

Perceived Factors Leading to a Lack of  
Recidivism Among Juvenile Offenders

A Field-Based Research Paper

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine what juvenile offenders, after participating in a ten-week Corrective Thinking program, perceived as factors that prevented them from re-offending. The results of the study indicated that two out of five juvenile offenders in the study perceived their thinking as being different after participating in the Corrective Thinking program. Four of the five participants reported that thinking about the consequences of irresponsible behavior, and/or the fear of going to the Department of Corrections and boot camp were the major factors in their lack of recidivism.

It can not be stated that the ten-week Corrective Thinking program was the sole reason for the lack of recidivism on the part of the juveniles. The findings of this study may be seen, though, as an incentive to look more closely at what juvenile offenders perceive to work best for them in regard to recidivism prevention.

## Perceived Factors Leading to a Lack of Recidivism Among Juvenile Offenders

Up until the middle 1970's, society seemed to believe that the criminal justice system should not be just a place for punishment, but also a place for rehabilitation. Currie (1998) stated however, that a more accurate account of this interest in rehabilitation could be expressed as "... the commitment to rehabilitation in prisons was shallow at best and in many states it was virtually non-existent" (p. 164).

Around the mid 1970's society experienced a period of time when the focus shifted from indifference to rehabilitation to a time when society felt the criminal justice system needed to toughen up and focus on what Currie (1998) called "penal harm". In this system offenders experienced pain and deprivation in society's call for retribution. While this type of imprisonment temporarily provided society with a sense of security and vindication, it did not seem to change criminal behavior (Uche & Harries-Jenkins, 1994).

From a history of fronted support for both rehabilitation and punishment, society has come to a point where "while citizens want criminals to be punished, the public is not monolithically punitive: most support the rehabilitation of offenders" (Applegate, Cullen, Fisher, 1997, p. 238). Now that society is willing to consider alternatives in the area of corrections, the dilemma is finding a method of intervention that will work best to reduce recidivism among adult and juvenile offenders.

One comprehensive way in which physical and social scientists are reviewing the evidence of what works to reduce recidivism is meta-analysis. Applegate and Cullen (1998) studied a meta-analysis that evaluated effective interventions for serious juvenile offenders. They reported that treatments such as behavioral, skill-oriented, and multi-modal that were more structured and focused seemed to be more effective than treatment approaches such as counseling, that were less structured and less focused.

Paul Gendreau and Mario A. Pappozzi (1995), identified characteristics of offender intervention programs that appear to reduce offender recidivism.

1. Services are intensive and last three to nine months. They are based on cognitive and social learning behavioral/psychological theories and are used for higher risk offenders.
2. Services target criminological needs, such as antisocial attitudes and values.
3. The style and mode of treatment is matched to the offender's learning style and personality.
4. Program reinforcement depends on the behavior being exhibited
5. Therapists relate to offenders in sensitive and constructive ways and are trained and supervised appropriately.
6. Program structure and activities disrupt the criminal network by placing offenders in situations where pro-social activities predominate (p.29).

Based on these characteristics, cognitive behavioral programs seemed to be most effective in reducing recidivism. Paul Gendreau (1996) expounded on the definition of a cognitive behavioral program as one that stems from a cognitive behavioral therapy. These theories, in regard to offenders, intend to, "...change the offenders' cognition, attitudes, values, and expectations that maintain antisocial behavior" (p.121).

An example of such a cognitive behavioral intervention is the Corrective Thinking program developed by Rogie Spon (1999) from Truthought Publishers. This program is based on the extensive research in criminology by Dr. Stanton Samenow. (Spon, 1999). Truthought is a publisher and provider of seminars and workshops in the Corrective Thinking process. Corrective Thinking (Spon, 1999) is a cognitive process that helps individuals identify their irresponsible thinking and develop more responsible thinking. The program teaches irresponsible thinkers to identify nine thinking barriers and the correctives that counteract each of these. The nine thinking barriers and their correctives include:

<u>Barriers in Thinking</u>	<u>Steps to Responsible Thinking</u>
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|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Closed Thinking</li> <li>2. Victim Role</li> <li>3. Superior Self-Image</li> <li>4. Reckless Attitude</li> <li>5. Instant Gratification</li> <li>6. Fear of 'Losing Face'</li> <li>7. Power Control</li> <li>8. Possessive Attitude</li> <li>9. Uniqueness</li> </ol> <p>(Spon, 1999, p. 32)</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open Channels</li> <li>2. Personal Accountability</li> <li>3. Self Respect</li> <li>4. Daily Effort</li> <li>5. Self Discipline</li> <li>6. Courage Over Fear</li> <li>7. Healthy Relationships</li> <li>8. Respect for Others</li> <li>9. Humility</li> </ol> |
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There are also nineteen "Time Bomb" Tactics that the participants in the program are taught to recognize. They fall into three categories. They are:

Shifts Blame or Focus

1. Attempts to confuse
2. Points out others' faults
3. Builds self up by putting others down
4. Makes a big scene over minor issues
5. Accuses others of misunderstanding
6. Uses anger as a weapon to control others
7. Argues over "words" to avoid the real issues
8. Introduces irrelevant issues (race/gender)
9. Puts others on the defense by embarrassing

Lies and Deceives

10. Deliberately vague
11. Avoids obligations (by saying "I forgot")
12. Tells others what they want to hear not the whole truth
13. Omits facts; reveals only what pleases self
14. Says "yes" without meaning it

Ignores obligations

15. Does not pay attention
  16. Chooses only what is self-gratifying
  17. Refuses to communicate or participate – silence
  18. Minimizes behavior (I just got into a little trouble)
  19. Says "I'm changed" after one right thing
- (Spon, 1999, p.35)

Through this process individuals explore responsible alternatives to irresponsible thinking and behaving as viable options that are more practical and responsible.

Because of the support found in professional literature for cognitive-based programs as effective means of reducing recidivism, and the perceived applicability of the program content of the aforementioned Corrective Thinking program, this cognitive-based program was chosen to be used in an attempt to reduce recidivism with juveniles on intensive and/or regular probation. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of this program on the recidivism rate of selected juveniles currently in the juvenile justice system and to further identify the factors these juveniles perceived as deterrents to their reoffending

### Methodology

#### Participants

Five individuals, ages fourteen to seventeen, enrolled in the local intensive probation program were instructed by their probation officers to attend the ten-week Corrective Thinking program as a part of their probation. All five of the participants were male, one Native American, four Caucasian, and all had numerous criminal offenses. Each of the participants completed the ten-week program and completed both required program evaluations.

#### Procedure

These five subjects participated, on a non-volunteer basis, in the ten-week Corrective Thinking program that was developed from Spon's (1999) Corrective Thinking material. They attended one, one and one half-hour session each week. Each session began with the facilitator collecting homework and checking to see if each participant had been completing the daily journal assignments. Participants then recited the opening ritual, which was the same every session, read the group purpose, three primary group rules, and then committed to a common goal for that particular session. The participants then received instruction on whichever thinking barrier was being presented during that session, and the corrective or more responsible thinking that corresponds with that thinking barrier. During the session the

participants worked on and shared their response to a worksheet or activity that corresponded with the thinking barrier. At the end of the sessions, the participants were given homework assignments to be completed by the next session, and recited a closing ritual. Participation in all group activities and discussions was mandatory for all participants. All participants were also required to complete, and present to the rest of the group, a ripple chart showing how committing one of their crimes affected other people.

At the completion of the program the subjects were given a written program evaluation created by the facilitator to complete on their own and return to the facilitator. The evaluation asked the following questions:

- What are the “Time-Bomb Tactics” and how do you use them?
- What are the “Thinking Barriers”?
- What is the responsible thinking that goes with each of the “Thinking Barriers”?
- Which of the “Thinking Barriers” have you discovered that you use most often?
- How do you plan to correct your thinking?
- What have you learned about yourself during this program?

