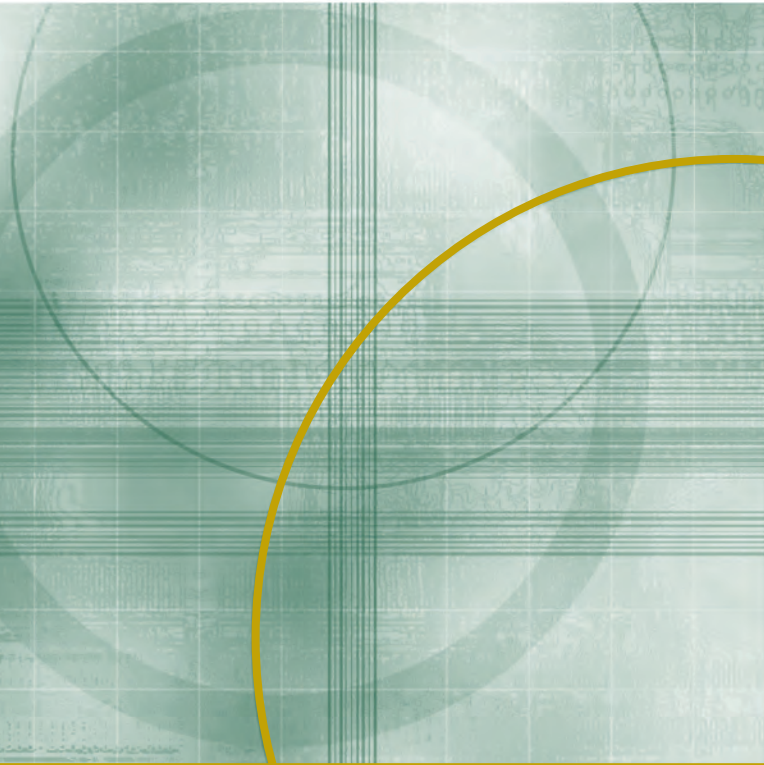




*Inmate Behavior Management:*

**The Key to a Safe  
and Secure Jail**



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*Inmate Behavior Management:*

# **The Key to a Safe and Secure Jail**

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Jails must maintain a safe and secure environment to protect their inmates, staff, visitors, and, ultimately, the community. Historically, many jails have struggled to achieve this, as demonstrated by all-too-common incidents of assault, suicide, fire, and escape. This document presents the management of inmate behavior within the jail as critical to a safe and secure environment. Corrections practitioners have often considered the design and condition of the physical plant, the quality of locking systems, the use of restraint devices, and staff's ability to physically defend themselves as primary means to achieving safety and security, and there is no disputing their importance. However, experience has shown jails cannot rely on these measures alone. To be safe and secure, jail staff must actively supervise and manage inmate behavior.

*Inmate Behavior Management: The Key to a Safe and Secure Jail* presents six key elements

that, in combination, will help jails reduce a wide array of negative, destructive, and dangerous inmate behavior. Jails that fully implement these elements should experience a safer, more secure, and more orderly environment. Once such an environment is established, jail practitioners will have an excellent foundation on which to build an array of inmate programs and services or to develop innovative approaches to operations, if they so choose.

This material was originally published as chapter 9 in the National Institute of Corrections' *Resource Guide for Jail Administrators*. We have chosen to publish it also as a separate document for use in training programs and for broader dissemination among jail practitioners and others interested in this topic. We hope it will serve as an introduction to the basic elements in managing inmate behavior and encourage jail practitioners to explore these further.

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# Inmate Behavior Management: The Key to a Safe and Secure Jail

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The most fundamental goal of every jail is to maintain a safe and secure environment for inmates, staff, and visitors. Effectively managing inmate behavior is critical to achieving this goal. Traditionally, jails have sought to control inmates solely through physical containment, namely, hardware—locks, steel doors, security glass, and alarm systems. Staff safety was believed to depend on maintaining physical barriers between staff and inmates.

In the absence of staff management of inmate behavior, however, the emphasis on physically containing inmates failed to keep jails secure. With inmates left to their own devices inside cellblocks, problems such as violence, vandalism, and lack of sanitation became so common that they seemed inherent to jails, which, along with communities, have paid dearly for these problems through costly litigation, staff and inmate deaths, jail riots and fires, and escapes.

Over the past 25 years, jail practitioners have learned that jails do not have to be and should not be out of control, dangerous, or filthy. Ample evidence shows that control of the jail can be established through effective management of inmate behavior. Much of what we have learned about managing inmate behavior is based on the experience of jails that use podular direct supervision. Introduced to jails by W. Raymond Nelson when he was chief of the Jails Division at the National Institute of Corrections (NIC),

podular direct supervision combines an inmate management philosophy with a specific jail design that conveys an expectation of positive inmate behavior, facilitates staff interaction with inmates, and promotes management of inmate behavior. In direct supervision jails, staff are positioned within inmate dayrooms, and no physical barriers separate them from the inmates. Staff are able to interact extensively with the inmates and provide continuous supervision.

Although many local jurisdictions that have built new jails in the past 25 years have opted for direct supervision design and management, most American jails were built in the era when physical containment was stressed to the virtual exclusion of inmate management. Jail professionals now realize, however, that all jails, regardless of design, are responsible for managing inmate behavior to ensure safety and security.

