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Conflict Resolution Training for Correctional Officers

prepared by:

Shari Jennings
Corrections Specialist

with the assistance of:

Christine Weglein
Reference Coordinator

National Institute of Justice/NCJRS
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20850

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING FOR CORRECTIONAL OFFICER CADETS

I. Introduction

As part of its curriculum planning, the Arizona Department of Corrections' Correctional Officer Training Academy wishes to identify how other corrections departments handle conflict resolution training for correctional officer cadets. Specifically, the Arizona Department of Corrections is seeking answers to the following questions:

- 1) Does your agency train its cadets in conflict resolution?
- 2) How many hours of conflict resolution training are required?
- 3) Is the role-play technique used in training?
- 4) Do the role-plays involve physical contact and would they represent the worst-case scenarios correctional officers might face?
- 5) During training, would anything be thrown at or on the cadets to simulate what inmates might throw? What substances are simulated?
- 6) How many cadets are trained in conflict resolution each year? How many are trained using the role-play technique each year?

The National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) was asked to contact correctional trainers to obtain answers to these questions and to summarize the findings. The following discussion presents the survey results.

II. Methodology

A survey instrument was developed by NCJRS that incorporated the information requested by the Arizona Department of Corrections. Additional questions were added to the instrument to provide clarity. For example, a question regarding the use of psychological tests to measure a cadet's probable response to a conflict situation was added after the issue was raised during the first two interviews. (Appendix A presents the survey instrument.)

The respondents were chosen through a stratified random sampling technique intended to eliminate any bias toward particular States and to ensure proportionate representation of all regions. Sixteen States were chosen for participation in the survey, representing one-third of the United States. Arizona was eliminated prior to the sampling. The remaining States were grouped by region - Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. The States were listed alphabetically within their respective regions, then randomly chosen from within those regions. The number of States chosen per region was proportional to the number actually in each region. For example, there are 16 States in the South, representing one-third of the United States. The South, then, comprises one-third of those States surveyed. The following table lists those States:

Table 1. Correctional Systems Surveyed

Northeast	Midwest	South	West
New Hampshire	Iowa	Florida	California
New Jersey	Michigan	Georgia	Hawaii
Vermont	North Dakota	North Carolina	New Mexico
	Ohio	Oklahoma	Oregon
		Virginia	

The Federal Bureau of Prisons was also surveyed, for a total of 17 respondents.

Once the States were chosen, the persons in charge of correctional training were identified through the Correctional and Juvenile Justice Training Directory of North America draft copy provided by the Department of Correctional Services' Training Resource Center of Eastern Kentucky University. The training directors were contacted by telephone and all agreed to participate in the survey.

III. Survey Results

The principal goals in conducting this survey were to determine if correctional officer cadets are being trained in conflict resolution, and if the role-play is used as a training technique. The principal results of the survey are summarized below; Appendix C provides a complete summary of all findings. Significant findings include:

- Overwhelmingly, the correctional systems surveyed train cadets to handle or avoid conflict/crisis situations through the

use of interpersonal communication skills. These skills include verbal and non-verbal techniques, such as listening, modelling calm behavior, and exhibiting respect for inmates. However, most respondents pointed out that physical self-defense techniques are taught in addition to the communication skills.

- Of the systems utilizing the role-play technique, nine responded that these role-plays involve physical contact. Seven systems use role-plays with no physical contact; the respondent from Vermont did not know whether physical contact might be involved. (Physical contact involved in self-defense training was considered a separate issue.) None of the respondents reported throwing things at or on the cadets as part of the training; 12 systems reported that they do not use this technique, while four were unsure whether their instructors are using it.

- Seven systems act out "worst-case scenarios" in their role-plays, eight do not, and one respondent did not know if such scenarios are used. Those who act out "worst-case" situations define them as hostage situations or situations where there is violence against the correctional officer. Other situations role-played in training include general disagreements between or among inmates, inmates refusing to obey rules, and sexual confrontations between male inmates and female officers.

- The number of hours of conflict resolution training required per responding jurisdiction is not well-defined. Many of the States incorporate this training into the overall program, not into separate classes, making measurement difficult. Appendix C presents the information provided by the respondents regarding the amount of conflict resolution training provided. Appendix C also indicates how many cadets receive such training annually.

