



Attitudes and Behaviour

Client Handbook Series
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Developed by Carleton University, Criminal Justice Decision Making Laboratory
& Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services
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Costs and Benefits


“Criminal attitudes” are our thoughts about criminal actions. People with pro-criminal attitudes think crime is a part of life or out of their control, and tend to make excuses for why they do it. People with non-criminal attitudes understand the problems with crime and choose to live a different lifestyle.

Often, people commit crime because they think that it will help them rather than harm them. In fact, criminal behaviour is learned through getting rewards for crime and expecting that good things will happen from it.

But, as the costs of crime become more than the benefits, people have more to lose. For example, if you commit a crime and get caught, you may go to prison, lose your job or you may hurt or disappoint your family.

In the table below, make a list of the things that you will gain (benefits) if you continue offending and the things that you will lose (costs) if you continue offending.

Benefits of Offending	Costs of Offending
E.g., Easy money, I keep my reputation	E.g., I'll go to prison, I feel shame and guilt
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

 Great! Now that you've thought about the costs and benefits of offending, move on to learn about how the people around us affect our decisions in important ways.

Peers and Attitudes

We mainly think like the people who we spend the most time with, whether it is our friends, family, or coworkers. It is those people who affect our thoughts, attitudes, choices, and actions the most. In order to avoid crime it is important to surround yourself with people who are supportive, positive, and most importantly who have non-criminal attitudes.

In the activity boxes below, describe two important relationships that you have and how these people influence your attitudes. Here is an example:

Relationship #1: Harry (High-School Friend)

In which category does this person belong?

- Has pro-criminal attitudes**
- Has non-criminal attitudes**

How has this person influenced your criminal attitudes in the past?

He thinks that crime is a good way to make money and have fun. He convinced me to steal a car with him. We got caught and I went to jail for it.

How will you let this person influence your criminal attitudes in the future?

I will not have any contact with Harry unless he changes his criminal attitudes in the future.

Peers and Attitudes

Relationship #1: _____

In which category does this person belong?

- Has pro-criminal attitudes
- Has non-criminal attitudes

How has this person influenced your criminal attitudes in the past?

How will you let this person influence your criminal attitudes in the future?

Relationship #2: _____

In which category does this person belong?

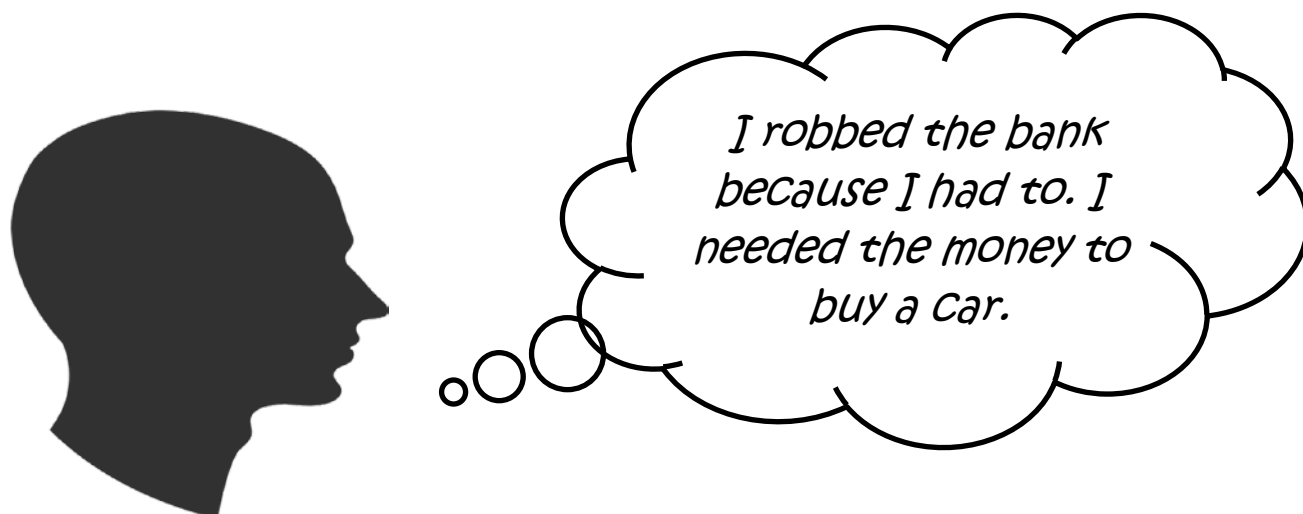
- Has pro-criminal attitudes
- Has non-criminal attitudes

How has this person influenced your criminal attitudes in the past?

