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Chapter 7: Communicating RNR

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my first introduction to the principles of effective rehabilitation—what we commonly refer to as the risk, need, and responsivity principles, or RNR for short—came during my graduate-program clinical training. I conducted one of the first studies validating an early version of what we now call the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (Hoge & Andrews, 2010), and during my preparation for my research, I read an extensive report outlining the RNR principles. The seminal book on the subject, *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*, by Andrews and Bonta, would be published in 1994, but it had not yet been released when I was in graduate school. As a student, the RNR principles seemed . . . well, they seemed obvious to me. Similarly, today much of what I teach in my forensic psychology classes, which includes the RNR principles, seems obvious to my undergraduate students. Hindsight bias can lead us to believe that what we know has always been obvious. But as I progressed in my graduate thesis, I realized that the RNR principles were not obvious to treatment professionals (and they would not be until Andrews and Bonta codified them), that there was a long history behind that ideological breakthrough, and that all professionals in training need to learn about where we came from, why RNR is important, why we (should) use RNR principles, and, of course, how to use them in the real world. Today, after 15 years of independent clinical practice and teaching, I have developed a great appreciation for the work of others to effectively maximize the benefits that can be gained from clinical and supervisory work with sex offenders.

The goal of this book is to guide clinicians, administrators, and supervisory agents through the application of the RNR model and to offer practical tools to effectively implement this model. It is important to note that the RNR model is evidence-based and endorsed by many correctional organizations across North
America and other parts of the world. The reader is referred to a more comprehensive review of the empirical data that supports RNR and the psychology behind the development of RNR that is seen in Andrews and Bonta's most recent edition of their book, published in 2010. However, the text is often deemed to be academic and scientific in its presentation and not necessarily focused on the practical needs of the clinicians and other professionals who would be implementing these principles at a grassroots level. My goals in writing this book were to summarize the history of RNR and the science behind it; to translate the principles into practice with sexual offenders; to describe what that implementation looks like; and to examine the potential challenges of implementation.

The book is written for an intended audience of clinicians, program developers, and clinical administrators; however, much of the application is also relevant to probation and parole officers, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the criminal justice system. Some readers may have had some degree of exposure to the RNR principles, and I apologize to those of you who are already familiar with some of the material I present in the following chapters, but for the sake of those readers who have had limited exposure, it is critical that we explore the breadth of the RNR model. (Being Canadian, apologies come naturally to me. Hereafter, though, I will strive to avoid apologies, as well as Canadian lingo, which may not always translate well to American corrections or criminal justice systems, or to similar organizations in other parts of the world.)

This book is based primarily on research with adult males, and correspondingly, it will be aimed at those treating and supervising adult males. Given that interventions with this population are commonly conducted in a group format, the interventions discussed in this book will refer mostly to group treatment programs, although it is possible to adapt some of these applications to an individual format.

Beyond telling the reader what the book intends to do and for whom the book is intended, it is equally important to highlight what this book is not. It is not an exhaustive coverage of existing treatment paradigms but, instead, is limited to RNR applications. This is not to say that there are no other models to consider, but discussing them would be beyond the scope of this book. The book is also not a step-by-step, session-to-session manual. Although RNR calls for manualized approaches, it is most certainly not a one-size-fits-all paradigm. Rather, it ensures that treatment is tailored to the needs of the offender. Hence, session-by-session content would be inappropriate. The book does not provide exhaustive empirical
coverage of the effectiveness of RNR, although many key studies are reviewed. Neither does it provide exhaustive coverage of criminogenic needs and responsivity factors. Instead, the goal is to give readers a better understanding of the process of identifying relevant needs/factors and applying RNR in their program. Lastly, it is not a policy book intended to guide the creation of treatment guidelines for your agency or state, although it may help prepare the reader in considering the many obstacles in carrying out this necessary but ambitious task.

In sum, this book is intended for clinicians who wish to optimize therapeutic effectiveness, administrators who seek guidance for the manner in which they must allocate limited resources, and for others who wish to learn practical ways to implement RNR principles in the treatment and management of sex offenders.