If inmate behavior is managed effectively, jails can be a good workplace for staff, a safe and clean detention environment for inmates, and a valuable and highly regarded service for the community. An effective jail administrator will accept nothing less. Given the importance of inmate behavior management in achieving safety and security, it may be viewed as the jail's core function and the jail administrator's primary concern. You should consider all decisions regarding jail operations with respect to their impact on inmate behavior management.

## **Inmate Behavior Management Plan**

The inmate behavior management plan presented here is based on previous work in two major areas: podular direct supervision and inmate classification. As noted above, W. Raymond Nelson is credited with introducing podular direct supervision to jails. His work was supported and furthered by Michael A. O’Toole, his successor as chief of the NIC Jails Division. James Austin and Timothy Brennan are responsible for much of the work on inmate classification. Both have worked extensively in this area and produced a body of knowledge that has changed the way jail practitioners think about assessing risks and needs in the inmate population.

The inmate behavior management plan consists of six essential elements:

1. Assessing the risks and needs of each inmate at various points during his or her detention.
2. Assigning inmates to housing.
3. Meeting inmates’ basic needs.
4. Defining and conveying expectations for inmate behavior.
5. Supervising inmates.
6. Keeping inmates occupied with productive activities.

These elements, once established, function as an ongoing, integrated process designed to generate positive inmate behavior—that is, behavior that complies with the staff’s expectations of what is acceptable. Implementing these elements puts control of the jail in the hands of the staff instead of the inmates.

Establishing a formal, written inmate behavior management plan serves the jail administrator as both a strategy for achieving more effective control over inmate behavior and a mechanism for identifying problem areas in inmate behavior

management. The written plan should include goals, an overview of components (the six elements), and provision for periodic assessment to determine if the plan is meeting its goals. The goals of the plan should be based on an assessment of the current status of inmate behavior in the jail and a determination of what behavior is expected of inmates. For example, goals might address issues such as violence, vandalism, contraband, sanitation, and inmate compliance with rules. Goals should be specific and measurable, and the jail should develop a formal system to evaluate the achievement of stated goals at specified intervals.

Implementing an inmate behavior management plan requires the following:

- Clear directives, in the form of written policies and procedures for each step of the plan.
- Adequate staffing levels.
- Staff training.
- Supervision of staff to ensure that the plan is implemented according to policies and procedures.
- Systematic documentation and recordkeeping of all activities related to inmate behavior management.

Plan implementation and success also depend greatly on the active direction and leadership of the jail administrator. You must clearly articulate and demonstrate support for inmate behavior management both philosophically and operationally. The remaining sections outline the six elements of an inmate behavior management plan.

### **Element 1: Assessing Risks and Needs**

The first element in the inmate behavior management plan is to gather information on the risks and needs of each inmate:



- **Risk** is a measure of how dangerous the inmate is to himself or herself and to others and of the likelihood that the inmate will attempt to escape.
- **Need** is a measurement of the inmate's physiological and psychological requirements for well-being, for example, in terms of medical care, mental health care, or education.

The risk and needs assessment lays the foundation for the behavior management plan. The information gathered is used to classify the inmate and is also essential for developing a strategy to manage his or her behavior. For example, an inmate assessed as a high escape risk and one assessed as a low escape risk will have substantially different requirements for housing, supervision, and delivery of services, as will an inmate with serious medical needs and one who is healthy. An inmate who is developmentally disabled is likely to require a different behavior management strategy than one who is not developmentally disabled.

A jail's system of assessing inmate risks and needs is called **inmate classification**. Every jail administrator is responsible for implementing an inmate classification system and for ensuring that the classification process assesses each inmate's risks and needs accurately so that staff can manage and control inmate behavior.

### *Attributes of an Effective Inmate Classification System*

An effective classification system is objective, that is, it is based on a consistent set of criteria and a systematic method of applying the criteria to classification decisions. It is also straightforward and easily understood and implemented by staff. An effective classification system meets the following three tests:

1. **Reliability:** Different staff using the system will get the same result for a given inmate.
2. **Validity:** The system accurately predicts (or assesses) the inmate's risk level and need.
3. **Equitability:** The system is applied in the same way for each inmate.

### *Assessment Criteria*

The following criteria are commonly used to assess inmate **risk**:

- The severity of the current charge.
- Detainers and warrants.
- Sentencing status (pre- or postsentencing).
- Criminal history and possible additional charges.
- Escape history.
- Institutional disciplinary history.
- Substance abuse.
- Age, employment, residence, and family ties.

**Needs** are commonly assessed in the following areas:

- Medical (physiological) condition.
- Mental (psychological) condition.
- Intellectual capacity.
- Substance abuse.

Assessment criteria must be clearly defined and applied consistently to all inmates.

### *Classification Decisionmaking Points*

Inmate risks and needs must be assessed at various points during incarceration. The jail must have a process to gather and respond to information at each classification decisionmaking point.

