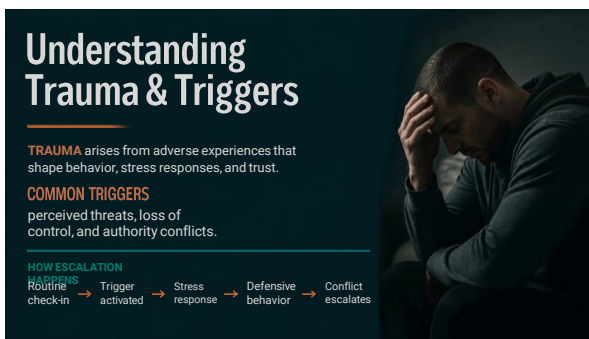




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Trauma-Informed Communication Strategies

- 01 — Use empathetic language and active listening
- 02 — Maintain consistent, clear expectations without harsh judgment
- 03 — Recognize and validate feelings without reinforcing negative behavior
- 04 — Employ de-escalation tactics when signs of distress arise



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Replacing Triggering Practices

TRADITIONAL APPROACH
Confrontational questioning



TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH
Collaborative dialogue

TRADITIONAL APPROACH
Zero tolerance for minor noncompliance



TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH
Contextualized response with support

TRADITIONAL APPROACH
Punitive sanctions first



TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH
Problem-solving and connection first

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Balancing Empathy, Accountability & Officer Wellness

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Empathy
Understand participant backgrounds to foster engagement

2

Accountability
Set clear boundaries and follow through with consistent consequences

3

Officer Wellness
Use self-care strategies to manage stress and prevent burnout

Sustainable supervision requires attending to all three.

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A Practical Approach: De-escalation Tactics

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DBT and ACT



Dialectical Behavior Therapy

A therapy model that includes practical skills for:



Regulating intense emotions



Reducing impulsive behavior



Managing conflict without escalation



Acceptance & Commitment Therapy

A therapy model that focuses on building psychological flexibility by:



Increasing accountability for actions



Reducing rigid, blaming, or avoidant thinking



Helping people act in ways that align with long-term goals



Both DBT and ACT are **evidence-based** approaches that support lasting change through skill-building, insight, and values-driven action.

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How DBT and ACT Support Supervision



Dialectical Behavior Therapy

Selected DBT skills can help participants stabilize emotions and avoid behaviors that increase risk.

They can help officers:



• Calm escalation



• Manage emotional flooding



• Replace impulsive reactions with skill use



Acceptance & Commitment Therapy

Selected ACT processes can help participants step back from excuses and focus on personal goals and values.

They can help officers:



• Stop 'yes-but' arguments



• Unhook participants from stuck thinking



• Increase buy-in without lecturing

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Why DBT and ACT Skills Work in Supervision Settings



Applying selected evidence-based skills from these therapies through regular Core Correctional Practices can support effective supervision and improve participant outcomes.



These are communication and decision tools, not therapy.

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Why DBT and ACT Skills Work in Supervision Settings



Integration

Blending pieces of DBT and ACT into the Core Correctional Practices you already use supports real behavior change.



De-Escalation

Gives officers a clear, structured approach in heated moments rather than relying on instinct.



Lasting Change

Focuses on emotional flooding and stuck thinking, which sit behind most technical violations.



Rule: no one leaves the building dysregulated. Use TIPP first.

Evidence-Based Communication: Integrating Specialized Tools Into Daily Check-Ins

These are communication and decision tools, not therapy.

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Stabilization First

Operational



Crisis
DBT Distress Tolerance



Emotional flooding
DBT TIPP



Stuck thinking
ACT Defusion



Stable
Values & Committed Action



Reality Check

Housing insecurity • Food instability • Safety threats



Rule

Don't ask someone to 'visualize their best life' when they're trying to survive today.



Hierarchy of Needs

Abstract tools like 'values clarification' and 'long-term goal setting' require a calm, safe baseline.

Matching your intervention to the participant's current physical and emotional state.

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Step 1: STABILIZE - When Emotions are High



The participant is physically unable to process logic or rules.



The Dysregulated Nervous System

Pacing, clenched fists, shallow/rapid breathing, flushed face, neck, or ears.



