



Structured Decision-Making: Using Risk Assessment Outputs to Improve Practice

For risk and needs assessments to have an impact on justice processes and outcomes, assessment information must be used to improve decisions and practice. “Structured decision-making” is a method for doing this consistently and effectively to reduce risk. This method requires articulating what should be different for people at different risk levels or with different needs, and developing tools like matrices or other decision aids and accompanying processes to guide individual decisions in that direction. For example, how intensively should probation officers supervise someone given their level of risk to reoffend? Or, which goals should be prioritized in a reentry case plan based on the criminogenic needs identified in the assessment?

Setting up a structure for using assessments in decision-making should be an area of focus in any assessment implementation effort. To illustrate how this can be done, this guide sets out principles for structured decision-making in five distinct justice settings.

- Pretrial
- Diversion
- Community Supervision
- Transition from Jail
- Transition from Prison

The guiding principles are tailored for each setting and will help you: 1) match risk to intervention; 2) identify gaps in services; 3) measure performance; and 4) incorporate other relevant evidence-based and practical considerations.

Structured decision-making assists agencies and systems in using risk and needs assessment information to make practice consistent with the evidence base on reducing recidivism and other forms of misconduct. This evidence base is summarized in the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework with the following principles:

- **Risk Principle:** the level of supervision and treatment should be matched to the risk level of an individual, with more intensive supervision and treatment directed to moderate-risk and high-risk people. Supervising or programming low-risk individuals too intensively can make their outcomes worse.
- **Needs Principle:** Effective treatment and interventions to reduce the risk to reoffend should focus on addressing the criminogenic needs that correlate with offending.
- **Responsivity Principle:** Cognitive-behavioral and social learning approaches are the most effective form of intervention (“general responsivity”), and treatment should consider relevant individual characteristics such as motivation, gender, personality, intellectual and developmental ability, and cultural frame of reference (“specific responsivity”).

Pretrial

Decisions at the pretrial stage can range from very simple to highly complex. In some jurisdictions, the decision is either to release or detain, whereas in jurisdictions with substantial pretrial supervision capacity, the decision can involve multiple options for pretrial release conditions such as electronic monitoring or in-person reporting. Here are five questions you should ask yourself as you plan or seek to improve a structured decision-making tool or process based on risk assessment.

1. *Does the decision aid integrate risk with other factors that should also be considered (e.g. severity of charge faced by the defendant)?*

Frameworks or decision aids to structure decisions at the pretrial stage are often matrices such as the anonymized sample pretrial decision-making matrix below. Such matrices generally bring together two elements:

- The defendant's likelihood (risk) of failure to appear in court or reoffend in the community (in general, and for violent offenses in some tools) if released pretrial. This is what the pretrial risk assessment measures.
- The severity of the charge the defendant is facing.

As much as possible, it is helpful to use the matrix or other decision-making tool to incorporate the key factors that should inform decision-making. The simpler the tool, the more easily it can be applied. Bear in mind that a pretrial risk assessment tool itself incorporates a number of different risk factors, such as past criminal history and track record of appearing in court.

Figure 1. Sample Pretrial Decision-making Matrix

Pretrial Risk Category	Top Charge					
	All Other Charges	Misdemeanor	Non-Violent Felony	Domestic Violence	DUI	Violent Felony
1 (lower)	Reminder Only	Reminder Only	Reminder Only	Basic	Basic	Detain
2	Reminder Only	Reminder Only	Reminder Only	Basic	Basic	Detain
3	Reminder Only	Basic	Basic	Intensive	Intensive	Detain
4 (higher)	Basic	Basic	Intensive	Intensive	Intensive	Detain

Source: Mike Jones, Pretrial Justice Institute

2. *Is it clear how the preferred approach varies by risk level?*

An advantage of a tool such as the example matrix is that there is a clear preferred outcome for each cell. The upper left portion of the matrix, where the risk is low and the charge is not serious, suggests pretrial release with minimal conditions. To the lower right, where risk is higher and the severity of charge is greater, pretrial release with intensive supervision or detention are options. (Click [here](#) for a specific example from Mesa County, Colorado of a matrix to assign people to the appropriate level of pretrial supervision.) A pretrial matrix such as this should be a stakeholder consensus product, one that is grounded in research and reflects a shared understanding of the

appropriate pretrial release/detention outcome and in the case of release, conditions of that release.

3. *Does the framework support identifying the least onerous conditions necessary to support pretrial success?*

Research indicates that pretrial detention is detrimental to detainees and can make future offending more likely. Therefore, a structured decision-making framework supports evidence-based practice by encouraging a judicious use of detention. In the sample matrix, only violent felony charges result in a presumption of detention.

