



# Offending Behaviour Programmes

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# Contents

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Background	3
Key indicators of quality	6
Offending behaviour programmes	8
Guidance on delivery	10
Guidance on operational management	14
Guidance on strategic management and partnership working	16



# Background

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## What are the *Key Elements of Effective Practice*?

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) has identified effective practice as a key element in developing and improving youth justice services. We are committed to identifying and promoting effective practice across the whole of the youth justice system to ensure that work with young people is as effective as possible, and based on research evidence and promising practice.

The *Key Elements of Effective Practice* (the ‘*what to do*’) describe the features of effective interventions, using the best evidence available. They are intended to be used as the primary tool by youth justice services for evidence-based self-assessment and quality assurance, providing the benchmark for effective practice.

These guidance notes are derived from the evidence presented in the corresponding source document available on the YJB website. The source documents have gathered the latest international evidence in accordance with the YJB’s research standards and identify what is proven to be effective practice, or where robust evidence is not available, what is emerging as promising practice in the field. The *Key Elements of Effective Practice* are summaries condensing the evidence from the source documents into key messages for practice.

The following *Key Elements of Effective Practice* titles and the accompanying source documents are available from the YJB website ([www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk)):

- *Accommodation*
- *Assessment, Planning Interventions and Supervision*
- *Education, Training and Employment*
- *Engaging Young People who Offend*
- *Mental Health*
- *Offending Behaviour Programmes*
- *Parenting*
- *Restorative Justice*
- *Substance Misuse*
- *Young People who Sexually Abuse*

Since the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* were originally published in 2002/03, two new titles have been added to take into account the most recent research evidence and policy or legislative developments in these areas of intervention. The *Key Elements of Effective Practice* will continue to be updated in the future, in line with the YJB’s effective practice strategy, as additional research becomes available.

These updated *Key Elements of Effective Practice* have been produced with the intention of them being complemented by the *Case Management Guidance* for youth offending teams (the ‘*how to*’), and the revised *National Standards for Youth Justice Services* (the ‘*must do*’), due for publication in 2009. Together, the *Key Elements of Effective Practice*, standards and guidance will provide holistic guidance for youth justice services.

# Who are the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* for?

The *Key Elements of Effective Practice* are simple manuals that can be used by anyone working in the community and the secure estate with young people who offend. They describe the features of effective youth justice services and interventions, allowing delivery to be shaped by need and local context. They are intended to support consistent practice across youth justice services.

They do not provide specialists such as teachers, health care professionals or police officers in mainstream services with descriptions of how to work, nor do they detail the processes needed to deliver a service.

The *Key Elements of Effective Practice* have been structured to provide guidance to three main audiences:

- those involved in delivery, e.g. youth offending team (YOT) practitioners and prison officers
- those involved in operational and first-line management
- strategic managers in their role as service managers and partnership brokers.

# How should the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* be used?

The key indicators of quality have been identified from each of the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* as particular elements to put in place to promote effective practice and the delivery of good quality services. Anyone working in the community and secure estate with young people who offend should note that these indicators are not a comprehensive list of quality issues and they are not an end in themselves. They are designed for use within a wider framework of evaluation of service practice and performance, and will enable a wider and continuous process of evaluation to take place.

It is important that the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* are not used in isolation. The key messages for practitioners, operational managers, and strategic managers and their partners are derived from the corresponding source document; the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* should therefore be used in conjunction with their source document to ensure full understanding of the key elements of effective practice. This is not to say the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* on their own are not useful for the intended audience and purpose, but rather that the audience will have a better understanding of the evidence behind the guidance summaries if they are read and understood alongside the source documents.

Information is cross-referenced from the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* summaries to the source documents, and relevant page numbers of the corresponding source document are identified in brackets in the *Key Elements of Effective Practice*.

## Using the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* in YOTs

Youth justice services are responsible for owning performance improvement and self-assessment and planning. Self-assessment against the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* has previously been a mandatory requirement of YOTs, however, from 2008/09, YOTs will be free to use the revised *Key Elements of Effective Practice* and accompanying self-assessment toolkit in line with their local priorities. The *Key Elements of Effective Practice* are intended to be used as evidence-based self-assessment tools to help identify improvement priorities and actions. The resulting action plan should enable YOT managers to monitor progress in the delivery of the priorities for the YOT.