A month after completing the program, the subjects completed a written follow-up evaluation that was created by the facilitator. This evaluation was completed at the facilitator’s office. This evaluation consisted of the following questions:

- What “Time-Bomb Tactics” do you find yourself still using most often?
- Which of the “Thinking Barriers” do you find yourself using most often?
- What do you do to stop yourself from using “Time-Bomb Tactics” and “Thinking barriers” ?
- Have you re-offended (been arrested) since you finished the Corrective Thinking program?
  - If yes, in your opinion what caused you to re-offend? (Why did you?)
  - If no, in your opinion, what do you think kept you from re-offending?

The facilitator, and author of this study, analyzed the juveniles’ responses to the evaluation questions. This process involved comparing the subjects’ responses to the end of program written evaluation with their responses to the one month written evaluation. The analysis was to determine what the juveniles perceived to be the factors that lead to their lack of recidivism or recidivism, if in fact that was the case.

## Results

Prior to the beginning of the program, personal information was gathered from each participant. This information included the participant's sex, the family's general income class (expressed as either upper middle or lower), and a list of family members, academic grades, and a list of the participants' prior offenses. This personal information was included in the participants' case notes.

Summarized from the case notes are selected elements including subject's grades, session attendance, week of observed change (as determined by the facilitators' observation of the participants behavior, participation, and dialogue during group sessions), and number of aftercare sessions attended by each participant. These are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Comparison of Case Notes

	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5
Grades					
Before	F's	C's & D's	B's & C's	A's	C's
After	B's	C's & D's	B's & C's	A's	C's
Sessions					
Attended	11	12	10	10	12
Missed	1	3	0	0	2
Week of Observed Change	5	5	5/ 6	8	8
After care Sessions	1	5	0	0	6

Table 1 is a comparison of certain elements from each participants case notes. The grades for the participants illustrate, for easy comparison, each subject's grades before the program and after completion. Only Subject 1 showed improvement in his grades. The next element of the table illustrates the number of sessions each subject attended and missed. Three of the subjects were required to attend more than the original ten sessions. Subject One had an additional session added because he was late for a session. Subject Two had two additional sessions added for habitually not completing homework assignments. Subject Five had two sessions added at the discretion of his probation officer for minor probation violations. The week of observed change illustrates at which session the facilitator began to notice a significant amount of change in the subjects' behavior, level of participation and dialogue during the group sessions. The after care sessions documented in Table 1 illustrate how many after care sessions each of the five subjects attended. Participation in after care was at the discretion of the subjects' probation officers.

The information for Table 1 was derived from each participant's case notes. The following case narratives describe each participant's progress in the program.

#### Subject One:

Subject One was a fourteen-year-old Native American male. He came from a lower income family. His family consisted of himself, his biological mother and four other biological relatives. His academic grades had been failing at the onset of the program then rose to B's by the end of the program. Subject One's prior offenses were: two assaults, one aggravated assault, one intentional damage, one driving without a driver's license, and numerous minor probation violations. The subject did not arrive on time for all eleven of his sessions. He had an additional session added for being late for one of his sessions. During the program he was absent for one session.

The subject began the program with what seemed to be a negative attitude about being in the program. He did not seem willing to recognize or explore his use of

thinking barriers or tactics. He did not seem to take the program seriously as evidenced by his joking, inappropriate comments, and side conversations during the sessions. During the subject's fifth session, he appeared to be less negative about being in the program and seemed to be more willing to examine his use of thinking barriers and tactics. After this session, the subject became more willing to recognize his use of thinking barriers and tactics as a means of avoiding accountability and responsibility. He also began appropriately confronting other program members on their use of thinking barriers and tactics. By the end of the program the subject seemed able to not only identify his use of thinking barriers and tactics but also to replace them with more responsible correctives. The end of program evaluation demonstrated that the subject was able to identify the tactics and thinking barriers and correctives that go with each of these. In the evaluation the subject reported that the tactics and thinking barriers he uses most often were being vague, not paying attention, and victim role. He reported that he plans on correcting his thinking by changing it. He also reported that during the program he learned what his bad sides are, which he stated were "...too much". The subject attended one after care session. In the follow-up evaluation the subject reported that he did not feel that he was using any of the tactics of thinking barriers. He also reported that he had not re-offended and that in his opinion this is because, "...the class taught me to think of the consequences before I act, or how stupid it would be to get in trouble for stupid stuff and think how many freedoms I have now." As of February 2001 the subject had not re-offended and was on regular probation.