4. *Are there categories of people for whom the intended intervention is insufficiently available?*

A decision-making guide like the sample pretrial matrix shown below indicates what a jurisdiction wants to have happen in the run-of-the-mill case. However, the ultimate decision depends on a few factors, one of which is whether the preferred option is actually available. How many defendants can receive intensive pretrial supervision depends on the capacity of the local pretrial supervision agency. In cases of insufficient resources, a matrix like this can be a valuable guide to producing pretrial decisions as aligned with an overall strategy as possible, and identifying priority areas for increasing capacity.

5. *Have you established performance measures tied to the structured decision-making tool?*

This type of structured decision-making can guide the monitoring of three important aspects of system context and performance:

- How many defendants fall into each cell of the matrix? This determines the pretrial supervision capacity necessary to actually deliver the intended release types.
- Are defendants being released/detained and supervised at the level suggested by the matrix? There will always be some use of overrides of the suggestions of a matrix such as this, reflecting specific circumstances or relevant information that is not sufficiently captured by the pretrial risk assessment or the charge. However, high override rates indicate that practitioner agreement with the structured decision-making framework is lacking, and either consensus needs to be re-established (or established), or the matrix itself should be adjusted.
- What are the defendant success/failure rates for each cell of the matrix? Tracking pretrial outcomes by matrix category allows a jurisdiction to monitor whether the levels of supervision being employed are producing acceptable pretrial success rates.

Diversion

The purpose of front-end diversion is to increase public safety by averting incarceration and its negative consequences for appropriate persons and offenses, in favor of options that present a minimal risk to public safety and a greater opportunity for rehabilitation. Here are six questions you should ask yourself as you plan or seek to improve a structured decision-making tool or process based on risk assessment.

1. *Who should be eligible for diversion options, in terms of risk level?*

The degree of risk that a person will reoffend informs whether they can be diverted safely, and how restrictive that diversion option may need to be. Many diversion candidates beyond those scoring as low risk have a good chance to be successful, provided they receive interventions to address criminogenic needs such as substance use disorders or criminal thinking.

2. *What factors other than risk should also be considered (e.g., severity of alleged offense)?*

Diversion decision-making often incorporates two main factors: the individual’s likelihood (risk) to reoffend and the severity of the alleged instant offense.

The [decision-making matrix](#) from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (see below) is a good example of how diversion eligibility can be established and different diversion tracks can be set systematically.

Figure 2. Florida Juvenile Justice Decision-making Matrix¹

Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Disposition Recommendation Matrix

(Staff should begin with the least restrictive setting within a particular disposition category. See Structured-Decision-Making guidelines.)

Most Serious Presenting Offense	Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) Risk Level to Reoffend			
	Low Risk to Reoffend	Moderate Risk to Reoffend	Moderate-High Risk to Reoffend	High Risk to Reoffend
Civil Citation Eligible ¹	Level 1	Level 1	N/A	N/A
Minor ²	Level 2 or 3a	Level 2 or 3a	Level 2 or 3a-c	Level 3a-c or 4
Serious ³	Level 2 or 3a	Level 2 or 3a-b	Level 3a-c or 4	Level 3a-c or 4
Violent ⁴	Level 2 or 3a-b	Level 2, 3a-c, or 4	Level 3a-c, 4, or 5	Level 3a-c, 4, or 5

¹ – Eligibility for civil citation is outlined in F.S.985.12. Youth deemed ineligible for civil citation (based on community standards) should be reviewed under the “Minor” offense category based on the PACT risk level to reoffend

² – All misdemeanor offenses

³ – Felony offenses that do not include violence

⁴ – Violent felony offenses (do not include misdemeanor assault and battery which are captured under “Minor”)

Level 1 – Alternatives to Arrest	Level 2 – Diversion & Non-DJJ Probation
Level 3 – Community Supervision	Level 4 – Non-Secure Residential Commitment
(3a) – Probation Supervision	Level 5 – Secure Residential Commitment (High & Maximum Risk Programs)
(3b) – Probation Enhancement Services (ART, EPICS, Lifeskills)	
(3c) – Day Treatment, MST, FFT, Minimum Risk Commitment	

¹ Figure acronyms: ART: Aggression Replacement Training; EPICS: Effective Practices in Community Supervision; MST: Multisystemic Therapy; FFT: Functional Family Therapy

In the Florida DJJ example, risk level was assessed using the Community Positive Achievement Change Tool (C-PACT). As much as possible, it is helpful to use the matrix or other decision-making tool to incorporate the key factors that should inform decision-making. The simpler the tool, the more easily it can be applied. Bear in mind that a risk assessment tool itself incorporates a number of different risk factors, such as past criminal history and prior performance under community supervision.

