VITA EDUCATION SERVICES

DECISIONS PROGRAMS

Cognitive
Behavioral
Intervention
For
Justice Involved
Adults

DECISIONS®

215-345-8322
www.vitaeducation.org

Vita Education Services
8 East Court St.
Doylestown, PA 18901

Vita Education Services
1414 Radcliffe St.
Bristol, PA 19007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 2

Introduction 2

Cognitive Behavioral Research 3

Cognitive Behavioral Components of Vita's *Decisions* Programs 6

Cognitive Restructuring 12

Historical Data on Vita's *Decisions* Programs 13

Implementation of Vita's *Decisions* Programs 17

Conclusion 19

References 21

Authors

Marikay Forst, EdD
Gail Huber, MA

Executive Summary

This paper identifies the critical aspects of Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBI) that lead to effective behavior change, particularly in criminal justice settings. The paper then focuses on the *Decisions* programs provided by Vita Education Services, a non-profit organization in Bucks County, PA and ties the cognitive behavioral research to key components of *Decisions*. Specific examples from the *Decisions* curriculum are detailed to show how cognitive awareness is created throughout the program, as is the opportunity to practice new ways of thinking. In *Decisions,* facilitators work with participants to connect cognition and emotions to behaviors in various situations. Participants discover important behavioral patterns across situations and often discover that their actions lead to undesirable outcomes. The process of identifying desired outcomes and testing new behavior scenarios is a powerful element of the program and an important aspect of Cognitive Behavioral Treatment models.

Introduction

Many justice involved adults have a history of being poor problem-solvers which leads to poor decision-making. Offenders have been found to be less skillful in social problem solving than non-adjudicated persons, and many offenders have difficulty with components of successful problem solving (Coylewright, 2004; Antonowicz and Ross, 2005; Seruca & Silva, 2016). For example, poor problem solvers perceive fewer options available to them and tend to engage in rigid thinking. Often, they have reacted to situations while not thinking through the consequences of their behavior. The problem is compounded when they leave prison. They are asked to make the transition from having many decisions and movements controlled by the prison environment, to independence.

Decision making skills help inmates move from reactive to proactive behaviors. Learning how to make sound, well thought-through decisions is useful both while incarcerated and when they return to the community. The first section of this paper provides a background on cognitive behavioral treatment in general and, more specifically, for adults who are on probation or incarcerated. The second section then highlights Vita Education Services' *Decisions* programs that use Cognitive-behavioral intervention (CBI) to improve decision-making. Key cognitive behavioral elements of the curriculum are examined.

Cognitive Behavioral Research

Why Cognitive Behavioral Interventions?

"The Decisions For Living class has helped remind me of how to think through problems and seek solutions." Quotes throughout are from participants of Vita Education Services *Decisions* Programs.

A plethora of research indicates that cognitive behavioral interventions (CBI) are commonly held as evidence-based, effective modalities to modify behavior (Lipsey, Chapman and Landenberger, 2001; Wright, Basco and Thase, 2006; Beck and Beck, 2011; Dobson and Dozois, 2021). CBI originates from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a psychological approach to behavior modification that uniquely addresses undesirable behaviors by focusing exclusively on reforming maladapted and antisocial thought patterns (Hansen, 2008). In this paper, CBI will be used to refer to Vita Education Services (Vita) *Decisions* and other programs that use the CBT approach to distinguish programs from therapy. CBI programs connect participant cognitions to behaviors. Dobson and Dozois (2021) explain this connection through the three main principles underpinning cognitive behavioral programs:

- Cognitive activity affects behavior in that clients' cognitive evaluation of events can affect their response to the events.
- Cognitive activity may be monitored and altered. This global assumption contains two underlying assumptions. First, clients are able to identify their thoughts. Second, after cognitions are surfaced, the client is better prepared to change some of the more problematic ones.
- Desired behavior change may be affected through cognitive change. Altering distorted cognitions changes the clients' interpretation of events, which in turn increases the probability that their behaviors will be altered in response to this new interpretation. This assumption suggests that cognitive restructuring can be a valid method to create meaningful and lasting behavior change.

In evaluating programs for behavior change, it is important to assess the degree to which a program teaches the influence of cognition on behavior and provides opportunities for participants to identify thoughts in situations they encounter. Furthermore, effective programs include practicing or trying on new interpretations for events and identifying behaviors based on adjusted cognitive frameworks.

CBI and Criminal Justice

CBI treatment programs for criminal offenders are thought of as one of the most highly effective and cost-efficient treatment methods available today. Lipsey, Landenberger and Wilson (2007) hold that cognitive-behavioral treatments are typically ranked in the top tier compared to other treatment approaches when examining the effects of treatment on recidivism. CBI programs vary in many ways, but share one common focus, that is the relationship between cognition and action (Barnes, Hyatt and Sherman, 2017). CBI "brings about change by modifying the way that participants respond to the automatic thoughts and emotional reactions encouraged by stressful, external stimuli." (Barnes et al., 2017, p.612).