## Using the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* in the secure estate

Managers and practitioners within the secure estate should consider the guidance contained within the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* summaries when developing and reviewing their practice and approaches to working with young people. The key messages will help to inform the development of effective practice and should be helpful in achieving their desired outcomes for young people. Establishments should also consider completing self-assessments against the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* to assist in identifying priority areas for development and improvement.

# Key indicators of quality

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## Assessment

An assessment of the risk factors associated with each young person's offending should be undertaken using *Asset*.

Assessment should be used to determine whether an offending behaviour programme is appropriate for the young person in each case, with those at highest likelihood of reoffending most likely to benefit from a cognitive behavioural programme.

## Individual needs

Programmes of intervention should be tailored to the individual, taking account of their age, gender, ethnicity and risk factors associated with their offending.

Practitioners should consider in which types of settings an offending behaviour programme may be most effective for each young person, providing one-to-one support in addition to group work where necessary.

## Communication

Communication between practitioners in different agencies working with young people who offend should take place to ensure a co-ordinated intervention takes place.

Practitioners should use motivational and engagement techniques to increase the likelihood of each young person taking part in, complying with, and completing the programme.

## Service delivery

Staff delivering an offending behaviour programme should ensure they deliver it as it was designed, to ensure the best possible outcomes can be achieved.

Interventions should be multi-modal, with offending behaviour programmes delivered as part of a range of interventions that target other risk factors and influences that have been identified through assessment, and supported by effective case management.

## Transition

Consideration should be given to delivering offending behaviour programmes only to those young people in custody who will complete the programme during their custodial sentence.

Intervention and resettlement plans should take account of, and build on, the work to be undertaken during the custodial phase of the sentence.



## Training

Those delivering an offending behaviour programme should be trained in its theoretical basis and in how to deliver the programme as it was designed.

Staff should be trained in assessment skills to enable the most appropriate interventions to be put in place for all young people who offend.

## Management

Programme managers should recruit skilled staff to deliver programmes and provide clear guidance on programme delivery.

Managers should ensure programme staff are supported and supervised to enable programmes are as effective as possible.

## Service development

Service managers should assess whether there is robust evidence supporting a programme's effectiveness before choosing an appropriate programme to run, and only implement those shown to be most effective.

Programmes should be chosen to meet the needs of the target population of young people who offend.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Intervention outcomes should be regularly monitored and assessed.

Engagement, drop-out and completion rates of participants in programmes should be regularly monitored.

# Offending behaviour programmes

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This *Key Elements of Effective Practice* summary provides recommendations for effective practice in the selection, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the two most promising kinds of offending behaviour programmes – cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and multi-systemic therapy (MST). These recommendations are based on three essential principles of effective intervention, which have the greatest potential to ensure promising interventions will have positive results (p.58).

These principles are laid out below.

- Programmes that have proven promising or effective when robustly evaluated (for example, through randomised experimentation and accurate interpretation of outcomes) have the greatest potential to provide effective intervention when applied in routine practice (while other programmes risk wasting time and resources).
- In order for a programme to be effectively implemented, practitioners delivering the programme need to understand its theoretical basis (what it is intended to affect, and in what way).
- A programme's success depends on whether it is effectively implemented and delivered; therefore implementation and delivery should be carefully structured and continuously monitored and supervised by competent and committed practitioners to ensure a programme is doing what it is meant to do in the way it was designed to do it (p.42).

Both CBT and MST programmes have proven successful or promising in reducing young people's offending during evaluation studies. However, because they are complex, rigidly-structured and intensive interventions, they present many challenges during implementation. At the same time, the way they are delivered can significantly affect their outcomes. It is therefore critical that these interventions are closely supervised to ensure they are delivered as intended, and continuously monitored to determine if they are achieving the intended outcome. This summary describes ways in which to use these types of programmes to derive maximum benefit for children and young people.

## Programme descriptions

- **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)** is a relatively new intervention type, which has arisen from advances in our understanding about the role of internal cognition in the expression of external behaviours. CBT is based on the idea that cognition affects behaviour, and that individuals have the capacity to be aware of and adapt their ways of thinking, which can lead them to change their behaviour.

