

# RESEARCH BRIEF

## SONOMA COUNTY PROBATION

May 2014

### Dual Relationships

“Officer-Offender Relationship Quality Matters: Supervision Process as Evidence-Based Practice”<sup>1</sup> summarizes promising research about the complex relationship corrections professionals have with offenders. The importance of balance in a “dual relationship” is included in the Effective Practices In Community Supervision (EPICS) and Core Correctional Practices (CCP) models in use within the Sonoma County Probation Department. This article describes aspects of effective dual relationships and presents research that links high-quality dual relationships with improved public safety outcomes.

**It’s Not Just Professional Alliance.** Behavioral science literature finds a strong correlation between improved treatment outcomes and a therapeutic relationship that emphasizes a patient-therapist bond, mutually agreed-upon treatment goals, and how the therapist and client work together to reach these goals. While Probation Officers are not therapists, this “professional alliance” has application in helping offenders change behavior. But an additional power dynamic is added to the relationship, one that includes the Probation Officer’s enforcement of conditions and laws. Balancing the helper and enforcer roles is shown to have a helpful impact on recidivism, whereas relying too much on either the helper or the enforcer role is connected with increased recidivism. How can the proper balance be achieved?

**Procedural Justice** is based on the premise “that people will react more receptively to authority if they have a perception of fairness,” stemming from how authority figures treat them, demonstrated in three ways:

1. Authority figures must give offenders a voice. Offenders must know that they are entitled to express their views and that their opinion is valid and valued.
2. Officers should include offenders in decision-making. Officers can solicit the offenders’ views and incorporate them (when feasible) into case management decisions.
3. Offenders need to feel that the process of control is fair. Officers must clearly communicate the rules and the corresponding consequences that will follow for noncompliance and be consistent and timely when enforcing the rules.

Studies evaluating the effectiveness of these principles found that high-quality, dual-role officer-offender relationships reduced criminal outcomes consistently across offenders who were low and high risk, and offenders with and without difficult personality traits.

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<sup>1</sup>Manchak, Sarah M., Ph.D., Patrick J. Kennealy, Ph.D. and Jennifer L. Skeem Ph.D. (2014). Officer-Offender Relationship Quality Matters: Supervision Process as Evidence-Based Practice. *Perspectives*, 38, 56-70.

## A BALANCED RELATIONSHIP

How can an officer maintain authority, exert control over offenders, help them and, perhaps most importantly, ensure that offenders will willingly cooperate with them? The key may be for officers to practice principles that are consistent with a construct called procedural justice.