3. *Is it clear how the preferred approach varies by risk level?*

An advantage of decision aid such as the example matrix is that there is a clear preferred outcome for each cell. The available diversion options include alternatives to arrest in the case of the lowest-risk youth facing very minor charges, at the upper left portion of the matrix. To the lower right, where risk is higher and the severity of charge is greater, there are different options but they all involve some form of correctional control, from probation to secure placement.

4. *Does the framework support minimal interventions and requirements for low-risk individuals and reserve more intensive ones only for higher-risk individuals, to maximize public safety outcomes?*

Consistent with the [risk principle](#), diversion options should match an individual's risk to reoffend. Low-risk people with minimal prior justice involvement and low levels of treatment or intervention need are best served by diversion options with minimal, if any, compliance requirements. For people at greater risk to reoffend and/or with substantial needs such as substance use disorders, access to effective treatment and service options may be critical to diversion success. Therefore, a structured decision-making framework around diversion should encourage light touch interventions for lower-risk people that don't "widen the net" by placing them under stricter conditions than standard justice processing.

5. *Are there categories of people for whom the intended intervention is insufficiently available?*

A decision-making guide like the Florida matrix indicates what a jurisdiction wants to have happen. However, the available options for diversion determine whether the preferred option is actually available. How many people with substantial needs can be diverted depends on the availability of interventions to manage those needs in the community. In a structured decision-making model like this, additional needs and behavioral health assessments might be used to determine the right program placement and approach for within the range of options indicated by the matrix.

6. *Have you established performance measures tied to the structured decision-making framework?*

This type of structured decision-making can guide monitoring of two important aspects of system performance: 1) divergence from the placements suggested by the matrix, and 2) effectiveness of the interventions.

- Are individuals being assigned to diversion options of various kinds suggested by the matrix? There will always be some use of overrides of the suggestions of a matrix such as this, reflecting specific circumstances or intelligence that is not sufficiently captured by the risk assessment or the charge. However, high override rates indicate that practitioner agreement with the structured decision-making framework is lacking, and either consensus needs to be re-established (or established), or the matrix itself should be adjusted.
- What are the defendant success/failure rates for each cell of the matrix? Tracking diversion outcomes by matrix category allows a jurisdiction to monitor whether the levels

of sanction, supervision and programming being used are producing acceptable success rates.

The Florida DJJ did a [validation analysis](#) of the matrix examining all of these issues, finding high levels of dispositions within the ranges suggested by the matrix, and better outcomes for youth disposed as recommended by the matrix than for those whose dispositions fell outside that range.

Community Supervision

To be effective, efforts to reduce risk of recidivism for probationers and parolees must be guided by both the risk and the needs principles. Assessment can guide community supervision decision-making along several dimensions, with the goal of managing and reducing risk and making strategic use of limited supervision resources such as officer time and available program slots. Here are six questions you should ask yourself as you plan or seek to improve a structured decision-making tool or process based on risk assessment in community supervision.

1. *Is it clear how the intensity and conditions of supervision should vary by risk and need?*

Risk level frequently determines the intensity of community supervision, defined by things such as how frequently probationers and parolees must report to their supervising officer and by what means (e.g., in-person, by phone, or by kiosk). Most supervision agencies structure decisions on supervision level by integrating risk assessments into policy and operations. Figure 3 shows an example from Vermont that assigns intensity of supervision based on three considerations:

- supervision status, such as probation, parole, and various types of furlough statuses for people serving all or part of their sentence to incarceration in community settings
- severity of offense, 2 broad categories comprising “listed” offenses designated as violent/attempted violent acts against persons and “non-listed” offenses not so designated
- risk level, as gauged by the LSI-R risk/needs assessment

Figure 3. Vermont Supervision Matrix²

Standard Supervision Level Grid				
Status	Offense	Risk Level		
		Low LSI-R 0-19	Moderate LSI-R 20-30	High LSI-R 31+
Furlough (CR, RF, PAF, MF, and TF)	Listed	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
	Non-listed	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Probation Parole/SCS	Listed	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
	Non-listed	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3

Source: State of Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department of Corrections

South Dakota, as another [example](#), has a clear policy for how risk and needs assessment scores translate to supervision level, as well as for how scores at reassessment translate into changes in supervision level.