### **Booking and Intake Screening**

During booking and intake, inmate risks and needs are screened at two points:

1. **On arrival at the jail.** Jail staff screen each arrestee brought to the jail to determine whether the jail can accept him or her based on whether the arrestee has immediate, critical medical needs that must be addressed at a medical facility.
2. **On acceptance into the booking room.** Jail staff screen the inmate further to determine how he or she should be managed in the booking room. The information gathered typically covers the assessment criteria found on this page, with the possible exception of sentencing status and institutional disciplinary history.

The booking and intake screening process identifies and responds to critical issues related to the information gathered.

An initial assessment of risks and needs should not be conducted randomly or haphazardly. Jail policies and procedures must ensure that every arrestee brought to the jail receives an initial screening. Policies and procedures should address both the process of gathering information (who, what, where, when, and how) and the response to information gathered during the initial assessment. The assessment must be documented on a standard form.

### **Admission to the Jail**

The next point at which inmate risks and needs are assessed is when the decision is made to admit the inmate into the jail and assign him or her to housing. The move to housing takes place after an initial observation period, which varies among jails and may last from 1 hour to 3 days. Depending on the physical layout and operational philosophy of the jail, inmates may remain in the booking room until they are moved to housing, they may be placed in a holding area until after they appear in court, or they may be held in a separate intake unit until they are given a housing assignment. Regardless of where and

how long inmates are held on admission to the jail, they must undergo an indepth assessment of risks and needs and be classified before being moved to housing. The information gathered during the indepth assessment provides the basis for decisions about how best to manage the inmate's behavior in the jail, which in turn informs decisions about the inmate's housing assignment, level of supervision, and access to services and programs.

The indepth assessment, which is conducted during a face-to-face classification interview, considers all the information gathered previously, along with information about the risks and needs listed on page 3 that might not have been available during the initial screening. In many jails, the assessment of risks and needs does not rest with a single staff member. For example, security or custody staff may assess risk, and medical, mental health, and program staff may assess needs. When the assessment responsibilities are divided, the jail must have a system of sharing information to give all staff access to the information they need to manage inmate behavior. For example, security staff need certain types of medical information, such as whether an inmate needs special accommodations (e.g., a lower bunk or lower tier) or is appropriate for consideration as an inmate worker. Medical staff, on the other hand, need information on whether an inmate presents an escape risk and may require a higher level of security for medical appointments outside the jail.

The process for conducting the indepth assessment must be formal and documented. Policies and procedures must address not only the kind of information gathered, but who gathers it, when and where it is gathered, and the format in which it is gathered. Policies and procedures must also address who is given access to the information and the types of decisions that result from it regarding supervision, housing, services, and

programs. The assessment must be documented on a standard form or instrument.

### Reassessment

Each inmate's risks and needs should be reassessed when new information is obtained and at regularly scheduled intervals. Reassessment in response to new information ensures that staff are able to react to the changing circumstances affecting inmates. The following events would prompt reassessment outside of routine intervals:

- Improvement or deterioration of inmate behavior.
- A crisis in the inmate's life (e.g., court decisions, personal problems).
- A medical or mental health emergency.
- Court information (e.g., new charges and/or sentencing).
- An inmate's request for reclassification.
- An officer's request for reclassification of an inmate.

When staff supervise inmates through extensive interaction (see "Element 5: Supervising Inmates"), they are able to assess inmates' risks and needs continually. If housing unit staff or others who work with inmates detect behavior or know of circumstances that might warrant a change in an inmate's risk or need status, they should document this on a standard form. The jail should have a procedure for such documentation, its distribution, and its use in making decisions on how an inmate is managed. Formal reassessments at regular intervals—for example, 30, 60, or 90 days—help jail staff ensure that no inmate is overlooked and that staff have all the information they need to manage inmate behavior most effectively on an ongoing basis.

Reassessment cannot be conducted arbitrarily. Jail policies and procedures must ensure that every inmate is formally reassessed in response

to new information and at regularly scheduled intervals. Policies and procedures must address both the process of gathering information (what prompts the reassessment, who conducts it, and how it is conducted) and the response to the information gathered during the reassessment. A standard form or instrument must be used to document the reassessment.

### Classification Process

To effectively assess inmate risks and needs and classify inmates, the jail must have a clearly delineated plan that includes the following elements:

- Established, defined classification criteria.
- A consistent process for gathering information.
- Comprehensive policies and procedures that address all the components of the classification process, including who, what, where, when, and how.
- Forms or instruments for documenting the assessment and classification.
- A system for evaluating the classification process to measure both how well the classification system is being implemented and whether it contributes to meeting behavior management goals.

Two instruments are commonly used for risk assessment:

1. **Point-additive instrument:** Assigns weights and numbers to various risk factors and leads to a specific assessment of the inmate based on a total score.
2. **Decision-tree instrument:** Leads the user through a series of yes and no questions concerning designated risk factors, resulting in a specific assessment of inmate risk based on the responses.

Whereas risk assessment instruments are designed to *predict* future behavior, needs assessment instruments are designed to *describe* current needs. Although no needs assessment instrument has yet emerged as an industry standard, several such instruments are available. Jails typically use point-additive instruments or narrative surveys, or some combination of the two, to capture information on needs. Point-additive instruments rate the severity of need in particular domains (e.g., physical health, mental health, intellectual capacity, substance abuse) and the individual's overall level of need (low, moderate, or high) based on the combined scores of all the domains. Narrative surveys are used to capture details about specific needs.

