clinical staff can play in helping clients to manage their own behavior. Non-clinical staff can often be instrumental in creating an environment conducive to behavioral change. Because of this, the ASSiSST training program seeks to enhance the knowledge and skills of security and support staff within correctional programs.

The ASSiSST curriculum is meant to be delivered on the job and seeks to teach skills through the use of 12 modules. Module 1 is simply an overview of the curriculum and sets the tone for what participants can expect throughout the 12 sessions. Module 2 engages the participants in self-awareness exercises. The specific focus is on knowing who we are and what our triggers are when dealing with difficult clients. Identifying our triggers consequently allows us to better manage our responses to difficult situations.

In Module 3, we begin looking at our clients – both who they are and who they are not. We will discuss research on client characteristics with a focus on how clients typically think. We will also discuss such concepts as “thinking errors” and “cognitive distortions” and the role they play in our clients’ lives as well as our own. Once we have outlined who our clients are, we can begin to look at the role of cognitive-behavioral interventions in helping our clients to succeed. This is the focus of Module 4. In this module, we will break down the components of cognitive-behavioral interventions and begin learning how to apply cognitive-behavioral techniques in the workplace.

Module 5 looks at the role of respect within a cognitive-behavioral environment. Exercises and discussion focus on defining, recognizing, and giving respect. Lessons learned in Module 5 serve as a precursor to the lessons learned in Module 6 and 7, both

of which focus on effective communication skills. Module 6 looks at communication among staff, while Module 7 looks at communication between staff and clients.

In Module 8, we begin to learn how to recognize antisocial behavior in our clients and in ourselves. This may be manifested in behavior or in words. During this section, we will take a closer look at “thinking errors” and “cognitive distortions” so that staff can understand their impact on behavior and how to appropriately respond to such behavior. This then leads into Module 9 where we begin to look at the staff’s role as prosocial role models. We will discuss what this means and what responsibilities staff have for consistently modeling prosocial behaviors. We will also practice various ways that staff can do this.

A key way of both dealing with antisocial behavior and role modeling prosocial behavior is for staff to be consistent in their use of reinforcement. This is the focus of Module 10. During this module, staff will learn how to appropriately reward and sanction behaviors so that antisocial behaviors are diminished and prosocial behaviors are increased or maintained.

Perhaps the most critical module in the curriculum is Module 11. This is the module on de-escalation. The concepts and skills taught in Modules 1 through 10 all serve to help reduce the need for de-escalation. This is why the primary focus of the Module 11 is on prevention. However, we recognize that even with effective use of cognitive-behavioral techniques, there will be times when staff will need to de-escalate a client. Because of this, we will also practice some de-escalation strategies during this module.

Finally, in Module 12 we summarize what we have learned throughout the curriculum. The focus at this point is on outlining “next steps” for staff to implement these techniques in the workplace. This includes identifying additional needs for skill development, the role of supervision, and evaluating staff on their competence in the delivery of CBT.