Specialized caseloads are set for some groups of parolees and probationers, such as those convicted of a sex offense, and specialized assessments can be used to determine both eligibility (e.g., Is the risk of sexual re-offense high enough that this person should receive specialized supervision?), and level of supervision (e.g., What intensity of specialized supervision should this individual receive?). Whether caseloads are specialized or more general, conditions of supervision should be related as closely as possible to criminogenic risk factors identified through assessment, as they are the drivers or reoffending.

² Figure acronyms: CR: conditional re-entry; RF: reintegration furlough; PAF: pre-approved furlough, MF: medical furlough; TF: treatment furlough; SCS: supervised community sentence.

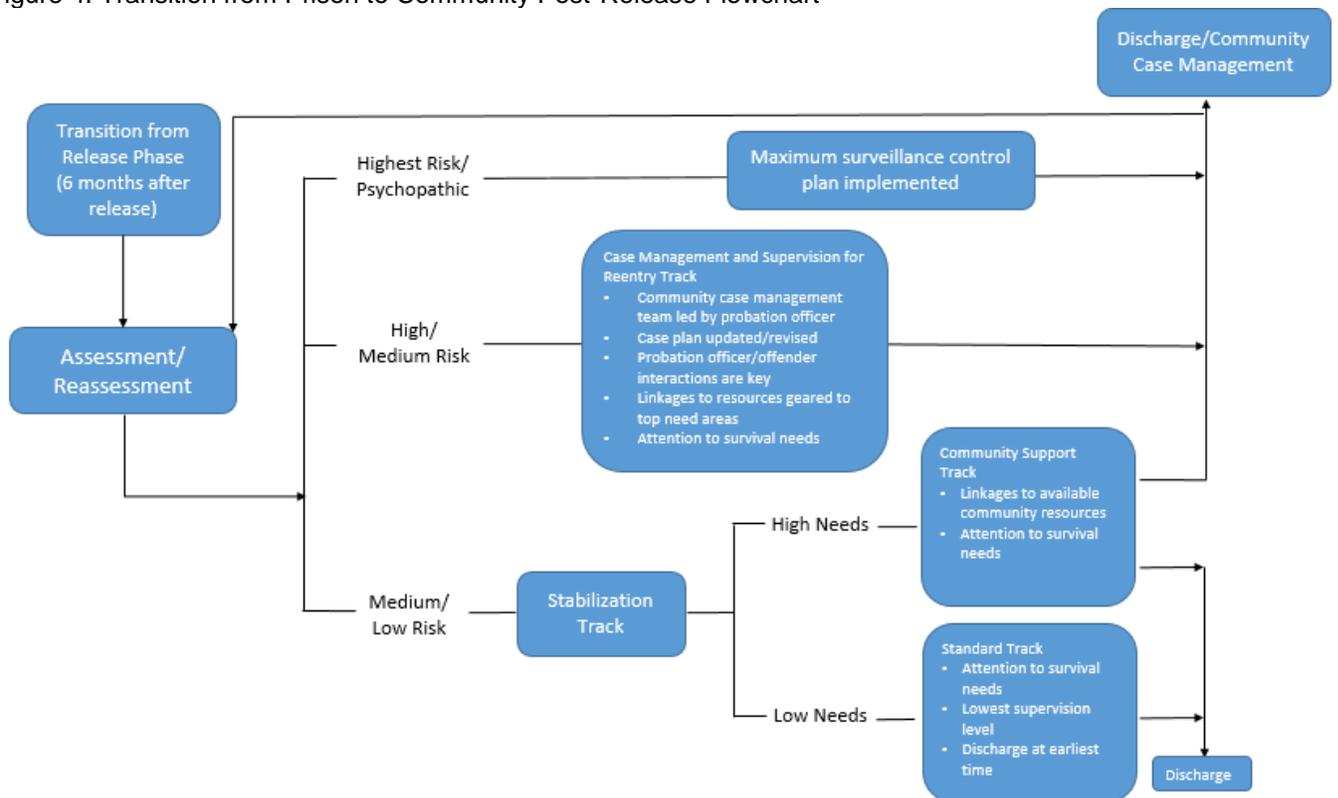
2. Does the framework support minimal supervision and program requirements for low-risk individuals and reserve more intensive supervision and programming only for higher-risk individuals?

At a minimum, agencies should adjust levels of supervision based on risk; requiring more intensive supervision requirements for higher-risk individuals is necessary, but not sufficient. Research shows that more intensive supervision, absent risk-reduction interventions, can make outcomes worse, as closer surveillance uncovers more misconduct but programming to facilitate behavior change is absent. An agency should define separate supervision pathways that are appropriate for people with different risk and need profiles. Specifically, there must be:

- Separate intervention and supervision pathways for higher-risk and lower-risk people.
- The supervision pathways for people with a moderate to high risk to reoffend should involve intensive services addressing criminogenic needs, as well as attending to stability in the community, for example, by assisting with obtaining stable housing. Programs for lower-risk people can focus primarily on stabilization needs.