Barnes et al. (2017) conducted an experimental study in which a CBT program in a community correctional environment was added to intensive supervision by probation officers for nonviolent offenders and reduced the prevalence of offending for high-risk probationers. After a one-year follow up period, 33.7 % of those in the CBI group were charged with a new offense versus 40.5% in the control group. Lipsey, Landenberger, and Wilson (2007) also examined CBI rehabilitative treatments for criminal offenders. Specifically, they looked at variables that had a statistically significant influence on effectiveness of programs and determined that most of the variation in recidivism affects were based on just a few moderator variables: the risk-level of offenders, how well the treatment was implemented, and the inclusions of anger control and interpersonal problem-solving components in the program. This data is particularly useful when evaluating CBI programs.

Criminogenic Thinking

Since a key component of CBI involves modifying thinking patterns, it is important to understand what thought patterns are particularly relevant for criminal justice-involved people. Tafrate and Mitchell (2022) hold that the goal of CBT interventions is to "alter the thinking patterns that drive risky and criminal decisions in broad life areas (e.g., relationships, routines and habits) while increase thinking that leads to productive decisions, prosocial outcomes and ultimately a non-destructive life." (p.1) Criminogenic thinking commonly involves giving oneself permission to engage in self-defeating behaviors. Examples of what it might sound like in the client's mind when they give themselves permission to engage in self-defeating behaviors could be: "I've had a long day, I deserve it; Just this one time; No one will know; It's not really hurting anyone, so why not." (Tafrate and Mitchell, 2022, p.1). Criminogenic thinking can be shifted by working with clients to think about healthy thoughts that preceded a time when the person made a healthy decision. According to Tafrate and Mitchell (2022), the process of shifting thinking is gradual based on

discovering and strengthening the productive thinking that may already be present in the client. First, awareness of the impact of thoughts on decisions is created. Second, weakening the thinking that precedes risky decisions and strengthening productive thinking occurs in an effort to make better decisions.

In addition to permission-giving behaviors, criminogenic thinking often involves risk taking, blaming others, and acting entitled or unrealistically self-confident (Pennsylvania Partnership for Criminal Justice Improvement, Tafrate and Mitchell, 2022). The Pennsylvania Partnership for Criminal Justice Improvement (2025) suggests focusing on four main categories of criminogenic needs to reduce the likelihood that a person will violate the law again:

- **Antisocial Cognition** - address the thoughts, values and attitudes supportive of illegal behavior with the goal of developing new ways of thinking and acting.
- **Antisocial Personality or Temperament** – help people develop skills to increase understanding of others' viewpoints, increase responsibility to or concern for others, manage anger, make well-reasoned decisions that minimize harm to themselves and others.
- **Antisocial Associates** – help people recognize and resist negative peer influences and form meaningful relationships with prosocial people.
- **Family/Marital** – help people build skills to reduce or better manage stress and conflict in the home.

Therefore, altering criminogenic thinking patterns can influence a client's thoughts leading to more effective behavioral outcomes. Understanding common criminogenic thinking patterns such as permission giving, risk-taking, and blaming others is critical in effective programming to reduce recidivism. Finally, programs that focus on the four main categories of criminogenic needs will have the most significant impact on recidivism for people who are moderate to high risk (Pennsylvania Partnership for Criminal Justice Improvement, 2025).

Cognitive Behavioral Components of Vita Decisions Programs

Vita offers two decision-making programs: *Decisions for Living* (DFL) that serves incarcerated adults while *Decisions for Change* (DFC) serves those on probation or parole. These programs have reached thousands of participants since their inception in 1971. The *Decisions* curriculum enables participants to connect cognition to behaviors in various situations. Participants learn important behavioral patterns across situations and often discover that their actions lead to undesirable outcomes. The process of identifying desired outcomes and testing new behavior scenarios is a powerful element of the program and an important aspect of CBT models.

Cognitive skills

"The Decisions class has taught me the skills I lacked in life on how to be able to make decisions for myself and to know how to apply the process to every situation in my life before I just act on impulse. Now I will think it through first."

Stop Think Ask Reason

The basis of *Decisions* is STAR: stop, think, ask, and reason. This is the mental process taught to move from impulsiveness to decision making and is a key component of CBT (Dobson and Dozois, 2021). It begins in the first session and is repeated in every activity.