#### Subject Two:

Subject Two was a seventeen-year-old white male. He came from a middle income family. His family consisted of himself, his biological mother, his biological father and one younger biological brother. His academic grades remained the same throughout the program at C's and D's. The subjects prior offenses were: three possessions and consumption of alcohol by a minor, two possessions of drug paraphernalia, one possession of marijuana, one curfew violation, one truancy, and multiple minor probation violations. The subject arrived on time for all twelve of his sessions. He had two additional sessions added for habitually not completing his assignments. The subject missed three sessions to attend Anger Busters.

The subject began the program with what seemed to be a negative attitude about being in the program as evidenced by him slamming his books and his slumped withdrawn demeanor. He did not seem willing to discuss or explore his use of tactics and thinking barriers. He did not voluntarily participate in session activities or discussions. He seemed to be angry and withdrawn during these sessions. During the subject's fifth session, he seemed to be more relaxed and not as angry as he had in the past. He seemed to be making an effort to not make excuses and to recognize his use of tactics and thinking barriers. He was still refusing to complete his journal and homework assignments.

During the subject's eighth session he turned in a partially completed journal and his homework. His attitude did not seem as negative as it had in the past. He did not drop his books, and he voluntarily participated in the session discussions and activities. After this session the subject took time off of the program to attend Anger Busters at the discretion of his probation officer. Anger Busters was not a part of the Corrective Thinking program. Upon his return he had what appeared to be a more positive attitude and seemed to be willing to make a commitment to not saying, "I forgot" as a tactic to avoid responsibility. At the end of the program the subject seemed more willing to examine his use of thinking barriers and tactics and how his use of these effect his life. The end of program evaluation demonstrated that the subject was able to identify the tactics and thinking barriers and the correctives that go with each of these. He also stated that the thinking barriers he uses most often are lies by omission and saying, "I forgot". The subject reported that he plans to correct his thinking by using responsible thinking. He also reported that during the program he learned that he needs to do his work on time.

Subject Two attended five after care sessions. In his follow up evaluation the subject reported that he finds himself still using some of the tactics and thinking barriers. He stated that thinking about being sent to Custer Boot Camp keeps him from re-offending. As of February 2001 the subject had not re-offended and was on regular probation.

#### Subject Three:

Subject Three was a fourteen-year-old white male. He came from a middle income family. His family consisted of himself, his biological mother and one younger biological brother. His academic grades remained the same at C's and B's throughout the program. The subject's prior offenses were: one burglary, one running away, and multiple curfew and probation violations.

The subject arrived on time for all twelve of his sessions. He had two additional sessions added for refusing to complete his homework and journal. He did not miss any sessions.

The subject began the program with what seemed to be a disinterested attitude. He seemed to joke a lot and did not seem to take the program seriously though he participated in the program activities and discussions and completed all of the homework assignments. During the fifth and sixth sessions the subject seemed to begin taking the program more seriously and seemed more willing to explore his use of tactics and thinking barriers. By the end of the program the subject appeared to be able to recognize his use of tactics and thinking barriers, and he seemed willing to apply what he learned during the program to his own life.

In the end of program evaluation, the subject demonstrated that he was able to recognize the tactics and thinking barriers and the correctives that go with each of these. He reported that he finds himself using the Reckless Attitude thinking barrier the most often. He stated that he planned to correct his thinking by trying to meet his obligations. He also stated that during the program he learned that he does a lot of things unknowingly.

Subject Three did not attend any after care sessions. He relocated with his family out of the area. In the follow-up evaluation, which was mailed to and from the subject, he reported that he still finds himself lying by omission, and he does not stop to think before doing some things. He stated that in order to make himself stop using tactics and thinking barriers, he tries to think about things before saying them. He stated that he has not re-offended because he tries to think about the consequences before doing things. As of February 2001 the subject was on probation and had not re-offended.

#### Subject Four:

Subject Four was a seventeen-year-old white male. He came from a lower income family that consisted of himself, his biological mother, his biological father and one younger biological brother. His academic grades fluctuated throughout the program between A's and B's. His prior offenses were: multiple possessions and consumption by a minor, one shoplifting, one speeding, one curfew violation, one huffing, and multiple probation violations.