Selected Highlights

In addition to the findings presented above, there were other observations voiced by respondents during the interviews. The following are the more noteworthy comments.

- The respondent from Virginia commented that "the army does not shoot its recruits so they will know what it is like to be shot" and he does not throw things at or on cadets to gauge their reactions to such situations.
- Other reactions to the question about things being thrown at or on cadets ranged from "They had better not" throw things, to "No, but it is a good idea."
- North Dakota stated that it trains too few cadets to use role-play techniques. Instead they use a videotape which simulates conflict situations. The cadets watch a

dramatized scenario, then discuss ways to handle the situation. New Hampshire would like to use more role-play, but their training groups are too small to do so.

- Several respondents reported using a National Institute of Corrections (NIC) curriculum for training in conflict resolution techniques.

V. Some Final Notes

There was some confusion during the administration of the surveys as to whether the focus was on conflict resolution or crisis intervention. Some correctional trainers define the two differently; for the purposes of this survey the respondents were asked to consider both concepts in their responses. The trainers who defined the terms differently explained that conflict resolution occurs in a threatening yet rational situation, whereas crisis intervention occurs when the participants have become irrational and the situation has become out of control. This differentiation was made by only a small number of respondents, but it points out the need for a definition of terms. Should further research take place, this issue will need to be addressed.

Asking about the specific methods of training and the conflict resolution techniques taught allowed NCJRS to maintain consistency in the responses to subsequent questions. Some of the respondents considered riot formation drills and defensive tactics as part of their conflict resolution training. Most of the respondents,

however, evidently consider conflict resolution and crisis intervention skills useful in obviating the need for the above measures and therefore as separate from such training. In calculating the number of hours of conflict resolution training, respondents were asked not to include defensive tactics and similar courses.

The intended scope of this survey was limited to determining how many jurisdictions train correctional officer cadets in conflict resolution and how many use the role-play as a training tool. By including several open-ended questions, the survey provided some illuminating details and an indication that much more research could be conducted on the topics only touched upon in this study.

APPENDIX A

TELEPHONE SURVEY OF CORRECTIONAL TRAINERS
FACT FINDING PROJECT FOR ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Hello. My name is _____ and I represent the National Institute of Justice/National Criminal Justice Reference Service. We are conducting a survey, on behalf of the Arizona Department of Corrections, regarding pre-service training of correctional officer cadets. Do you have a few minutes to answer some questions about the training your State provides its cadets?

(If not now, maybe we can schedule a time to call back.)

Name of Respondent _____
Organization _____
Title of Respondent _____
Telephone Number _____
Address of Respondent _____

The specific area of pre-service training we are focusing on is conflict resolution.

(Mainly we are looking for information on conflicts between inmates and officers, but information regarding officers and other staff may be useful.)

1) Does your State train its cadets in conflict resolution techniques? (If "no", skip to question two. If "yes", continue.) (Yes No)

- what methods are used for conflict resolution training?

- what techniques are the cadets instructed to use?

- how many hours of such training are required?

- none
- 1-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- _____ (write in if over 40 hours)

- how many cadets receive conflict resolution training each year?

- none
- 1- 20
- 21- 40
- 41- 60
- 61- 80
- 81-100
- 101-125
- 126-150

_____ (write in if over 150 officers)

2) This question regards the use of the role-play method as used in the training of correctional officers. Does your agency use this method of training? (Yes No)

If so:

- what scenarios/situations are acted out? Do you role-play the "worst-case" scenario (the worst situations the cadets might be faced with)?

- do the role plays include actual physical contact, or simulate violent encounters? (Yes No)
- in role-playing, are objects thrown on the cadets to simulate objects that inmates might throw? If so, what objects are used and what do they simulate?

- how many cadets are trained using the role-play technique each year?