Stop means adding a pause before acting. The length of the pause often correlates to the seriousness of the situation or consequences. Participants are led through exercises to apply the following instructions and concepts:

Stop, a brief pause may keep you from making a sarcastic comment to a friend, but you may need a much longer pause to decide if it is your best interest to quit your job. Think, engage your brain rather than acting on impulse. Ask, engage your brain by asking yourself questions: What do I want? What is at stake? Do I have to do anything right this second? Reason, apply knowledge, logic, and judgment to decide how to respond to the situation. When deciding how to respond to a situation, participants are also taught to build on their assets and abilities. How did they respond to a situation like this effectively in the past? Strengthening productive thinking is an important part of making better decisions (Tafrate and Mitchell, 2022).

Generate Alternative Solutions

The program addresses the tendency of poor problem solvers to come up with only one or two limited solutions, often the same ones they have used in the past. (Seruca & Silva, 2016). These options might not have worked in the past and might not be successful now. Brainstorming activities give participants practice generating many possible options to solve a problem or get what they want. One of the ways to generate more ideas is to ask prompting questions:

What haven't I tried before? What would be fun? What could get me in trouble? Oftentimes a person's ego or self-image limits what options they will consider. To get around this, *Decisions* facilitators encourage asking questions about how someone else would solve the problem. What would your grandmother do? What would Steph Curry do? What would your probation or parole officer (PO) do?

The goal is to generate lots of ideas. Some will not be good, some will not be feasible, but often a new, realistic idea comes from the process of thinking through many possible solutions.

Evaluate Consequences

"The class was good to help me start thinking before I act instead of just acting and suffering the bad consequences."

Before deciding which option to choose, there are more questions to ask. In *Decisions*, participants are taught to ask, "what are the possible positive outcomes and what are the possible negative outcomes for each option being considered?" The individual imagines the future that each outcome could bring. The outcomes include legal repercussions, feelings, relationship impacts, and more. Doing this requires both brainstorming and overcoming bias. People often latch onto an idea quickly, "this is a great idea" or dismiss others without consideration, "no way would I do that." Making an informed decision means carefully and honestly exploring the options. Doing this not only guides decision-making, it can also lead to personal insight. For example, it is not uncommon for an inmate to dislike a particular correctional officer. An option for dealing with the guard might be to hit them. Obviously, this is a bad idea with a lot of negative outcomes. However, it is important to explore outcomes from the participant's perspective:

The officer might fight back, I could get hurt, I would get new charges, I would be incarcerated longer, I would become a target for other officers. But, if honest, there could be positive outcomes as well: the officer does not return to work, I would feel powerful, it would relieve pent-up anger, other inmates might admire me. By listing these outcomes, it might emerge that the participant needs a healthy outlet for anger, or that the officer is not the problem so much as a feeling of powerlessness.

Goal Setting

Another component of *Decisions* is goal setting. Participants are asked to identify long-term goals, what they want to do, have, achieve, and experience in life. The timeline varies from next week to the end of life. These are more than hopes for the future, they act as critical motivators. For example, when studying to earn a GED gets hard, and life is busy, focusing on the following goals may provide motivation: finish high school, get a better paying job, be a role model for my kids.

Many people on probation express anger and frustration with the rules. They seem unfair and they take them personally, "my PO hates me." Shifting to personal goals can provide face-saving motivation. I do not follow the rules because my PO says I should, I follow them so I can get what I want: to complete probation, to move in with my girlfriend, to travel through Mexico.

In this workbook example, James felt annoyed that his ex would not allow screen time during his weekend day with the kids.

On the left side of the circle, he described his situation.

On the right side, he focused on what mattered most to him and chose a goal based on that.

Good thinking requires the ability to juxtapose what is desired in this moment with what is wanted long-term. Participants are provided with opportunities to practice this. Acting impulsively now might make long-term goals harder to reach. One client gave a clear example of juxtaposing goals. He had no money for commissary, so he had no snacks. He was hungry nearly all of the time. His cellmate seemed to be flush with money and snacks. One day, the cellmate left his locker open when he went out to yard. It would have been easy to grab one of his many snacks. His immediate goal was, "I want to eat." However, he reasoned that getting caught stealing could lead to a fight and at least one misconduct. Misconducts would work against him reaching his goal of getting released on his minimum date. He chose to walk away rather than face the temptation of the snacks. By juxtaposing both goals, he made a choice that kept him moving towards his goal of release.

Teaching participants to find a goal shifts them from passive to proactive. This is true even when they have little control in the situation. Participants are provided with example scenarios and then choose their own scenarios. An example could be:

> The guard is yelling. You want him to stop. You are now in problem-solving mode. How can I get what I want? I could be quiet, I could acknowledge that I hear him, I could encourage others to settle down, I could quietly go to my cell. I am not in control of the guard, but I am in control of myself, and I have multiple choices that could help me get what I want.

Goals are an important component and motivator for participants in learning to make better decisions.