The subject arrived on time for all ten of his sessions. He did not miss any of his sessions.

The subject began the program with what appeared to be a negative attitude about being in the group and life in general. He seemed to focus more on the other group members than himself. He seemed to attempt to justify his irresponsible choices by putting himself in the victim role. He did not seem willing to put any effort into the group as evidenced by his not completing his homework or journal. During the subject's eighth session, his attitude about being in the group appeared to be less negative than it had been in the past. He had all of his homework completed and his journal up to date. He seemed to be more willing to explore his use of tactics and thinking barriers though he did not seem to be applying what he was learning in the program to his own life.

At the end of the program the subject seemed to continue to be more willing to explore his use of tactics and thinking barriers. He seemed to be continuing to justify his irresponsible thinking by seeing himself as the victim. In the end of program evaluation, the subject demonstrated that he was able to identify the tactics and thinking barriers and the correctives that go with each of these. The subject reported that he uses the Closed Thinking, Superior Self-Image and Power Control thinking barriers the most often. Most often though he find himself being vague and avoiding his obligations. He stated that in order to stop himself from using tactics and thinking barriers, he plans to try to catch himself when he thinks irresponsibly. He stated that during the program he learned why he acts the way he does and what he is thinking when he acts that way. He also stated that he was amazed to see how often he uses thinking barriers.

The subject did not attend any after care sessions. In his follow-up evaluation the subject reported that he had re-offended with probation violations for using drugs (marijuana). He stated that he still finds himself being deliberately vague and avoiding obligations. He also stated that he still uses the Reckless Attitude and Possessive Attitude thinking barriers. He reported that in order to stop himself

from using tactics and thinking barriers he tries to have other people point out when he is using them. As of February 2001 the subject had completed an inpatient treatment program for chemical dependency, turned 18, and was removed from all court service programs.

#### Subject Five:

Subject Five was a sixteen year old white male. He came from a middle income family that consisted of himself, his biological mother and his mother's boyfriend. His academic grades remained that same, C's, throughout the program. His prior offenses were: one truancy, two unauthorized uses of a motor vehicle, two driving without a license, one speeding, one curfew violation, and numerous probation violations.

The subject arrived for all twelve of his sessions. He had two extra sessions added by his probation officer. He missed two sessions.

The subject began the program with what seemed to be a negative attitude about being in the group. He often stated that he did not think that he needed to be in the program. He seemed to joke often and not take the program seriously. He seemed to have an excuse for all of his irresponsible choices. He did not seem willing to explore his use of tactics and thinking barriers or how his use of them affected his life.

During the subject's eighth session he seemed to have a less negative attitude about being in the group than he had in the past. He had all of his homework completed and his journal up to date. He seemed to be more willing to examine his use of tactics and thinking barriers than he had in the past. He did not seem to be willing to give up his use of them. He stated that he did not want to stop using them because they helped him get his way.

By the end of the program the subject seemed to be making more of an effort to apply what he learned in the program to his own life. In the end of program evaluation the subject demonstrated that he was able to identify the tactics and thinking barriers and the correctives that go with each of these. He stated that he used the Closed Thinking, thinking barrier the most often, and that he plans to correct this by thinking before he acts. He also stated that during the program he has learned to think before he acts.

The subject attended six after care sessions. In the follow-up evaluation the subject reported that he still find himself not paying attention as a way to avoid accountability. He stated that in order to stop himself from using tactics and thinking barriers he recognizes what he is doing and stops himself. He stated that not wanting to go to department of Corrections and thinking different after the Corrective Thinking program keeps him from re-offending. As of February 2001, the subject had not re-offended and was on probation.