- **Multi-systemic therapy (MST)** was specifically developed to treat young people who offend, or who have serious behavioural problems, and is aimed at the 10–17 age range. It is an intensive, individualised intervention programme that targets the social systems in which a young person who offends operates. MST views offending behaviour as a consequence of the relationship between individuals and the external social systems in which they take part. Its primary goal is to promote multi-faceted change in individual, familial, peer, school and neighbourhood variables, all of which influence offending.

# Guidance on delivery

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## Assessment

An assessment should be undertaken with each young person to identify the risk factors most closely associated with their offending (p.48). In YOTs, this should be done using *Asset*. In the secure estate, the YOT's *Asset* assessment should form the basis of the assessment, using e*Asset* where available.

The assessment should be used to determine whether an offending behaviour programme is appropriate, and whether other types of intervention are needed, based on the young person's risk factors. Research suggests that offending behaviour programmes, such as CBT and MST, are most effective for the most persistent offenders, or those at highest risk of reoffending (and less effective for those less likely to reoffend) (p.33).

Practitioners need to carefully consider the content and implementation factors of programmes, as well as other external factors, to ensure not only that the effectiveness of the chosen programme has been empirically supported, but also that the chosen programme is suited to the young person. The assessment should be used to consider the extent to which the young person's offending is affected more by a lack of self-control or their moral values, for example, as this could affect their responses to different forms of cognitive therapy (p.32). Moral reasoning may be more appropriate for the latter, whereas cognitive skills training to reduce impulsivity may be more suited to the former.

## Individual needs

It is important to consider whether children and young people who offend, who have diverse individual characteristics and are from a range of social backgrounds, may respond differently to a programme. Therefore, the age, gender, ethnicity and wider family and social factors should be taken into consideration when deciding on the most appropriate intervention for each young person. When considering whether a programme meets the needs of an individual, practitioners should consider whether it should be undertaken in a group or one-to-one setting.

Studies show that CBT programmes are likely to be more effective for young people who offend more frequently (p.34, 41). CBT is also likely to be most effective for children and young people whose offending is driven by deficient, dysfunctional or distorted cognition. However, individuals with especially severe cognitive deficits (e.g. low IQ) may not be able to engage effectively with these interventions (p.46). It is therefore important that practitioners are familiar with the cognitive abilities of the young people with whom they work in order to determine whether a programme may be effective, and in order to determine what changes might be made to ensure certain young people can engage appropriately with an intervention. For example, personal attention in a one-to-one setting in addition to group involvement may benefit some participants who are struggling with an intervention.

MST may be more effective for young people whose offending is driven by the external social environment. MST programmes have been specifically developed to target the young people

committing the most serious offences, and/or those who offend most frequently and persistently. Evidence suggests MST programmes may be more effective when applied to situations in which family dynamics and dysfunction contribute significantly to the young person's offending (p.47).

Evidence suggests that younger people who offend (under 13 years of age) may benefit most from parenting interventions, in particular behavioural parent training, where parents are trained to use behavioural management strategies, rather than offending behaviour programmes, such as CBT and MST (p.30).

## Communication

Practitioners should engage with each young person, to encourage them to participate in interventions and comply with the requirements of their order. Young people assessed as suitable for an offending behaviour programme, such as CBT or MST, are likely to benefit most when they are motivated to take part. Therefore, a high level of engagement by participants, to prevent young people from dropping out, is crucial to a programme's effectiveness (pp.40, 44). Practitioners should develop relationships and use appropriate techniques, such as motivational interviewing, to promote engagement and enhance participants' involvement and commitment to a programme (p.49). (For more information, see the *Key Elements of Effective Practice* summary – *Engaging Young People who Offend* [YJB, 2008]).

Sharing information between agencies working with children and young people who offend is essential to ensure that assessments are based on up-to-date knowledge, and that appropriate referrals can be made. Regular communication between different agencies and groups working with a young person should take place, and up-to-date information should be continuously disseminated so that all partners are aware of any changes in circumstances and the young person's progress (p.56). This can occur through regular meetings between practitioners within or across agencies or regular communication via other technologies.