Values

Identifying goals goes a long way to making sound decisions, but looking at goals in a vacuum is not enough. Decisions need to fit with our values. Decisions or behaviors that do not fit with values leave us feeling remorseful, ashamed, and wrong. Many offenders report feeling regret for the choices they made, saying, "it wasn't who I am" or "I don't know why I did it." This is the very reason values are part of *Decisions*. The goal is for participants to shift from looking back with remorse to considering their values before making choices. Addressing values in CBI programs reduces the likelihood that a person will violate the law again (The Pennsylvania Partnership for Criminal Justice Improvement, 2025).

Incorporating values in decision making begins with identifying them. *Decisions* includes lessons and activities to help participants identify what matters most to them, what they believe in, what makes life seem "right." Then it is time to overtly connect values with decisions using practice scenarios. The following is an example scenario and questions participants work through during one exercise:

> After cashing your paycheck, you realize the teller gave you too much money. What would you do? Which of your values drives that choice? If you value honesty, keeping the money does not fit. In another example, you have promised your child that you would be there for their birthday party. But then a friend offers you a last-minute ticket to a great pro game. Would you go to the party? Would you go to the game? If you say you value your family, which option expresses that value? What if you also value friendship? You need to prioritize which values are most important in this situation.

Participants are provided with example scenarios after which they use scenarios of their own. Bringing values into the decision-making process requires mental rigor. Participants learn to consider values, an abstract concept at the same time they anticipate future outcomes, also abstract. It is challenging, but necessary to move from the concrete and immediate ("you trash talk me, I hit you") to proactive decision making.

The *What Will I Choose* section of *Decisions* adds another element to this with core questions. These questions move with participants from situation to situation as a template for decision making. Two questions proposed to participants in this step are: Will this help me reach my goals? Does this fit with my values? Each individual is encouraged to develop other questions.

For example: Would this put my sobriety at risk?
If my coworkers invite me out with them after work, would this put my sobriety at risk?
If I avoid seeing my family over the holidays, would this put my sobriety at risk?
If I stay with my boyfriend who still uses, would this put my sobriety at risk?

Through evaluating which actions lead to attaining goals and how those actions tie to their core values, participants often gain invaluable insight into the choices they have made in the past and those they wish to make in the future.

Decision Making

Decision making is the framework for the *Decisions* course. It appeals to people because it is practical and can be used right away. More than that, it is a palatable way to teach cognitive skills. The goal is to help people make well-reasoned decisions that minimize harm to themselves and others (the Pennsylvania Partnership for Criminal Justice Improvement, 2025). If you ask people if they need to be better thinkers, they will usually say no. They respond as if it is implied that they are flawed or unintelligent.

But if you ask people if they need to make better decisions, it is much more likely the answer will be yes. This is especially true while sitting in jail or serving probation.

Feelings and Anger Management

"Knowing more about my feelings gives me a better way to react to things".

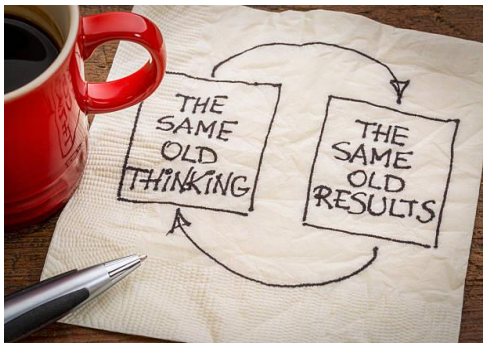
One of the few things people have been taught about decision making is, "if you want to make a good decision, keep your feelings out of it." Research shows that this is incorrect and actually impossible (Bechara, Damasio, & Damasio, 2003). Feelings are integral to decision making and provide information about ourselves and the situation. Feelings influence how we perceive things and what choices we make. Consider feeling "hangry." Is it true that other people are being more annoying to a person who is hungry? Do they deserve to be snapped at? Or is it possible that people are more irritable when they are hungry?

Participants in *Decisions* are taught to name their feelings. Finding a word to express your internal experience takes practice for many people. The cognitive work needed to label feelings comes with a benefit beyond self-expression, it also slightly decreases the likelihood of acting impulsively (Lieberman, Eisenberger, Crockett, Pfeifer and Way, 2007). In *Decisions,* participants are also challenged to look for patterns of behavior that correspond to particular feelings. If the behaviors have not been successful, or lead to negative consequences that feeling becomes a signal to use STAR. One participant recognized that when he felt lonely, he would try to find the first available woman who showed interest. Although this behavior temporarily relieved his loneliness, it had not yet led to a meaningful relationship. His loneliness continued and he concluded that no woman would ever love him. He decided to look for friends to lessen his loneliness and take more time to find a compatible romantic partner.