Both types of needs assessment instruments yield critical information that assists jail officials in addressing inmates' basic needs. Each jail must determine the best method of assessing, documenting, and responding to inmate needs based on its own philosophy and operational capabilities.

The jail administrator must establish detailed policies and procedures regarding inmate classification, particularly with regard to staffing considerations. Staff must be assigned to complete each step of the assessment process. Some jails have designated classification staff; others train all staff or all booking room staff to conduct classifications. Some jails have continuous access to onsite medical staff; others must rely on periodic visits from community medical personnel to assist with needs assessments. All staff should receive general training in the classification system to enhance understanding and communication. Adequate supervision of classification staff is important to ensure that they implement the system according to policies and procedures.

## **Element 2: Assigning Inmates to Housing**

The second element in the inmate behavior management plan, assigning inmates to appropriate

housing according to a housing plan, enables staff to manage the inmates' behavior more effectively.

### ***Housing Assignment Decision***

The information gathered about an inmate during the risk and needs assessment serves as the basis for the housing assignment. Jail staff consider the following factors:

- The level of security risk the inmate presents.
- The inmate's ability to function with other inmates.
- The level of supervision the inmate requires.
- The types of services the inmate requires.
- The types of programs that should be made available to the inmate.
- Legal requirements for separating certain categories of inmates. These requirements vary from state to state.

### ***Housing Plan***

The housing plan, which describes how bed-space within the jail will be used, is based on an assessment of the following components:

- Existing bedspace, including the number of housing units and beds within each housing unit, the configuration of the housing units, and the level of physical security in the housing units.
- The level of supervision in each housing unit.
- Risks and needs in the inmate population and the resulting inmate classifications.
- The number of inmates within each classification.

For each housing unit, the housing plan should designate the following criteria:

- The types or classifications of inmates housed.

- How services are delivered.
- The level of staff supervision.
- The programs and activities available.

The housing plan must also designate space, as appropriate, for separating inmates for disciplinary, protective custody, or other special needs. You should revisit your jail's housing plan regularly to accommodate fluctuations in the number and types of inmates in the jail population.

Housing plans vary from jail to jail according to existing bedspace, the design of the physical plant, and operational philosophy. All jails, regardless of size or number of housing units, should have a housing plan. For example, jails with severely limited housing options, such as a 20-bed jail with a 15-bed housing unit and 5 single cells, must still have a housing plan. The plan may simply specify that, within the 15-bed unit, inmates are assigned to rooms or bunks according to the need for staff to observe them easily. Even in larger jails with more housing options, inmates within a given unit may be placed where they can best be managed, depending on the specific risks and needs of each inmate.

In some jails, the housing plan may also include a provision for housing inmates in another jurisdiction. For example, some jails are not able to meet the needs of the female population or do not have the space to ensure that they are separated from male inmates. Many jails are not equipped to separately house and manage juveniles. In still other cases, the jail may simply be so crowded that it must send some inmates to other jurisdictions' jails.

A carefully developed housing plan benefits the jail in the following ways:

- Inmates are placed where they can be best managed.
- Groups of inmates that must be separated by law are kept separate.
- Inmates that must be separated for safety and security reasons are kept separate.

The housing plan may also assist the jail administrator in making staff assignments with respect to matching staff capabilities to the needs of particular inmate groups.

### Element 3: Meeting Inmates' Basic Needs

The third element in the behavior management plan is meeting inmates' basic needs, which are no different from those of all human beings:

- **Physical needs:** Things that sustain life and ensure a baseline of human comfort, such as adequate and nutritious food, protection against the elements, adequate warmth, physical exercise, medical care, and adequate personal and environmental sanitation. In the context of the jail, meeting inmates' physical needs involves food services, medical services, allowing inmates to maintain their personal hygiene, providing for physical exercise, maintaining adequate air flow and appropriate temperature, and ensuring that all areas of the jail are clean enough for a healthy environment.
- **Safety needs:** Protection from harm, including personal injuries resulting from assault or unsafe environmental conditions. In the context of the jail, this means ensuring that inmates do not victimize one another, eliminating hazardous environmental conditions, and developing plans to ensure inmates' well-being during emergencies.
- **Social needs:** Maintaining contact with family and friends and the opportunity to have positive interaction with others. In the context of the jail, this means providing for inmates to receive and send mail; have access to a telephone; visit with family, friends, and others who are significant in their lives; and interact positively with other inmates and staff.



This categorization of human needs is based on the work of Abraham Maslow, a psychologist who developed a hierarchy of needs that was first published in 1954.<sup>1</sup> Well-established case law requires jails to meet the basic needs listed above; failure to do so may result in costly litigation. However, behavior management is another compelling reason for the jail to meet basic inmate needs. All human beings seek ways to meet their basic needs. If the jail does not provide for these needs, the inmates will find ways to meet them on their own terms. A jail that allows this to happen will hand over a significant amount of control to the inmates. For example:

- If inmates do not have enough to eat, they may hoard or steal food.
- If inmates do not have adequate warmth, they may hoard blankets or clothing or cover air vents in their cells.
- If inmates do not have appropriate ways to interact socially with others, they may become depressed or interact inappropriately with other inmates.
- If inmates are not physically safe, they may make weapons, pay other inmates for protection, or form gangs.