## Service delivery

Interventions should be tailored to the individual, according to the assessment of their risk factors, and be multi-modal. That is, they should simultaneously address the different factors associated with each young person's offending (p.25). Offending behaviour programmes should form part of a range of interventions available, and, where assessed as appropriate for an individual, should be delivered alongside actions to address other factors, such as education or substance misuse. Effective case management will be essential to ensuring interventions can be delivered in a co-ordinated way.

Evidence generally suggests that the most effective offending behaviour programmes are cognitive behavioural in nature and skills-based (p.26), and use the following approaches:

- thinking and reasoning, and increasing self-control
- changing attitudes and social perceptions, and teaching pro-social values
- problem-solving, including pro-social coping behaviours.

A number of different ‘brands’ of CBT are available, but research evidence is inconclusive as to whether any particular brands are more effective than others. Some evidence suggests Moral Reconciliation Therapy may be more effective than Reasoning and Rehabilitation. Other research indicates that elements of cognitive restructuring, anger control and one-to-one support, in addition to group therapy, may lead to stronger effect sizes, while victim impact and behaviour modification elements have been associated with weaker effect sizes (pp.31–33). Because these findings are not definitive, it is more important for practitioners to consider the specific needs of their target population and the available resources (such as competent, well-trained programme delivery staff) when deciding which brand of CBT, or which elements, to implement.

How an offending behaviour programme is delivered can greatly influence its effectiveness. It is therefore important that, where a programme is used, it is chosen on the basis of robust evaluation, that the most effective methods of implementation are clearly specified, preferably in a programme manual, and that these methods are closely followed by those delivering the programme, who should be trained in its delivery.

Programmes tend to be delivered in groups; therefore any group-based interventions should take into consideration the potential for contact between young people who offend to have an escalating influence on an individual’s own offending. Ensuring group sessions are consistently structured, and children and young people remain engaged in the intervention may reduce the likelihood of this occurring (p.50).

Systemic programmes, such as MST, combine behavioural and skill-based work with interventions aimed at affecting wider social influences, such as family, peer group and school. These are not available in the secure estate, as they are designed to take part in the young person’s social setting. They are highly intensive and require strict treatment fidelity, so where YOTs have them in place, they should be delivered as designed in order to maximise their potential for impact on offending.

## Transition

CBT interventions have proven effective when implemented in both custodial and community settings, whereas, by their nature, MST interventions are only applied in community settings. MST and CBT interventions have significantly larger effects on the recidivism of participants who complete an entire programme than those who don’t. It is therefore important when assessing whether a young person in custody is suitable to take part in a programme, to consider whether they will have the opportunity to complete it. Participants’ engagement may be increased, and the likelihood of them dropping out reduced, by increasing the involvement of other family members where possible (p.49).

Community interventions generally involve different, more intensive techniques for tracking participants and monitoring their outcomes, as well as reducing attrition and ensuring engagement with the intervention (p.51). Any special considerations that need to be addressed when implementing a programme in either of these settings should be specified by the programme’s guidelines.

When planning interventions, staff in the YOT and secure establishment should consider whether a young person suitable for a programme should undertake it in custody or the

community. When a young person has been through a programme in custody, it will be important to ensure that interventions in the community complement this.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Practitioners should monitor the rates of engagement, drop-out and completion of programmes on an individual and aggregate basis. To increase the likelihood of young people engaging in and completing a programme, practitioners should track their progress, and use techniques such as motivational interviewing to increase engagement and commitment to the intervention.

# Guidance on operational management

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## Communication

Research shows that interventions that target multiple factors affecting participants' offending behaviour tend to be the most effective. Managers should therefore ensure there are strong communication links between all agencies involved in a young person's intervention to enhance the chances of a successful programme of interventions (p.56).

## Training

It is critical that the staff overseeing the implementation of offending behaviour programmes have a clear understanding of what is required by, and expected from, the intervention (p.52). Operational managers can ensure their staff have the necessary skills to implement an offending behaviour programme, such as CBT or MST, effectively by:

- recruiting competent and appropriately-trained personnel to deliver programmes
- ensuring practitioners are offered and take part in specialist training for the types of programmes they are expected to deliver, including training to help engage and motivate young people who offend
- ensuring practitioners understand the theoretical rationale and empirical grounding behind the particular programme they are implementing.