Lipsey et. al (2007) holds that incorporating anger control into CBT programs is a key ingredient to reducing recidivism. Many participants of the Vita *Decisions* program have recognized the connection between feeling angry and choosing unproductive or negative behaviors. Strong emotions, like anger, can decrease our ability to think clearly. Repeated use of STAR can decrease impulsiveness. One participant shared their pride in choosing a new behavior in a familiar situation. She found herself arguing with someone on her module. As she took a pause to think, she realized that she had gone from irritation to anger. With this realization she immediately left the common room and closed herself in her cell. She gave herself time to calm down and avoided lashing out physically, as was her typical pattern. This idea of taking a pause to think and reason in a heated interpersonal situation is aligned with the Lipsey et al. (2007) conclusion that a key ingredient of CBT programs that reduces recidivism is interpersonal problem solving.

Cognitive Restructuring

Decisions teaches participants to recognize their thoughts and understand their influence on behavior, aligning with CBI's goal of modifying criminogenic thinking patterns (Tafrate and Mitchell, 2022). Activities in the program teach how to challenge participants' thinking by looking for evidence to prove and disprove the validity of thoughts. For example:



"All dogs are vicious".

Evidence that this is true: I was bitten by a dog once, I know of other people who have been bitten, I've heard of people who have been bitten.

Evidence that this is not true: Many people have dogs and do not get bitten, I only know a few people who have been bitten by dogs, but I know a lot who have dogs.

This activity was especially relevant for a participant in a DFL group. He shared that while driving, he passed a restaurant and saw his girlfriend going inside. A man was holding the door as she entered. Upon seeing them so close in the doorway, he immediately assumed that they were going in together, and that she was cheating. Without pausing for a single moment he pulled into the parking lot, grabbed the gun under his seat and started shooting. He stated that he acted with no evidence at all, and it turned out he was actually wrong. By processing and reflecting on his previous reactions, he was able to cognitively restructure the situation in an effort to more carefully gather evidence before acting in the future.

After looking for evidence, the next task is to ask questions that will help clarify the situation. In the example above there are many possible questions:

"Has she ever cheated? Did she mention what she would be doing that day? Could it just be someone holding the door? Could I call her? Could I park and go in? Could the man be her boss and this is a work event?"

The Dobson and Dozois (2021) principle of altering distorted cognitions supports the CBT aspect of these cognitive restructuring activities in the *Decisions* programs. Through changing the clients' interpretation of events, behavior change can occur based on this new interpretation.

Habits and Reaction Cycles

In addition to recognizing the influence of emotions and thoughts on behavior, another valuable component of the *Decisions* programs is the opportunity for participants to analyze habits and cycles of behavior. This connects to Tafrate and Mitchell's (2022) work on habits and the nature of criminogenic thinking related to unhealthy habits.

Participants in *Decisions* learn about how patterns of behavior that may become repetitive cycles can become barriers to obtaining long-term goals. Understanding feelings associated with each action can lead to important self-awareness required to change cognition and behavior. A person may feel elated when obtaining a new job but fall into a pattern of becoming frustrated with supervision over time and eventually quit the job. When participants understand the short-term positive feelings of power when quitting, they can begin to formulate where they can step out of their reaction cycle and what actions are likely to achieve long-term goals.

For example, a person who is chronically late for work because he can't wake up in the morning may vow to turn off the television by 11:00 p.m. Yet every night he watches until the early hours and can't wake up for work. It may be relaxing and enjoyable to watch tv, but it's stressful to be late for work.

Historical Data on Decisions for Change

Vita Education Services has provided educational programs in Bucks County Community Criminal Justice settings for over 50 years. A study of 244 participants within a two-year period from 2014 through 2016 in the *Decisions for Change* program showed a significant difference in violations and probation outcomes between those who completed and those who did not complete DFC.

Vita and Bucks County Adult Probation & Parole have worked together to provide DFC to high-risk, high-need offenders.

Analysis of data from 244 individuals over a six-month post-course period revealed statistically significant differences in violations and probation outcomes between participants who completed DFC and those who did not.

Completed DFC		Did Not Complete DFC
45%	Technical Violations	70%
12%	Direct Violations	23%
28%	Probation Revoked	56%
57%	Probation Successfully Closed	29%