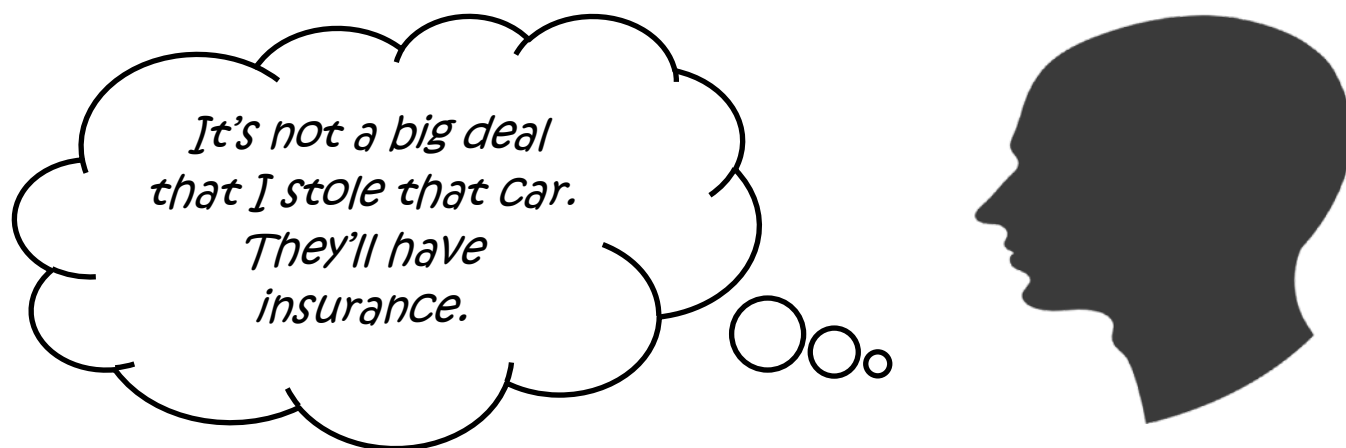
How will you let this person influence your criminal attitudes in the future?

Common Attitudes

There are some common thoughts that people often have about their crimes. They influence our decision to act a certain way or not. These actions have consequences, either good or bad.



Some thoughts involve making excuses for your actions or for why you did something wrong.



Other thoughts involve downplaying the seriousness of your actions – to make it seem like less of a big deal than it is.

Changing Our Attitudes

Sometimes to change negative actions you first have to change some of your attitudes. It's important to know which attitudes make your life better and which ones lead to actions that take you down a bad path.

There are four important steps to follow when trying to change our attitudes. Fill out the form below to begin the process.

Step 1: Identify The Situation

Describe a time when you had pro-criminal attitudes that lead to a crime. What were those attitudes? Were your expectations reasonable?

Step 2: Identify Your Thoughts

Write down what you might have said to yourself or to others to rationalize or minimize your crime.

Step 3: Challenge Those Thoughts

Write down some more alternative thoughts about your crime (e.g., "*I really hurt those people when I robbed their house*").

Step 4: Monitor Your Success

In real life situations when you find yourself having pro-criminal attitudes about something, identify them for what they are and practice replacing them with alternative thoughts. Congratulate yourself when you have done this successfully -- eventually it will become habit!

Identity Change

One way that can help people move away from crime is something called “identity change”. This means starting to view yourself as non-criminal instead of criminal. Is this something you’ve done?

Part of this involves imagining yourself in the future. For example, you might picture yourself as an ex-offender that is successful and is able to support and take care of your family. Is this realistic for you? If not, why not?

Start the process by picturing your future self. Make a plan towards changing your thoughts and behaviour. Below is an example of how you might imagine yourself in the future and the steps that you can take to make the change possible.

Step 1: Imagine your future self.

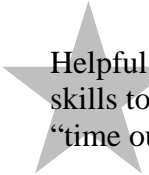
- In the future, I imagine myself as being sober and having a stable job.

Step 2: List some steps that you can take to make it happen.

- I will start going to treatment on a regular basis
- I will stop hanging out with friends who do drugs
- I will see a job counsellor

Step 3: List some strengths that can help you stay on track.

- I am a hard worker



Helpful Tip: Sometimes we need to change our behaviours *before* changing our attitudes. Good skills to practice are “planning ahead” to avoid high-risk situations from the start, or taking a “time out” to step out of a situation that might affect your life in a negative way.

Identity Change

Now it's your turn to imagine yourself in the future. In the table below, write down some steps that you can take to make it possible and some of your strengths that can help you along the way.

Step 1: Imagine your future self.

Step 2: List some steps that you can take to make it happen.

Step 3: List some strengths that can help you stay on track.

Summary

Here's a quick summary of what you have learned about criminal attitudes:

- 1) Our criminal attitudes are how we feel about committing crimes.
- 2) Having a pro-criminal attitude means that you see more benefits to committing crime, while having a non-criminal attitude means that you see more costs to committing crime.
- 3) As the costs of crime begin to outweigh the rewards of crime, people have more to lose. For example, committing a crime may jeopardize a new relationship or job opportunity.
- 4) The people we spend the most time with will greatly influence our criminal attitudes and also our actions. It's important to build good relationships with non-criminal people.
- 5) Recognizing our own criminal attitudes and thoughts about crime is important to changing our behaviour.
- 6) Identity change is when you begin to view yourself as non-criminal. Imagining yourself in the future can help you make a plan to achieve your goals.