While Figure 3 shows an example of how to devise risk-based supervision plans for individuals directly sentenced to probation, Figure 4 shows an example of how to do set up such plans for individuals released from prison.

Figure 4. Transition from Prison to Community Post-Release Flowchart



Source: Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) Implementation Handbook

3. *How do you translate needs assessment information to program assignment?*

Reducing parolee and probationer risk requires appropriate matching of treatment to level of criminogenic need. Case plans or supervision plans are a common means of structuring this. Such plans need to:

- Clearly indicate the criminogenic needs identified as most problematic through assessment.
- Guide the supervision officer or case manager to make program referrals and set goals to address these priority criminogenic need factors.

Appropriate program assignment requires not only understand the criminogenic needs of the person being supervised, but also “treatment matching”—that is, identifying which available programs are designed to address which criminogenic needs. Some assessment tools, such as the LS/CMI, include case planning functionality to support developing case plans that fully address criminogenic needs. Vermont’s [Offender Case Plan](#) is an example of a case planning interface that indicates need domains and includes information about addressing each indicated need area during the parole supervision period. Antisocial personality pattern, antisocial cognition (criminal thinking), and antisocial associates are the criminogenic needs with the strongest relation to future offending and should be prioritized when present.

In addition to matching people with the right programs to mitigate their criminogenic needs and thereby reduce their risk to re-offend, there is the question of dosage: How much programming is enough to reduce the risk to reoffend? While the research base on program dosage and recidivism is not yet sufficiently developed to definitively answer this question by risk level, concepts such as “[dosage probation](#)” are a helpful guide on how to approach this issue.

4. *Have you examined available program interventions to determine the criminogenic needs they address, as defined in the risk/needs assessment tool?*

Case plans support structured decision-making at the individual level by focusing work for parolees and probationers on addressing their criminogenic needs. In addition to that, a recommended practice is to sort or inventory intervention options by need(s) addressed, as defined in the risk/needs assessment tool. This information should be available to supervision officers and case managers. Doing this could involve a thorough examination of existing programs to:

- Determine the evidence base on how effectively they address criminogenic needs.
- Assess whether they are implemented with fidelity. Appropriate program models delivered without fidelity do not produce the intended results.
- Gauge the number of available program slots relative to the identified level and distribution of needs among the supervisee population.

5. *How is risk integrated into responses to supervision violations?*

Risk level is an important input into determining how to respond to supervision violations. Tools to structure supervision violation response decision-making generally bring together three elements:

- The individual’s likelihood (risk) to reoffend.

- The severity of the supervision violation.
- The available response options.

A simple violation response matrix that organizes consideration of all three elements is shown in Figure 5. Minor violations committed by lower-risk parolees get the least intensive interventions, which might include a verbal reprimand, imposition of a curfew, or a behavioral contract. More intensive interventions might be referrals to intensive programming or even recommendation for revocation.

Figure 5. Supervision Violation Decision-Making Matrix

Severity of Violation	Risk Level	Response Category	Check One
1	1	Least Intensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	1	Least Intensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	Least Intensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	1	Moderately Intensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	2	Moderately Intensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	3	Moderately Intensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	2	Most Intensive A	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	3	Most Intensive A	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	3	Most Intensive A or Most Intensive B	<input type="checkbox"/>

Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

6. *Have you established performance measures tied to the structured decision-making framework?*

Structured decision-making can facilitate monitoring of several important aspects of system performance:

- Are supervisees assigned to programs appropriate to their risk level and that address their criminogenic needs? Monitoring in this area checks whether practice accords with the risk and needs principles. It's important to ensure that high and moderate-risk supervisees are in risk-reduction programming, rather than low-risk people. And for those who are in programs, it's critical that the programming match their established needs.
- Are responses to supervision violations consistent with the response suggested by the sanctions matrix? There will always be some use of overrides of the suggestions of a supervision violation response matrix, reflecting specific circumstances or intelligence that is not sufficiently captured by the risk assessment or the nature of the violation. However, high override rates can indicate that practitioner agreement with the structured decision-making framework is lacking, and either consensus needs to be re-established (or established), or the matrix itself should be adjusted. Overrides may also indicate limitations in intervention capacity—either that preferred responses to violations are not available in some cases, or that decisionmakers do not believe that the quality of interventions available makes them a viable option.
- What are the supervisee success/failure rates for each risk-based supervision level? Tracking supervision outcomes by risk-based supervision category allows a jurisdiction to monitor whether the levels of supervision and programming being used are producing acceptable success rates. It is valuable to monitor program success rates by the risk level of supervisees participating, as programs taking on higher-risk participants are trying to improve upon a high baseline for recidivism.