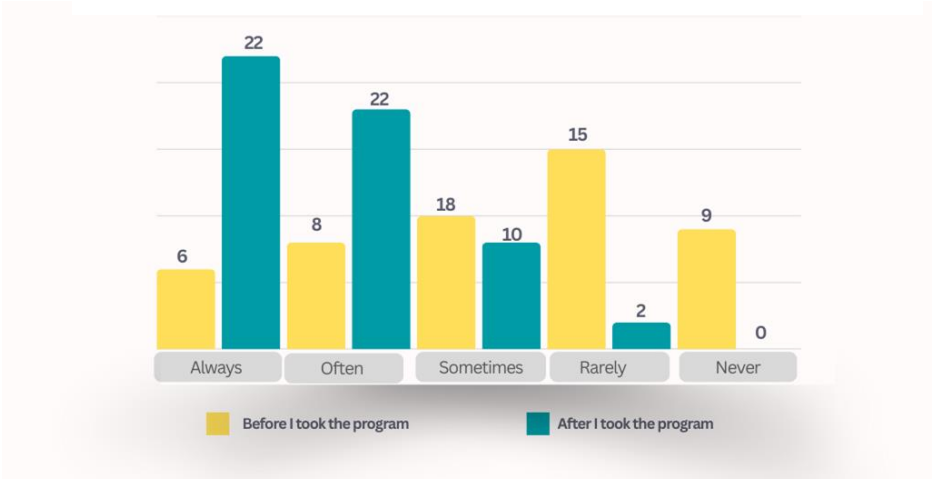
Technical violations=rules infractions - Direct violations=new offenses

Technical violations decreased from 70% for the group that did not complete DFC to 45% for the group that completed DFC. Similarly, direct violations decreased from 23% for those who did not complete the program to 12% for the group that completed DFC.

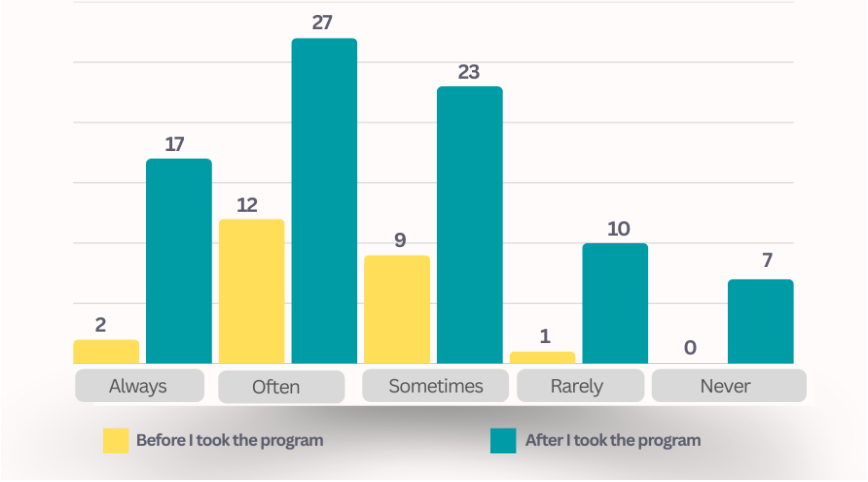
Furthermore, probation was revoked for 28% of participants who completed DFC versus 56% who did not complete the program. Probation was successfully closed for 57% of participants who completed DFC compared to 29% who did not complete the program.

Vita collects survey data from all *Decisions* participants. The following graphs represent participant responses for a sample of survey questions. Data was derived from a retrospective pre-posttest following the program. These responses represent a consistent theme for participant input for all years of survey data. Respondents report a change in how feelings and values influence decision-making in addition to discovering new ways to solve problems and use logical strategies to make decisions. They also report plans to think about consequences before acting and use the *Decisions* process after release. These responses are supported by the above 2014 to 2016 data indicating that *Decisions* had an influence on reduction in new violations and recidivism.

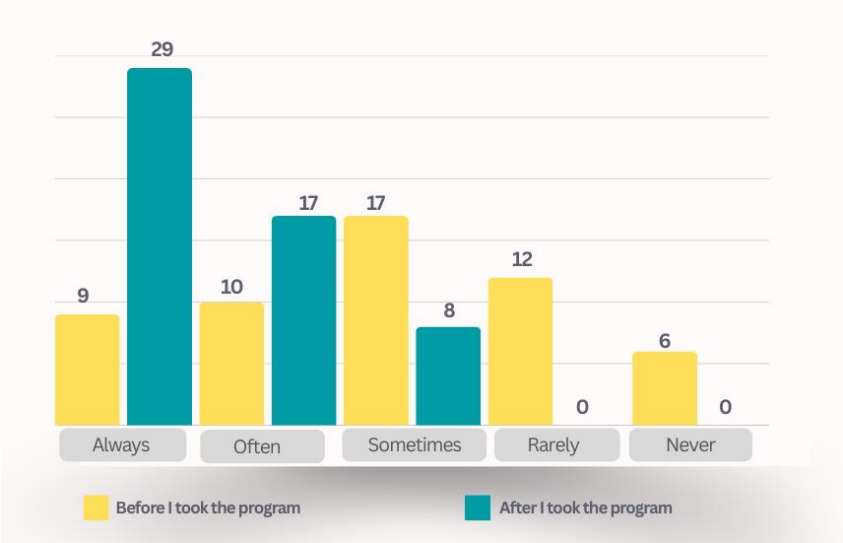
I used a logical process for making important decisions