If the jail does not meet the inmates' basic needs, it cannot be safe for either the inmates or the staff. Inmates who are angry, form gangs, and/or have weapons pose a direct and immediate threat to staff safety. Staff who work in an environment where their own basic need for safety is not met must devise ways to meet this need. They may resign, devise ways to avoid interacting with inmates, carry weapons, or physically abuse inmates as a way to establish authority, thereby exacerbating the already dangerous conditions in the jail—dangerous conditions that can quickly become deadly for staff and inmates.

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<sup>1</sup> A.H. Maslow, R. Frager, and J. Fadiman, *Motivation and Personality*, 3d ed. (Boston: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1976).

#### **Element 4: Defining and Conveying Expectations for Inmate Behavior**

The staff's expectations for inmate behavior and the way those expectations are conveyed have a powerful influence on how inmates act. Historically, jail staff have expected inmates to be uncooperative, destructive, aggressive, violent, and manipulative. Staff have communicated these expectations by avoiding interaction with inmates, adopting a negative demeanor when they do interact with inmates, and accepting negative inmate behavior as "normal."

Over the past 25 years, it has been demonstrated that jail staff can influence inmates to behave positively within the jail; that destructive, manipulative, and aggressive inmate behavior will be the norm only if allowed to be; and that, with proper supervision, most inmates will meet high expectations for their behavior. Inmates can comply with jail rules, maintain high levels of sanitation within their living areas, treat the staff respectfully, and interact positively with each other. Jail staff should expect this and tolerate no less.

##### ***Defining Expectations***

The expectations set for inmate behavior should support the goals of the overall inmate behavior management plan. In determining what the jail will consider acceptable inmate behavior, expectations should be high, but attainable. The jail not only should define what is expected of inmates, but also ensure that they have the means to comply. For example, if the expectation is that housing units are to be clean and orderly at all times, then the jail will need to supply sufficient cleaning supplies and equipment to facilitate this. If the expectation is that inmates are to address their complaints about jail operations without resorting to destructive behavior, then the jail



will need to have a system through which inmates can report and receive timely responses to their complaints.

### ***Conveying Expectations***

Once the jail has defined what it considers acceptable inmate behavior and has established the means for inmates to comply with these expectations, it must convey the expectations to the inmates. Jails convey their expectations for inmate behavior both directly and indirectly. Most jails develop a handbook for inmates that gives information about schedules, procedures, and services; lists the rules for inmates; and describes the jail's disciplinary process and sanctions for breaking the rules. Some jails may simply post this information on a bulletin board in the dayroom.

A handbook effectively informs most inmates, but jails also need to provide this information for inmates who do not speak English and/or are illiterate. Jails should translate handbooks into the primary foreign languages used in the region. For those who cannot read, the jail should provide audio- or videotapes.

Information on behavioral expectations should be part of each inmate's orientation to the jail. The jail should give each new inmate a copy of the inmate handbook or access to an audio- or videotape when he or she is first admitted to housing. Staff should be available to answer the inmate's questions and verify that he or she understands the information. The jail should require inmates to sign a form to verify that they have been given the information and understand it. Inmates also must have ready access to this information throughout their stay in the jail.

The indirect or subtle messages the jail gives inmates about expectations for behavior are as important as its formal message. For example, the jail's physical plant itself conveys a powerful

message about expected behavior. Most jails were built on the premise that inmates are violent, dangerous, and destructive and convey this expectation by using bars and steel mesh to contain inmates and by equipping inmate areas with virtually indestructible fixtures and furnishings. In such jails, the message conveyed by the physical plant clearly contradicts the formal message that inmates are expected to behave positively. These jails need to devise strategies to counter the message conveyed by their physical plant. For example, staff can demonstrate that they expect inmates to behave well by interacting extensively with them, treating them with respect and consideration, and ensuring that inmate living areas are maintained in good order.

On the other hand, the jail's physical environment may convey a positive message about behavioral expectations that is aligned with the formal message, but staff behavior may contradict the official message if staff avoid interacting with inmates, treat them disrespectfully, or ignore their concerns. The jail administrator must be aware of these potential contradictions and devise strategies to resolve them. Otherwise, the contradictions will confuse and frustrate inmates and will undermine the success of the inmate behavior management plan.

### ***Incentives To Meet Expectations***

The jail administrator should ensure that the jail's environment reflects that it is in the inmates' self-interest to meet behavioral expectations. For example, housing units for inmates who behave well and do not present high-level security risks should provide inmates easy access to basic necessities, services, and programs. Staff should offer incentives for positive behavior ranging from a simple "thank you" to an inmate who has done a good job cleaning his cell to special rewards for accomplishing extra tasks within the housing unit. For example, some jails

conduct weekly facility inspections and provide the cleanest housing unit with a small reward such as soda or popcorn.

On the other hand, negative behavior should be met with disincentives such as removal from the housing area, lockdown within the housing unit, lockdown within a disciplinary unit, loss of permission to attend programs, and loss of commissary privileges. The jail should have a formal, clearly defined disciplinary process so that both staff and inmates are aware of the rules and consequences for violations.