Transition from Prison

Assessment plays a fundamental role in reducing the risk to reoffend for the vast majority of people in prison who will return to the community. Here are four questions you should ask yourself as you plan or seek to improve a structured decision-making tool or process based on risk assessment.

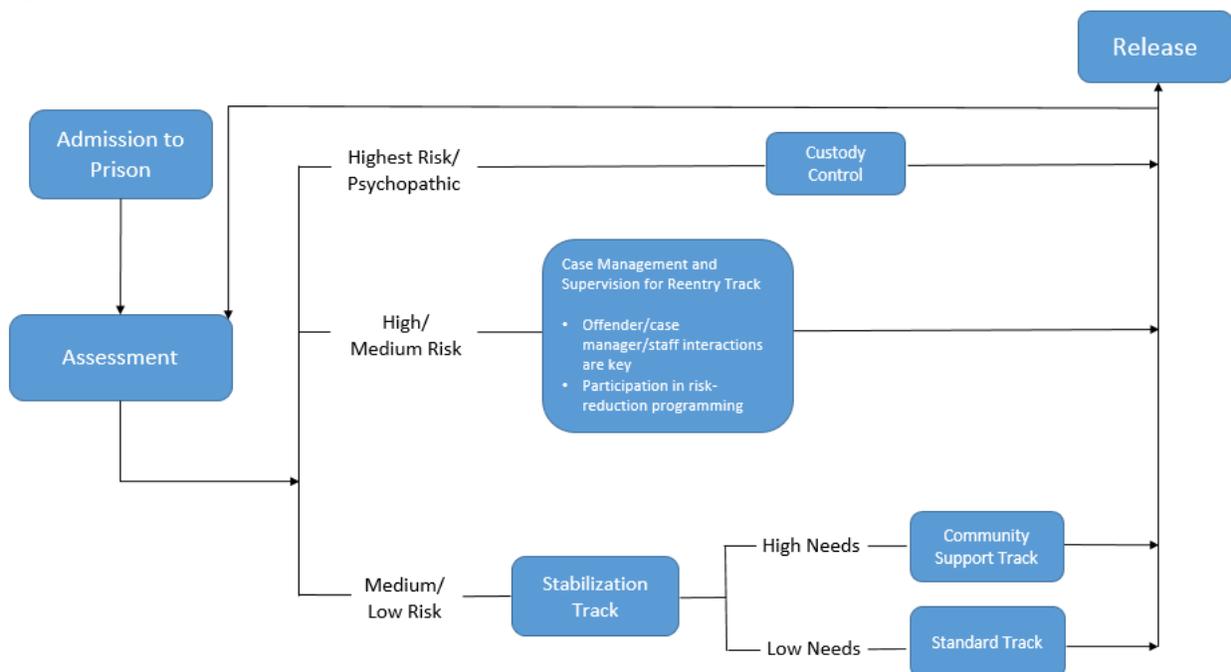
1. *Does the framework support reserving more intensive programming and reentry preparation for higher-risk individuals?*

Effective work to reduce risk must be guided by the risk principle and the needs principle. Specifically, there must be:

- Separate intervention pathways for higher-risk and lower-risk people.
- The intervention pathways for people with moderate to high risks to reoffend should involve intensive services addressing criminogenic needs. Programs for lower-risk people can focus primarily on stabilization needs.

Figure 6 shows a framework for doing this in the prison context, developed by the Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) Initiative.

Figure 6. Transition from Prison to Community Prison Transition Pathways



Source: Transition from Prison to Community Implementation Handbook

2. *How do you translate needs assessment information into program assignment?*

Reducing risk for people in prison requires the appropriate matching of treatment to level of criminogenic need. Case plans or transition plans are a common means of structuring this. Such plans need to:

- Clearly indicate the criminogenic needs identified as most problematic through assessment.

- Guide the case manager or correctional counselor, and the individual whose case plan it is, to make program referrals and set goals to address these priority criminogenic need factors.

Appropriate program assignment requires not only understand the criminogenic needs of the person being supervised, but also which available programs are designed to address which criminogenic needs. Some assessment tools, such as the LS/CMI, include case planning functionality to support developing case plans that fully address criminogenic needs. However, matching interventions to indicated criminogenic need requires inventorying intervention options by need(s) addressed and making that information available to supervision officers and case managers or correctional counselors.