## Management

Where a programme has been chosen on the basis of effectiveness, clear guidelines should be developed and disseminated, outlining the implementation and delivery conditions under which the programme proved most effective, so that they can be followed, in so far as is reasonably possible, during its subsequent implementation (p.53). Managers should ensure these guidelines are being followed and that the intervention remains on track.

The guidelines should take into consideration issues involved in implementing the intervention in group and individual settings, and identify the settings that are most appropriate for the particular intervention. They should also stipulate any additional considerations about the population for which the intervention is appropriate, if important variations in service delivery are required when the intervention is implemented in custodial versus community settings, and what practitioners should expect from participants at different stages of the intervention. These factors should be continuously monitored.



Operational managers should ensure those who deliver the programmes or interventions have adequate and relevant skills, training and supervision. They should also ensure programmes and interventions are consistently monitored and their outcomes continuously assessed to ensure effective implementation and delivery as intended.

Managers should equip staff with the necessary skills and support to effectively deliver an intervention programme by ensuring their staff are:

- adequately trained to implement the programme
- adequately supervised and supported throughout the implementation of the programme
- adequately motivated to deliver the programme as intended, even under difficult circumstances
- able to use techniques and procedures to enhance programme participants' engagement and treatment motivation
- able to monitor participants' attendance, particularly when they are in community settings, and progress on programmes
- familiar with well-developed procedures to monitor the programme's outcomes in the short and long term (pp.53–54).

## Monitoring and evaluation

Aggregate data should be used to profile the needs of the YOT client group or secure establishment population, and assess whether programmes continue to be suitable. Monitoring of starts, drop-out and completion rates should be undertaken on a regular basis, and reasons for high attrition rates should be explored.

Programmes should be monitored to ensure they are delivered as intended, and evaluation should be ongoing to ensure their effectiveness and impact on reoffending is maximised. The YJB recommends using the research standards jointly produced by the YJB and the National Offender Management Service's Research, Development and Statistics directorate when commissioning or conducting evaluations.

# Guidance on strategic management and partnership working

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## Training

Strategic partnerships should ensure that appropriate resources are identified for training of YOT managers and practitioners to support effective implementation and delivery of programmes and interventions for young people who offend.

## Service development

Service managers should make sure that, as far as possible, the programmes and interventions they put in place, either currently or prospectively, are only those that have proven effective or promising (p.41). Both CBT and MST have consistently demonstrated effectiveness or promise, but research evidence is inconclusive as to whether any particular brands are more effective than others. On this basis, service managers and strategic partnerships should consider the specific needs of their target population and the available resources (such as qualified programme delivery staff) when deciding which programme to implement, and the range of interventions and services needed to meet the varying risks and needs of their target population.

Service managers can ensure that the programmes and interventions, which filter down into practice, fulfil the requirements of having been appropriately evaluated and found to be effective, or at least promising (p.55). This should be achieved by reviewing the knowledge and evidence base of programmes and interventions already in operation, and also of any new programmes and interventions that come to the attention of the partnership, to assess their effectiveness and adequacy for implementation by the service.

Strategic partnerships should aim to support relevant evaluative research, and disseminate the findings to practitioners.

Service managers and strategic partnerships should ensure appropriate resources are in place to enable effective implementation of a MST or CBT programme. Resources will be needed for (p.44):

- the recruitment and/or training of well-qualified staff
- the regular supervision of staff to ensure proper implementation and to monitor outcomes
- achieving a high level of engagement and treatment motivation among participants.

# Monitoring and evaluation

Aggregate data should be made available to the strategic partnership to identify the profile of needs of the YOT or secure establishment population, and assess whether interventions are in place to meet those needs.

Results from programme monitoring and evaluation should be reviewed by service managers and made available to the strategic partnership to assess the programme's impact on outcomes, such as reoffending, and to identify whether programmes continue to be effective.









The full report on which this summary is based  
is available on the Youth Justice Board website.

Further copies of this summary can be obtained from:

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