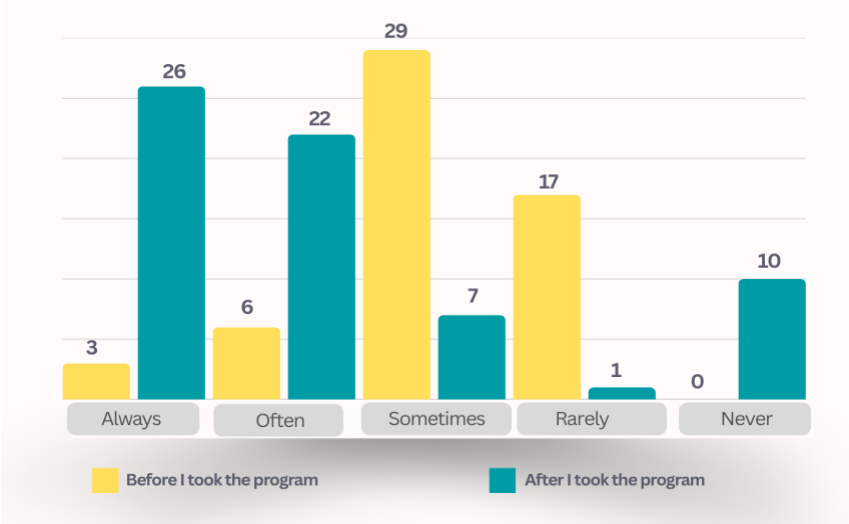
I thought about how my feeling influenced my decision making



I considered my values when making decisions

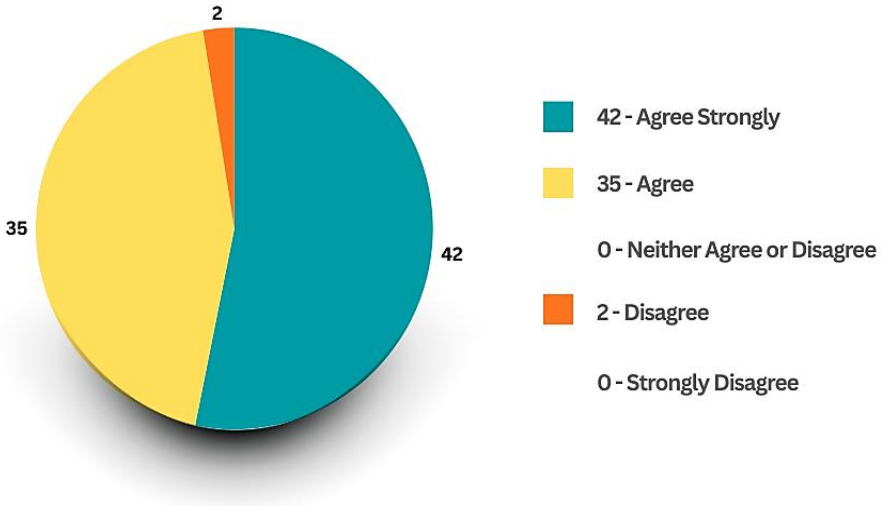


I thought about consequences before I acted

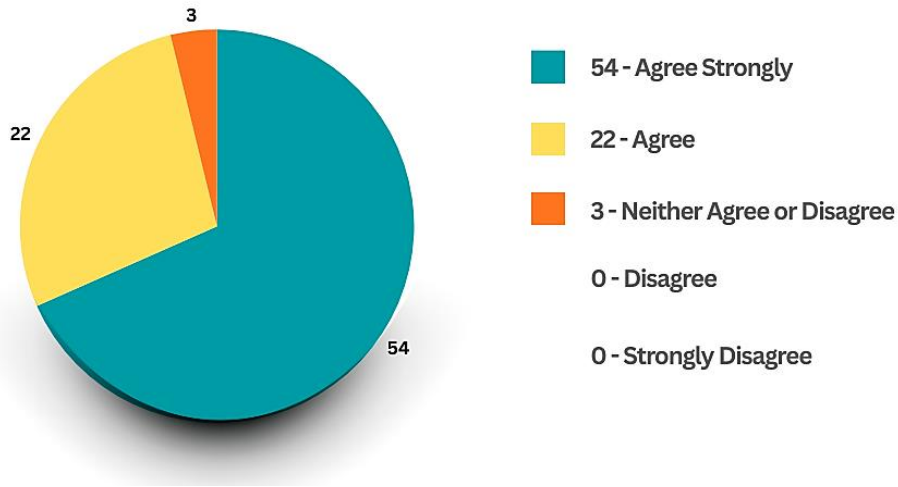


The following charts represent responses to a post-course survey completed by *Decisions* participants. The post-course survey results indicate that a majority of participants recognize the value of applying *Decisions* skills both during incarceration and after release.