Clearly stated behavioral expectations reinforced by incentives for positive behavior and disincentives for negative behavior enable staff to direct inmates to comply with the jail's goals. Inmates meet high behavioral standards when the jail expects them to and when staff are able to hold them accountable for their actions, both positive and negative. Inmate accountability is achieved through supervision, which is discussed in the following section.

### **Element 5: Supervising Inmates**

The fifth element in the inmate behavior management plan is supervising inmates to hold them individually accountable for their behavior. To do this, the staff must interact with the inmates. Note that before staff can effectively and safely interact with inmates, the jail must fully implement elements 1–4 of the inmate behavior management plan.

Staff interaction with inmates has a clear purpose: to obtain positive inmate behavior, namely, compliance with jail rules to achieve the goals of the behavior management plan. In this interaction, jail staff are in the role of supervisor and require the following skills:

- Effective decisionmaking and problem-solving skills.

- The ability to communicate, listen, and provide direction.
- The ability to treat people fairly and motivate them to engage in positive behavior.

Staff must be able to detect and solve small problems before they become crises. They should be able to devise strategies to ensure that the inmate housing unit is safe, clean, quiet, and orderly and then determine the effectiveness of these strategies through inspection and documentation. Each staff member must serve as a positive role model for inmate behavior and establish himself or herself as the person in charge of the housing unit by demonstrating knowledge of jail policies and applying supervisory skills. All staff should be respectful in their interaction with inmates and expect the same in return from them.

Several barriers can impede staff interaction with inmates and, therefore, supervision of inmates. These barriers include the following factors:

- The physical plant.
- Staffing levels.
- Staff placement.
- Staff behavior.
- The level of administrative commitment to staff interaction with inmates.

Because supervision is dependent on staff interaction with inmates, the jail must develop strategies to decrease barriers between staff and inmates. Doing so will assist staff in establishing control over all areas of the jail. For example, if the physical plant is a barrier to supervision and cannot be changed, the jail can increase supervision by changing expectations for the level and type of staff interaction with inmates. If the number of staff cannot be increased for political or budgetary reasons, rethinking the placement of staff can enable a jail to supervise its inmates more actively.





### ***Physical Plant***

Because many jails were built in the era when physical containment was emphasized to the virtual exclusion of inmate supervision, the jail's physical plant is a common barrier to inmate supervision. Security doors that offer limited or no view into the housing units, long corridors that separate staff areas from housing units, and multiple security doors are some of the literal barriers that may separate staff and inmates. These barriers prevent staff from seeing, hearing, and sensing the mood and activities of the inmates. Where staff do not have a presence, they do not have control.

If the physical plant prevents staff from having direct contact with inmates, the jail administrator might consider modifying the plant to increase the staff's ability to interact with and supervise the inmates. Such modifications may include opening housing unit doors, removing glass that separates officer stations from inmate housing areas, or removing interior walls. Modifications, of course, must be carefully considered for their long-term impact as well as for what they are intended to achieve with specific types of inmates. Additionally, any decision to remove the physical barriers between staff and inmates must be tied to an evaluation of current staff behavior. Do staff currently interact with inmates positively, negatively, or not at all? What changes might be necessary in terms of policy and training to provide staff with the tools they need to interact with inmates safely if barriers are removed?

### ***Staffing Levels***

Staffing levels may require staff to be responsible for multiple housing units, preventing them from giving sufficient attention to any one group of inmates. Staff may also have additional duties that divert their attention from supervising inmates. To increase the amount of time staff have to interact with and supervise inmates, the jail

administrator should consider whether some duties could be:

- Accomplished by staff who work an overnight shift, when inmates are sleeping and do not require extensive interaction with staff.
- Transferred to staff who do not directly supervise inmates.
- Accomplished more efficiently.

If, after considering duty assignments, you find that the number of staff is still insufficient to supervise inmates, you should develop a proposal for additional staff and include in the justification a description of the relationship of inmate supervision to the safety and security of the staff, inmates, and community. You may need to educate the agency's chief executive officer and funding authority about this issue.

### ***Staff Placement***

The location of staff duty stations varies from jail to jail, depending on the design of the jail and its operating philosophy. Generally speaking, there are three basic types of jail design: linear intermittent surveillance, podular remote surveillance, and podular direct supervision.

#### **Linear Intermittent Surveillance**

The cells in a linear housing unit are lined up in a row at a right angle to a staff corridor that is separated from the cells, usually by bars. The inmates' dayroom may be located behind or in front of the cells. Staff observation of inmates is intermittent. Staff walk through the corridor periodically to observe the inmates, then return to a duty station located outside the living unit. The duty station is usually some distance away from the housing area, and staff are not able to see or interact with the inmates from the duty station.

This type of jail design usually presents the most significant obstacles to staff supervision of inmates, but the obstacles are not insurmountable. Administrators of this type of jail might consider the following options for increasing staff interaction with inmates:

- **Establishing staff duty stations next to inmate housing areas.** This may involve something as simple as placing a desk in a hallway just outside the inmate housing area so that staff can more readily interact with, respond to, and supervise inmates. The duty station should have sufficient supplies and equipment so the officer does not need to leave the post to get frequently used items.
- **Requiring staff to spend a certain amount of time within each dayroom.** Staff should use this time to interact with, respond to, and supervise inmates.
- **Assigning one staff member to move through the housing units and interact with inmates while another remains at the nearby duty station.**

With any of these options, the jail administrator must ensure that the staff are fully prepared, through training and policy, to interact with inmates effectively and safely.

