Brief Intervention ToolS (BITS)
A Primer for Users

Welcome BITS users! BITS, or Brief Intervention ToolS, are designed to teach people skills that will help them make positive life choices. The tools are purposefully short (one page in length) so that they are easy to use and applicable in a wide variety of circumstances.

Evidence-based practices have provided staff with clear direction regarding what to focus on during one-on-one interventions: helping people build skills and learn new ways of thinking and behaving. New ways of thinking and behaving can be taught in a cognitive behavioral training (CBT) program. However, because of program capacity limitations and other barriers, not all people in need of CBT can attend. Under these circumstances, staff, as "agents of change," can have a profound impact on people's success. To do this work effectively, they need useful tools and techniques to engage people in discussions and skill-building activities.

This primer has been developed for agents of change. It seeks to demonstrate how BITS can be used in most situations to help people change their behavior and lead successful lives.

Why BITS?

Staff who have worked with people one-on-one have learned a common lesson: there is limited time, so every minute counts. This means that interventions need to fit into short appointments, and they need to be impactful. This is not to say that lengthier, more in-depth interventions aren't appropriate; they are, of course. But too often staff don't have the time or training to work with people in these more complex ways. BITS were created for staff working with youth and adults to help them build skills in short, structured interventions.

BITS can be used in three ways:

1. **As a quick response to an issue that presents itself.** BITS can help people gain insight into difficult situations while those situations are fresh in their minds. Most commonly, use of the BITS tools *Overcoming Thinking Traps*, *Problem Solving*, and *Who I Spend Time With* will address this purpose.

2. **As a way to avoid relapse.** People have an unfortunate habit of repeating past, negative behaviors. The BITS tool *Overcoming Automatic Responses* helps them identify patterns of behavior that are prompted by particular conditions and develop a plan to avoid automatic, negative behavioral responses when these conditions arise.

3. **As a method to help people get unstuck.** When people get "stuck" and cannot seem to move forward, there are two BITS tools that can help: *Thinking Traps* and *Making a Decision*. For example, if a person repeatedly exhibits thoughts and behaviors that result in the same negative consequences, staff can use *Thinking Traps* to prepare the person for later discussions on how to overcome those traps. *Making a Decision* helps people weigh the pros and cons of making a change in order to help them move past the status quo.

Table 1 connects some of the key life areas that people may find challenging to skills that can help them address these areas. Specific BITS or other possible program referrals are matched to the skills.

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Table 1: Response Guidelines

Key Life Area	Skills to Build	BITS	Possible Program Referral
1. Thoughts and beliefs	• Take responsibility for actions • Recognize thinking traps • Manage thinking traps • Identify the link between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors • Replace harmful thoughts	• *Thinking Traps* • *Overcoming Thinking Traps* • *Decision Making* (if ambivalent about change)	• Thinking for a Change • Moral Reconation Therapy • Other available CBT programs
2. Coping/self-control skills	• Problem solve effectively • Control emotions • Manage conflicts • Ask for help • Cope with disappointment • Guard against triggers	• *Problem Solving* • *Overcoming Thinking Traps* • *Overcoming Automatic Responses* • *Decision Making* (if ambivalent about change)	• Thinking for a Change • Moving On • Life skills program • Dialectical behavior therapy • Other cognitive programs • Mental health services (if applicable)
3. Friends	• Recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships • End harmful friendships • Meet new, positive people • Set boundaries	• *Who I Spend Time With* • *Problem Solving* • *Overcoming Automatic Responses* • *Decision Making* (if ambivalent about change)	• Life skills program • Support group involvement
4. Family/relationships	• Know the difference between positive and negative family influence • Strengthen positive family relationships • Set boundaries • Resolve conflicts • Show appreciation • Recognize triggers	• *Who I Spend Time With* • *Overcoming Thinking Traps* • *Overcoming Automatic Responses*	• Family counseling • Pastoral counseling • Parenting classes • Domestic violence program • Multisystemic therapy (MST)
5. Alcohol and/or drug use	• Recognize dependence on alcohol/drugs • Resist peer pressure • Recognize triggers • Avoid high-risk situations	• *Overcoming Automatic Responses* • *Overcoming Thinking Traps* • *Problem Solving* • *Who I Spend Time With* • *Decision Making* (if ambivalent about change)	• Substance use treatment • Support groups • Mental health services
6. Work	• Identify employment interests • Work hard and persevere • Manage conflicts and disappointments • Ask for help	• *Problem Solving* • *Thinking Traps* • *Overcoming Thinking Traps* • *Overcoming Automatic Responses* • *Decision Making* (if ambivalent about change)	• Vocational assessment and/or career counseling • Occupational therapy
7. School	• Identify education interests • Work hard and persevere • Manage conflicts and disappointments • Ask for help	• *Problem Solving* • *Thinking Traps* • *Overcoming Thinking Traps* • *Overcoming Automatic Responses* • *Decision Making* (if ambivalent about change)	• Adult Basic Education (ABE) • Vocational program • GED class
8. Use of free time	• Identify recreational interests • Know how to find fun, healthy things to do • Have the courage to begin something new • Know how to meet others with similar interests	• *Problem Solving* • *Decision Making* (if ambivalent about change)	• Local recreation department (gym, etc.) • Health and wellness programs

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Features of BITS

To make staff's job a little easier, BITS are:

- **Short.** Each tool is only one page (front and back) and therefore can be completed during a brief intervention.

- **User-friendly.** To be of practical value, tools must be easy for staff to administer. They must be clear and straightforward so staff can easily and confidently explain and process the tools. Equally, people completing the BITS must be able to readily understand the "teachable moment" concepts and apply new learnings with confidence. In this way, they are most likely to remember and repeat the new skills following the brief intervention. Therefore, each tool is designed with as few steps as possible to enhance memory retention.

- **Few in number.** Sometimes less is more. There are a multitude of skills we could teach people to help them be more successful, but not all of these skills are equal in terms of their impact. BITS help build six specific skills—identified by staff in a series of interviews—as being the most important to teach.

- **Versatile.** The six BITS tools are versatile; the same tool can be easily applied to a variety of situations, as illustrated in Table 2. As a result, staff do not have to worry about identifying the perfect tool for each circumstance.

- **"Plug and play."** Many of the tools available to staff today require moderate or extensive amounts of training. BITS are different; they are intended for use with little or no advance preparation and are ready for immediate use.[1]

- **Built for skill practice.** Finally, BITS include opportunities for practice both during one-on-one appointments and as take-home assignments. Staff are strongly encouraged to demonstrate the skills they're teaching, conduct skill practice sessions, and assign and debrief take-home work. It is only by applying the new skills to their daily life experiences and processing the results that people will deepen their learning and form new habits.

Table 2: Use of BITS in Various Case Scenarios

Case Scenario	Decision Making	Overcoming Automatic Responses	Problem Solving	Thinking Traps	Overcoming Thinking Traps	Who I Spend Time With
Getting into trouble with a peer	✓	✓	✓			✓
Difficulty coping with stress	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical or verbal fighting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Difficulty solving a problem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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1   While training on the use of BITS is recommended and will likely enhance staff's confidence and the effectiveness of the tools, it is not required.