I will use the DFL process after release



Using the DFL process can help me stay out of jail



Implementation of Vita's Programs

CBI in Group and Individual Settings

Group Settings

Teaching in a group setting offers benefits that can enhance learning cognitive skills. One of these benefits is social support. For the incarcerated individuals, there is often a tremendous feeling of isolation. They are separated from family, friends, coworkers and often feel lonely and that no one understands what they are going through.

***Decisions* groups involve sharing situations and feelings, and many times people feel heard and understood.** Others have similar feelings. *Decisions* facilitators set a clear expectation that others' views will not be derided and that confidentiality will be maintained by participants. This creates an atmosphere of emotional safety. Because their movement and activities are restricted, even those on probation can experience isolation. Individuals do not need to share what they are experiencing to get this benefit. Often, just hearing others describe what they are going through can give a sense of relief.

Taking a *Decisions* course can be a shared experience. Over the twelve hours of group sessions, a sense of community and belonging may develop, allowing individuals to connect with others facing similar challenges. Another benefit is the opportunity to receive peer feedback. People are often more willing to consider a new perspective or accept feedback from someone they view as a peer. This takes away the resistance to guidance from correctional or probation staff. Their classmates have no authority over them, and this often makes their feedback more palatable.

The group setting also gives opportunities to practice and role-play. This reinforces the concepts learned and gives participants new perspectives on their situations. It can be helpful to practice asking your probation officer to give permission to leave the county. It can be downright eye-opening to play the role of the PO in that situation! Finally, teaching in groups can be cost-effective, allowing more people to receive the intervention in a short amount of time.

One-to-One Settings

Although there are clear advantages of teaching *Decisions* in group settings, there are times when working with individuals is preferable. Some participants have tremendous anxiety in groups and find it difficult to share or even attend. There is a greater sense of privacy and confidentiality that some people need in order to engage with the material.

One-to-one instruction allows for more time to address the learner's personal situations. The pace can be slower, and the facilitator can give more assistance. This can be helpful where independent reading and writing are challenging for the participant, in the case of language barriers or low literacy. Finally, some people lack the skills that are needed to be good group members. High distractibility, heightened emotionality, or resistance to school-like learning environments may be indicators that individual work would be in everyone's best interest.

Trained Facilitators

Decisions facilitators are trained to maintain boundaries, respect, and hope. Being outside the criminal justice system and having no actual legal authority over the group members is an advantage; there is no need for resistance or anti-authority posturing. Facilitators maintain clear boundaries; they cannot engage in friendships, taking sides or bending rules. Expectations are clearly stated and consistently reinforced. Facilitators treat each group member respectfully and expect participants to do the same. This is fostered by using each individual's chosen name, giving equal attention, and modeling good manners ("please," "thank you"). **A sense of hope is expressed through the belief that people can change, that education makes a difference, and that learning about oneself can empower individuals to take charge of their lives.** Lastly, the integrity of the program is maintained through consistent training of new facilitators by experienced facilitators with a comprehensive knowledge of the program and criminal justice participants.

Curriculum Packages

Vita offers curriculum packages that include the following:

- Participant workbooks
- Facilitator manuals
- Options for in-person train-the-trainer program or virtual training
- Video tutorial
- Supplemental web-based resources
- Phone support for new facilitators

Conclusion

"I had a pretty big dilemma that could have set me up for failure, but this class helped me see options I was not coming up with on my own. I think the new options will help me greatly!"

CBI based programs are known to be cost-effective treatment approaches that can significantly reduce recidivism among high-risk offenders. The most important variables connected to recidivism are the risk level of participants, how well the treatment is implemented, and the presence of anger control and interpersonal problem-solving components in the treatment program (Lipsey and Landenberger, 2007). Vita Education Services' *Decisions* programs represent a sustainable model built on CBT principles and have been refined over five decades. Participants are taught to understand how feelings and thoughts influence actions. Thought processes are examined in detail to facilitate options for cognitive restructuring and new thinking patterns. Participants create scenarios where new thinking leads to new behaviors and outcomes. By enabling participants to actively restructure their thought processes and rehearse new, prosocial behaviors, the program targets the root causes of behavior to improve decision-making.

Decisions offers a valuable evidence-based solution. The program's successful history with the criminal justice population combined with its high-quality facilitator training and focused attention on cognitive skills awareness and restructuring, affirms its position as a high value intervention capable of delivering significant results.

Authors

Marikay Forst, Ed.D, Faculty, Leadership Coach, Consultant

Gail Huber, M.A., Director of Cognitive Skills Programs, Vita Education Services

Vita Education Services

Vita is the largest provider of education programs in the Bucks County Correctional Facilities and the lead literacy agency in Bucks County. Vita's programs include *Decisions For Living, Decisions For Action, Decisions For Change, Decisions For Success* and *Decisions For Teens*.

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