### **Podular Remote Surveillance**

The cells in podular housing are clustered around a dayroom. The duty station is within the housing unit and is enclosed with security glass windows that allow staff to observe the inmates constantly. The term “remote” refers to the staff’s separation from the inmates by the glass barrier. In this type of jail, staff can observe the inmates while they are in the dayroom and interact with them on a limited basis, usually through intercoms.

The podular remote surveillance jail offers an advantage over the linear intermittent surveillance jail in that the location of the duty station allows constant observation of inmates in the

dayroom by staff. Staff interaction with inmates, however, is still limited, and observation is usually limited to dayroom activities. Also, staff are not able to hear the inmates and may not be aware of problems in the unit until they become full-blown crises. Administrators of this type of jail might consider the following options for increasing staff interaction with inmates:

- Requiring staff to spend a certain amount of time within each dayroom, interacting with, responding to, and supervising inmates.
- Assigning one staff member to move through the housing units and interact with inmates while another remains at the duty station.

With either option, the jail administrator must ensure that the staff are fully prepared, through training and policy, to interact with the inmates effectively and safely within the housing unit.

### **Podular Direct Supervision**

The cells in a podular direct supervision housing unit are clustered around a dayroom, and the staff’s duty station is in the dayroom. The duty station may consist of a desk or a counter with a control panel that allows staff to lock and unlock individual cell doors and control housing unit lights. No physical barriers separate the staff’s station from the inmates, and staff are encouraged to spend most of their time circulating through the housing unit and interacting extensively with inmates, with the purpose of managing their behavior.

Although these jails do not present physical barriers between staff and inmates, administrators might find that staff stay at their desks instead of circulating among the inmates, prohibit inmates from coming too close to their desks (again inhibiting interaction), and focus primarily on paperwork and phone calls. Reasons for this include the following:

- Staff have not been trained to focus on supervising inmates.
- Staff may have been given too many tasks that detract from supervising inmates.
- Shift supervisors do not coach staff in interacting with inmates, nor do they hold staff accountable when they avoid interaction with inmates.
- The jail administrator may not have clearly articulated or demonstrated the importance and purpose of staff interaction with inmates.

### **Variations in Jail Design and Staff Placement**

Although most jails fall into one of the three categories discussed above, there are many variations. Some jails practice direct supervision in dormitory housing. Some jails contain housing units of all three types, usually as a result of additions to the original physical plant. Some jails have a podular remote surveillance design but are able to assign only one officer to observe several housing units, so that constant observation of any one unit is impossible. Some jails have a podular remote surveillance design that allows one officer to see into multiple housing units from one duty station while another officer is assigned to roam through the dayrooms of these units. In all cases, the jail administrator must consider whether the location of staff duty stations facilitates or obstructs inmate supervision.

### **Staff Behavior**

It is not surprising that staff behavior may be a barrier to inmate supervision and achievement of inmate behavior management goals given the historical emphasis on physically containing inmates and the traditionally low expectations of inmate behavior. Staff may see themselves as “guards” or “enforcers” rather than as supervisors of inmates. Redirecting a jail’s primary focus from physical containment to behavior management is likely to require a significant

shift in staff attitudes and behavior. “Redirecting Staff Focus From Physical Containment to Behavior Management” (page 15) lists some examples.

The jail administrator is responsible for helping the staff make the transition to the role of supervising inmates. Administrators should keep in mind that, traditionally, staff have been conditioned to believe their safety depends on keeping a distance from the inmates and that many are likely to resist the new focus. They may be fearful of working directly with inmates. Some staff might have particularly negative relationships with inmates. There might be staff who have deliberately mistreated inmates because they thought the inmates could not retaliate. Such staff might feel—and might be—particularly vulnerable and probably should not be assigned to work with inmates.

The jail administrator should take action to reduce staff apprehension. The following are some strategies to consider:

- Fully implement the first four components of the inmate behavior management plan.
- Help staff understand all components of the behavior management plan and how, together, these components enhance safety and security.
- Make sure staff understand the purpose of interacting with inmates, what their role is, and, specifically, how to carry it out in the housing unit.
- Ensure that operational policies are clear and documented.
- Train staff in supervision and interpersonal communication skills, problem solving, standards for inmate behavior, and operational policies.
- Give staff the tools necessary to supervise inmates successfully: for example, a range

of productive activities for inmates, an effective inmate orientation plan, and an effective inmate disciplinary system.

- Assign adequate staff to provide backup for emergencies in any area of the jail.
- Require shift supervisors to spend time with staff in the housing units, coaching and supporting them in their role as supervisors of inmates.
- Involve staff in planning for this transition so they will not feel that it is being unfairly imposed on them.
- Orient inmates to the new procedures.

### ***Administrative Commitment***

Administrative commitment, essential to the success of all components of the inmate behavior management plan, is especially important in the area of inmate supervision. Inmate supervision is likely to require a significant change in terms of how staff view their role and the purpose, frequency, and type of interaction they have with inmates. If the administrator does not communicate and demonstrate commitment clearly and consistently, staff are unlikely to make or maintain the necessary changes in their behavior.