The results of the completion and follow-up evaluations are combined in Table

2. This enables comparisons of the participants' progress in the program and their responses to the evaluations.

**Table 2**Comparison of Completion and Three Month Follow-up Evaluations

	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5
<b>Evaluations</b>					
<i>Completion</i>					
Thinking Barriers/ Tactics Used	Being vague Not Paying Attention	Lies by Omission Avoids Obligations	Reckless Attitude	Closed Thinking Superior Self Image/Power Control	Closed Thinking
Plan to Change Thinking	Change my Thinking	By responsible Thinking	Try to meet obligations	Just try to catch myself when I think that way	Think before acting
<i>Follow-up</i>					
Thinking Barriers/ Tactics Used	None	Victim Role Does Not Pay Attention	Lies by Omission	Reckless Attitude Possessive Attitude	Does Not Pay Attention
Plan to Change Thinking	Stop and think of Consequences	Think about Custer	Think about it before I say it	I try to have people point them out to to me	When I know what I do so I stop
<b>Recidivated</b>	No	No	No	Yes	No
Reason given	“The class taught me to think of the Consequences before I act, or how stupid it would be to get in trouble for stupid stuff and think of how many freedoms I have now.”	Think about Custer	Thinking about the consequences	“I relapsed.”	“I don’t want to go to Custer I think different after the class.”

Table 2 illustrates the responses of the five subjects to both the completion (end of program) and follow-up (one-month after completion of the program) evaluations. The

subject's responses to the questions were recorded as written by the subjects in the evaluations.

### Discussion

Although this pilot study consisted of only five participants, it demonstrated that a ten-week Corrective Thinking program could help some male offenders change their thinking from irresponsible to responsible, as evidenced by the responses of two of the participants in the program evaluations. It appeared that the threat of being sent to the Department of Corrections and boot camp were the strongest incentives for the juveniles to change their thinking and behavior. It was not clear, though, if the participants actually changed their thinking, or were just stopping themselves from reoffending because of the consequences of such a choice.

After studying the responses of the subjects in Table 2 it seemed that in the follow-up one-month evaluation the subjects' responses to the questions seemed to be more specific than their responses to the end of program or completion evaluation. In the completion evaluation the subjects' responses were vague in regard to their thinking, and they did not seem willing to be accountable for their thinking. In the follow-up evaluation their responses seemed to indicate that more thinking was going on. The subjects seemed to be thinking more about the consequences of their choices. This is true for all of the subjects except Subject 4. In regard to Subject 4, his responses seemed to stay in the same mind set from the time of the completion evaluation to the follow-up evaluation. He seemed to leave himself ways out rather than be accountable for his thinking. He also seemed to put the responsibility for accountability onto other people. It is interesting that Subject 4 is the only one of the five subjects to recidivate. I am inclined to believe that his lack of

responsible thinking and his unwillingness to be accountable for his thinking and behavior contributed highly to his recidivating.

During the program Subject 2 had taken time out of the Corrective Thinking program to attend six weeks of an Anger Management program at a different facility. Prior to his attending this Anger Management program, the juvenile had begun to demonstrate a more responsible disposition during his last Corrective Thinking session. Upon his return to the Corrective Thinking program, the subject's demeanor seemed to be much more cooperative, and he seemed more willing to explore his use of thinking barriers and tactics. It can not be determined if it was the Anger Management program or the Corrective Thinking program that initiated the change, or if the change in the subject occurred due to a combination of both programs.

After completion of the ten-week program, the participants were offered an after-care program that consisted of one-hour Corrective Thinking groups every other week. Aftercare was open to all Corrective Thinking participants who had completed the program. Of the five participants in this study, three of the juveniles were required to go to after-care by their probation officers for at least one session. It was then up to the individual as to whether or not he would continue to attend. As of June 2001, one of these three individuals required to attend aftercare was still attending on a sporadic basis, at his discretion.

Also, as of June 2001, the four juveniles who had not recidivated after one month of completing the program had still not reoffended. The one subject who had reoffended after completing the program went on to complete a drug and alcohol dependency inpatient treatment program, turned eighteen, and was removed from all court service

programs. He has since reoffended. The charge was possession and consumption of alcohol by a minor.

As of June 2001, eighteen juveniles have completed the ten-week Corrective Thinking program. Four of the eighteen participants have recidivated.

While this study does not prove the effectiveness of a ten week Corrective Thinking program on reducing recidivism for male juvenile offenders, it does provide insight about five juvenile offenders in regard to their thinking and their perceived reasons behind recidivating, or the lack thereof.

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