Physical Indicators

Raised volume, cursing/insulting language, ruminating on a single grievance.

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Step 1: STABILIZE - When Emotions are High



Tool: TIPP Skills

TIPP is a set of distress tolerance tools designed to change body chemistry quickly, activating the parasympathetic nervous system and helping move the body out of fight or flight mode.



The goal is to allow the rational brain to override the threat response.

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Step 1: STABILIZE - When Emotions Are High



1 Temperature Change

Change the body temperature to trigger the dive reflex and instantly slow your heart rate.

➤ Hand the participant an ice pack or cold water bottle or have them splash cold water on their face.



2 Intense Exercise

Burn off built up stress hormones and pent-up physical energy.

➤ Have the participant push against the wall or push their hands together hard for 10 seconds.



3 Paced Breathing

Regulate breathing to signal safety to the brain.

➤ Lead the participant through a few 4-7-8 breath cycles (in for 4, hold for 7, out for 8).



4 Paired Muscle Relaxation

Release physical tension.

➤ Walk the participant through a relaxation exercise by having them clench their fists and shoulders tightly as they breathe and give a verbal cue like "relax"

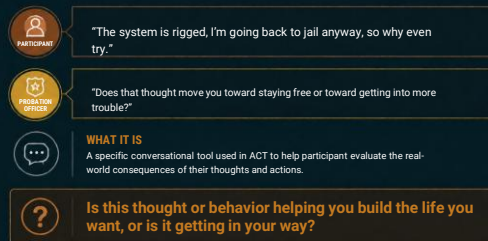
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Step 2: UNHOOK – When Participants Are Stuck



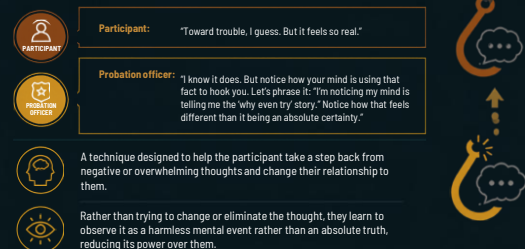
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Workability Question



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Cognitive Defusion or Unhooking



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Step 3: DIRECT – When the Participant Has Calmed Down

Identifying the transition point for structured problem-solving.



Indicators

Participant is physically calm
Their tone has lowered
Their mental looping has stopped
They are actively listening



Once you use your original question to show the participant that the thought is pulling them toward trouble, and you use defusion to help them unhook from it, pivot the participant to a physical, value-driven Toward Move.

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Step 3: DIRECT – When Participants Have Calmed Down



PO: Since that 'why even try' story takes you closer to jail, what is one tiny thing you can physically do in the next hour that takes you a step toward staying free?



Participant: "I guess I'll stay and try."



Away Moves

Away Moves are actions taken to avoid or escape difficult emotions. While they offer immediate relief, they pull the participant away from their long-term goals.



Toward Moves

Toward Moves are conscious actions that guide the participant closer to their personal values and the kind of life they want to live. They often require leaning into temporary discomfort or effort.

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Step 4: Reinforce – When Participants Make the Right Choice



Leverage positive reinforcement to lock in new behavioral habits



Why Positive Reinforcement is Imperative



Rewire the Brain:

Every participant interaction is an opportunity to build and reinforce new neural pathways that support long-term change.



Provide Neurochemical Fuel:

Praise, repetition, and incentives kickstart myelination, which strengthens healthy connections in the brain.



Build Intrinsic Drive:

Repeated prosocial choices solidify these pathways, shifting participants from external rewards and reinforcement to an internal locus of control.

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Next Steps

Practical actions you can take today
to strengthen trauma-informed supervision.

- 01 Audit supervision routines for potential triggers
- 02 Use trauma-informed language in daily interactions
- 03 Invest in ongoing training on trauma and stress responses
- 04 Prioritize officer wellness alongside participant care
- 05 Encourage peer support and reflective practice

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Thank You

Thank you for your commitment to trauma-informed supervision.

Questions and discussion
Resources and continued learning
Let's keep building safer, stronger communities together.

I'm here for the conversation.

Danielle Young
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