In addition to matching people with the right programs to mitigate their criminogenic needs and thereby reduce their risk to re-offend, there is the question of dosage and timing. How much programming is enough to reduce the risk to reoffend? While the research base on program dosage and recidivism is not yet sufficiently developed to definitively answer this question by risk level, concepts such as “[dosage probation](#),” while developed for a community rather than an institutional setting, are a helpful guide on how to approach this issue.

3. *Have you examined available program interventions to determine the criminogenic needs they address, as defined in the risk/needs assessment tool?*

Case plans support structured decision-making at the individual level by focusing work for people in prison on addressing their criminogenic needs. In addition to that, a recommended practice is to sort or inventory intervention options by need(s) addressed, as defined in the risk/needs assessment tool. This information should be available to correctional case managers or other staff responsible for encouraging program participation and reentry preparation. Doing this could involve a thorough examination of existing programs to:

- Determine the evidence base on [how effectively they address criminogenic needs](#).
- Assess whether they are implemented with fidelity. Appropriate program models delivered without fidelity do not produce the intended results.
- Gauge the number of available program slots relative to the supervisees that need intervention.

4. *Have you established performance measures tied to the structured decision-making framework?*

This type of structured decision-making can guide the monitoring of several important aspects of system performance. Note that establishing, measuring and monitoring performance in these areas will require coordination between institutional corrections, paroling authorities, and community supervision.

- Are individuals assigned to programs appropriate to their risk level that also address their criminogenic needs? Monitoring in this area checks whether practice accords with the risk and needs principles. It’s important to ensure that high and moderate-risk supervisees are in risk-reduction programming, rather than low-risk people. And for those who are in such programs, it’s critical that the programming match their established needs.

- What are the success/failure rates for each risk level? Tracking reentry outcomes by risk-based category allows a jurisdiction to monitor whether the levels of supervision and programming being used are producing acceptable success rates. It is valuable to monitor program success rates by the risk level of individuals participating, as programs taking on higher-risk participants are trying to improve upon a high baseline for recidivism.

Transition from Jail

Assessment plays a fundamental role in reducing risk to reoffend for people returning to the community from jails. Here are four questions you should ask yourself as you plan or seek to improve a structured decision-making tool or process for reentry from jail based on risk assessment.

1. *Does the framework support reserving more intensive programming and reentry preparation for higher-risk individuals?*

Effective work to reduce risk must be guided by the risk principle and the needs principle. Specifically, there must be:

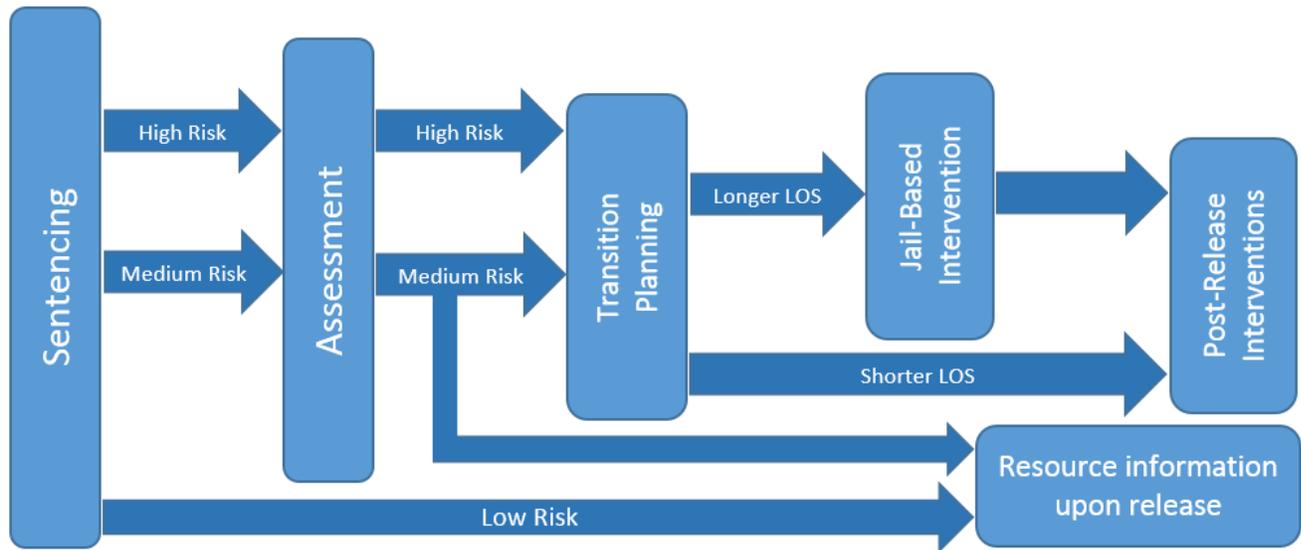
- Separate intervention pathways for higher-risk and lower-risk people.
- The intervention pathways for people with moderate to high risks to reoffend should involve intensive services addressing criminogenic needs.