The following are some actions jail administrators can take to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to inmate supervision:

- Ensure that policies and procedures support active inmate supervision.
- Give supervisors a mandate to encourage staff to meet these expectations, provide staff with needed support and coaching, and hold staff accountable for meeting these expectations.
- Train staff in how to communicate with and supervise inmates effectively to increase the staff's confidence in their ability to manage inmate behavior.

- Give staff the job tools necessary to actively and effectively supervise inmates, such as incentives for positive behavior and disincentives for negative behavior.
- Seek information from staff on what they need to be more effective in supervising inmates.
- Give staff the authority and responsibility, within the guidelines of policy and procedure, to make decisions in the housing unit concerning inmate supervision.
- Make the skills needed for active inmate supervision part of the criteria for hiring, evaluation, and promotion.

Although the inmate supervision component of the behavior management plan may represent a significant change in current jail operations, it will also result in significant positive changes in inmate behavior. Staff will begin to feel safer, take a more positive attitude toward their work, and, as they hone their supervision skills, gain a greater sense of fulfillment from their job.

### **Element 6: Keeping Inmates Productively Occupied**

The sixth and final element in the inmate behavior management plan is keeping inmates occupied with productive activities that focus behavior on the positive instead of the negative. Jail staff can keep inmates productively occupied in the following ways:

- Assigning each inmate work within the housing unit, such as keeping his or her individual cell clean and participating in cleaning the dayroom area.
- Allowing positive unstructured activities within the housing unit by providing reading materials (e.g., newspapers, magazines, books), writing materials, art supplies, and television.



## Redirecting Staff Focus From Physical Containment to Behavior Management

Physical Containment	Behavior Management
Staff perceive inmates as inherently violent, dangerous, and destructive.	Staff perceive inmates as capable of rational and positive behavior.
Staff consider inmate requests and grievances to be bothersome and not worth close or immediate attention.	Staff believe a timely response to inmate requests and grievances is critical to their role in inmate behavior management.
Staff avoid interaction with inmates.	Staff regularly initiate positive interaction with inmates.
Staff order inmates to follow their directives.	Staff clearly state the jail's expectations for inmate behavior and motivate inmates to meet them.
Staff provide no formal orientation to new inmates but might refer them to written rules that are posted in the housing unit or available in the inmate handbook.	Staff formally orient new inmates to behavior expectations, jail schedules, and jail services and ensure that inmates have ready access to this information throughout their stay.
Staff react primarily to negative inmate behavior.	Staff respond to both positive and negative inmate behavior, providing rewards for positive behavior and correcting negative behavior.
Staff are limited in their ability to hold individual inmates accountable for their behavior due to the limited interaction they have with the inmates.	Staff are able to hold inmates individually accountable for their behavior, both positive and negative, due to their extensive interaction with inmates.
Staff have little consideration for inmates' needs and concerns.	Staff interact with inmates in a respectful and considerate manner.
Staff-inmate relationships are often adversarial.	Staff-inmate relationships are primarily positive, with staff in the role of supervisor.
Staff observe inmates. They react to problems when the problems reach the point of gaining the staff's attention.	Staff supervise and manage inmates. They identify and address problems in their early stages, before they become crises.
Staff "write up" inmates when they see them breaking rules.	Staff encourage and reward positive inmate behavior and use a range of responses to manage negative inmate behavior.
Staff are not particularly respectful of inmates. Staff might return respect if it is shown to them.	Staff take the initiative to treat inmates respectfully. Staff set the standards for behavior and serve as role models for inmates.

- Facilitating structured activities within the housing unit, such as games, exercise, discussion groups, and tournaments.
- Encouraging inmates to attend organized programs and make use of services outside the housing unit, such as education classes, self-help and life skills programs, structured recreational programs, religious activities, and the library.

Many jails provide programs to improve inmates' ability to reintegrate into society or to decrease recidivism. At a more fundamental level, however, there are compelling behavior management reasons to provide inmates with productive activities. When the jail provides structured activities, it controls the nature of the activity and assures that it contributes to the overall goals of the behavior management plan. If the jail does not

provide inmates with productive activities, they will find ways to fill their time, often through activities that are destructive and contrary to the jail's mission of providing a safe and secure environment. When the inmates direct activities, control of the jail shifts from the staff to the inmates.

Productive activities also provide a powerful incentive for inmates to maintain positive behavior. When the inmates have access to meaningful activities and continued access is based on the appropriateness of their behavior, they are strongly motivated to behave according to the expectations set by the jail. Providing access to activities gives staff a means of rewarding positive behavior and enforcing consequences for negative behavior, thereby enhancing the staff's ability to supervise and manage inmates.

## **Summary**

The fundamental goal of every jail is to ensure the security of the jail and the safety of the staff, inmates, and the community. To achieve this goal, jails have historically focused on the physical containment of inmates. Over the past 25 years, managing inmate behavior has been shown to be a more effective approach to jail safety and security. By implementing the six elements of the inmate behavior management plan discussed here, the jail administrator puts control of the jail in the staff's hands, thereby ensuring the security of the jail and the safety of staff, inmates, and the community.



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