- none
- 1- 20
- 21- 40
- 41- 60
- 61- 80
- 81-100
- 101-125
- 126-150

_____ (write in if over 150 officers)

3) Do your agency utilize any form of psychological testing or measurement to predict a cadet's reaction to a conflict or crisis? (Yes No)

I would like to thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX B

RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY

CALIFORNIA

Lt. William Spencer
California Department of Corrections Training Center
9850 Twin Cities Road
Galt, California 95632
(209) 745-4681

FLORIDA

Bernard R. Cohen
Chief of Bureau of Staff Development
Florida Department of Corrections
1311 Winewood Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
(904) 487-2875

GEORGIA

Harriet Lawrence
Deputy Director of Training
Georgia Department of Corrections
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, SE
Twin Tower East, 7th Floor
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
(404) 244-5185

HAWAII

James Dehoff
Training Programs Manager
Hawaii Department of Public Safety
42-477 Kalaniana'ole Highway
Keilua, Hawaii 96734

IOWA

Merrie J. Murray
Superintendent
Iowa Department of Corrections
Capital Annex Building
523 East 12th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
(515) 281-6784

MICHIGAN

John Ocwieja
Director of New Employment Training
Michigan Department of Corrections
Operations Division: Training Division
715 West Willow Street
Lansing, Michigan 48913
(517) 334-6573

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Shirley Anderson
Training Director
New Hampshire Department of Corrections
P.O. Box 769
Concord, New Hampshire 03301
(603) 271-2133

NEW JERSEY

Tom King
Planning and Staff Development Analyst
New Jersey Department of Corrections
CN 863
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
(609) 292-9412

NEW MEXICO

Gary Cesarz
New Mexico Corrections Department/Academy
P.O. Box 5277
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502

NORTH CAROLINA

Bert Sellers
Director of Staff Training
North Carolina Department of Corrections
831 W. Morgan Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
(919) 733-2731

NORTH DAKOTA

Don Redmann
Director of Training
North Dakota Department of Corrections
P.O. Box 5521
Bismarck, North Dakota 58502
(701) 221-6100

OHIO

Rick Hoffman
Pre-service Coordinator
Corrections Training Academy
P.O. Box 207
Orient, Ohio 43146
(614) 877-4345

OKLAHOMA

Bud Slater
Senior Correctional Training Officer
Oklahoma Department of Corrections
1301 W. Main Street
Wilburton, Oklahoma 74578
(918) 465-2361

OREGON

Wayne Eatherly
Training Manager
Oregon Department of Corrections
2572 Center Street, NE
Salem, Oregon 97310
(503) 378-2498

VERMONT

Robert M. Smith
Chief of Human Resource Development
Vermont Department of Corrections
103 S. Main Street
Waterbury, Vermont 05676
(802) 241-2295

VIRGINIA

David R. Palmer
Senior Personnel Development Specialist
Virginia Department of Corrections
500 N. Winchester Avenue
Waynesboro, Virginia 22980
(703) 943-3141

FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS

John Hurley
Chief
Staff Training Academy
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center
Building 21
Glynco, Georgia 31524
(912) 267-2711

**APPENDIX C
SURVEY RESULTS**

Correctional System	Requires Conflict Resolution Training	Role-Play Utilized During Training	Physical Contact in Role-Plays	Worst-Case Scenario Role-Played	Hours of Conflict Resolution Training	Number of Cadets Trained Per Year
CA		✓	✓	✓	n/a	2,000-2,200
FL	✓	✓	✓		60-80	2,000
GA	✓	✓	✓		31-40	1,800-2,400
HI	✓	✓	✓	✓	80 (includes self-defense tactics)	200
IA	✓	✓	✓		11-20	175
MI	✓	✓			30	687 in FY 89-90; 2,020 in FY 88-89
NH	✓	✓	✓		42	200 employees*
NJ	✓	✓	✓	✓	throughout curriculum	800
NM	✓	✓			4	300
NC	✓	✓	✓	✓	20	700
ND	✓				8	8-12
OH	✓	✓			throughout curriculum	1,200
OK	✓	✓		✓	10	450
OR	✓	✓		✓	16 hours within two specific courses; then throughout curriculum	500-600 employees*
VT	✓	✓			8 hours pre-service; 48 additional during first year in-service	80-100
VA	✓	✓	✓		16 hours in specific coursework; then throughout curriculum	1,000-1,100
Federal	✓	✓		✓	11-20	3,300 employees*

* In addition to correctional officer cadets, these jurisdictions train all employees who, in the course of their duties, may have contact with inmates.