This general framework is the same as the transition from prison, but it must be put into practice differently due to the high volume of individuals entering jails, short average lengths of stay, and unpredictable release dates. These may be addressed through a triage process consisting of two steps:

- Risk screening using a short and simple tool, to establish level of risk to reoffend throughout the whole population entering jail and to identify the target population for intervention.
- Full risk/needs assessment of people in the target population to guide reentry interventions in the jail and/or planning for community-based interventions.

Figure 7 shows how this triage process works, with individuals scored as high or medium risk receiving more intensive assessment, transition planning and interventions, while individuals with a lower risk to reoffend are placed on a minimal intervention track. A more detailed jail transition process from Howard County, Maryland involving initial screening with the Proxy and full assessment with the LS/CMI is available [here](#).

Figure 7. Jail Transition Triage Process



Source: Transition from Jail to Community Online Learning Toolkit

2. *How do you translate needs assessment information to program assignment?*

Reducing risk for people in prison requires the appropriate matching of treatment to level of criminogenic need. Case plans or transition plans are a common means of structuring this. Such plans need to:

- Clearly indicate the criminogenic needs identified as most problematic through assessment.
- Guide the case manager or correctional counselor to make program referrals and set goals to address these priority criminogenic need factors.

Appropriate program assignment requires not only understand the criminogenic needs of the person being supervised, but also which available programs are designed to address which criminogenic needs. Some assessment tools, such as the LS/CMI, including case planning functionality to support developing case plans that fully address criminogenic needs. However, matching interventions to indicated criminogenic needs requires inventorying intervention options by need(s) addressed and making that information available to jail-based case managers and/or probation officers or community service providers who will be coordinating interventions after release.

In addition to matching people with the right programs to mitigate their criminogenic needs and thereby reduce their risk to re-offend, there is the question of dosage. How much programming is enough to reduce the risk to reoffend? While the research base on program dosage and recidivism is not yet sufficiently developed to definitively answer this question by risk level, concepts such as “[dosage probation](#),” while developed for a community rather than institutional setting, are a helpful guide on how to approach this issue. Given the short average stays in jail, the necessary program dosage may need to be delivered partly prior to release and partly in the community after release.

3. *Have you examined available program interventions to determine the criminogenic needs they address, as defined in the risk/needs assessment tool?*

Case plans support structured decision-making at the individual level by focusing work for people in prison on addressing their criminogenic needs. In addition to that, a recommended practice is to sort or inventory intervention options by need(s) addressed, as defined in the risk/needs assessment tool. This information should be available to correctional case managers or other staff responsible for encouraging program participation and reentry preparation. Doing this could involve a thorough examination of existing programs to:

- Determine the evidence base on [how effectively they address criminogenic needs](#).
- Assess whether they are implemented with fidelity. Appropriate program models delivered without fidelity do not produce the intended results.
- Gauge the number of available program slots relative to the supervisees that need intervention.

As the lengths of jail stays will be insufficient to deliver adequate dosage prior to release, this examination of existing programs should include both jail-based and community-based programming.

4. *Have you established performance measures tied to the structured decision-making framework?*

This type of structured decision-making can guide the monitoring of several important aspects of system performance:

- Are individuals assigned to programs appropriate to their risk level and that address their criminogenic needs? Monitoring in this area checks whether practice accords with the risk and needs principles. It's important to ensure that high and moderate-risk supervisees are in risk-reduction programming, rather than low-risk people. And for those who are in programs, it's critical that the programming match their established needs.
- What are the success/failure rates for each risk level? Tracking reentry outcomes by risk-based category allows a jurisdiction to monitor whether the levels of programming being used are producing acceptable success rates. It is valuable to monitor program success rates by the risk level of individuals participating, as programs taking on higher-risk participants are trying to improve upon a high baseline for recidivism.

The **Public Safety Risk Assessment Clearinghouse** is a one-stop resource that provides practitioners and policymakers with up-to-date and objective information about risk assessment as well as training and technical assistance on its use.



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Suggested citation for this publication:

Jannetta, Jesse (2017). Structured Decision-Making: Using Risk Assessment Outputs to Improve Practice (*Policy Brief Number 2017-05*). Washington, DC: The Public Safety Risk Assessment Clearinghouse.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-ZB-BX-K004 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

