

PO/Agent & Supervisee Relationship

Tips for Developing Positive Rapport

You will be more successful in your attempts to influence and guide probationers to comply with their supervision and change their behavior if you:

- Are open, honest and genuine in your approach
- Demonstrate respect
- Have the ability to be empathic
- Demonstrate a caring attitude, and understanding and accepting others
- Exhibit a trusting personality
- Show others that you are very motivated and enthusiastic about your work
- Are knowledgeable about offender behavior and attitudes
- Believe that the individuals you are supervising can change and improve their lives (i.e. encouraging and supporting “hope and optimism” for others; understanding the importance of self-efficacy)
- Have realistic and attainable goals for individuals you are supervising
- Are able to differentiate an individual’s behavior from the person
- Are firm, fair, and consistent in your approach

As you work on developing and improving your rapport with the individuals you supervise, remember:

- Prior to establishing a respectful and meaningful working relationship, your influence on the clients thinking and behavior will most likely be minimal. Their initial responses to your interview questions will probably be somewhat reserved and brief, expect that, particularly until they get to know you and understand the purpose of your work.
- Be mindful of your communication style and how to effectively use, and not abuse, your authority. Use a normal and respectful tone of voice in your interactions and your questions with your defendants/probationers.
- Clarify the purpose of your meetings and interviews, what documentation will be developed, and what it will be used for.
- Be specific when you are asking a defendant/probationer to comply with rules and expectations, and give them an opportunity to ask questions and better understand the process and goals of supervision. A primary goal of probation, ideally, is to develop and maintain a constructive and successful supervision experience, in order to assist and encourage the individual in the process of positive behavior change and risk reduction.
- Avoid statements or comments like, “You need to answer my questions and do as I say, and if you don’t, I’ll have you locked up!” These kinds of confrontational approaches are far more likely to damage the relationship, and can result in long term supervision problems. After all, you may be working with this individual for a long period of time, and developing a respectful and positive working relationship can have a positive impact on the outcomes and goals of supervision. It can also make your job easier and more rewarding!