



## Building Effective Communication with Persons Convicted of Terrorism and Extremism-Related Crimes

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### Abstract

*Introduction:* the article is devoted to the analysis of ways and conditions for building effective communication with persons convicted of terrorism and extremism-related crimes. *Purpose:* based on the generalization of theoretical materials, normative legal and organizational methodological literature and the results of studying the practice of interaction between penitentiary psychologists and this category of convicts, to show the prospects of using an algorithm to identify the main deterrent and provoking factors of destructive behavior of persons convicted for terrorism and extremism when determining their re-socialization program. *Methods:* comparative legal, empirical methods of description, interpretation; theoretical methods of formal and dialectical logic. *Results:* the analysis of organizational and legal aspects and law enforcement practice has shown that the available methods and techniques of psychodiagnostic and psychocorrective work are used by practitioners without taking into account the diversity of individual and personal characteristics of this category of convicts. Effective resocialization of convicts for extremism and terrorism-related crimes from the moment they are quarantined in a correctional institution requires that the psychologist together with the convict construct a common semantic space, maintain and transform it. *Conclusions:* building effective communication with a person convicted of terrorism and extremism-related crimes in order to conduct psychodiagnostic and psychocorrective work, it is necessary to use an algorithm to identify deterrent and provoking factors of destructive behavior with the exclusion of formal attitudes, taking into account the main difficulties and typical mistakes in working with this category of persons.

**Key words:** convicts; extremism and terrorism-related crimes; psychologist; penitentiary system; psychocorrection; algorithm; resocialization.

5.3.9. Legal psychology, psychological security.

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### Introduction

Joint construction of a common semantic space by partners, its maintenance and transformation is a condition for effective contact in the communicative practice of a penitentiary psychologist.

Persons convicted of extremism and terrorism-related crimes remain one of the most difficult categories in places of detention, work with which requires specific knowledge, skills and abilities from psychologists [1; 3; 6; 9; 17].

The author of the article has a significant number of publications that disclose information about psychological characteristics and behavior of persons convicted of terrorism and extremism-related crimes, obtained in the studies conducted in 2013–2020 and the work with this category of convicts [3–7]. Within the framework of this article, we will consider one of the aspects of this topic, namely, the issue of building effective communication with persons convicted of terrorism and extremism-related crimes.

It should be noted that convicted supporters of radical religious ideas prioritize religious laws and norms, but not legal ones. Psychodiagnostics of convicts held in the quarantine department conducted by the psychologist at the initial stage is of an introductory nature. Its goal is maximum coverage of all arrivals. At this stage, the psychologist pays attention not only to persons with obvious mental anomalies (low intellectual level, psychopathic manifestations, eye-catching oddities, unusual logical constructions in speech, the manner of conversation, etc.), but also to those expressing various extremist ideas [11; 12; 14].

When establishing contact with the convict during a psychodiagnostic conversation, the psychologist has to solve a number of consecutive tasks:

- to reduce tension, anxiety of the convict, and confrontation during interaction (first and subsequent);
- to assess the convict's belonging to traditional or radical religious ideas and identify their content;
- to write down the convict's judgments (radical in content) for subsequent psychocorrective work.

The analysis of the practice of psychological work shows that when the psychologist interacts with this category of convicts, a number of difficulties may arise due to distorted ideas of the convict:

- work with the psychologist is perceived by the convict as his/her state of mental health is doubtful [12];
- the convicted person expresses distrust (negative attitude) to the psychologist (accuse the psychologist of claims to knowledge of the soul). In order to soften the attitude and establish contact, the psychologist, in an interview

with the convict, clarifies the role, tasks and capabilities of him/her as a specialist [8; 11].

The question of the time required to implement the convict resocialization plan is solved individually and varies by a number of factors, starting with taking into account the convict's knowledge of the Russian language, his/her ability to perceive test tasks (questions), etc.

Psychodiagnostic conversation helps reveal personal characteristics of a person convicted of terrorism and extremism-related crimes. Particular attention should be paid to excessive bravado, arrogant attitude towards correctional officers, especially from first-time convicts, clearly manifested opposition attitude towards government officials, shouts with extremist political and religious content, signs of depression or excessive excitement, habitual narcotic slang or obvious imitation of criminal jargon (the desire, sometimes at a subconscious level or by the mechanism of imitation, to join the criminal subculture), etc. [2; 4; 5; 13; 16].

Let us present an algorithm for identifying deterrent and provoking factors of destructive behavior of persons convicted of terrorism and extremism-related crimes (hereinafter referred to as the algorithm) (Figure.)

The use of this algorithm in the practice of penitentiary psychologists helps draw up a general picture of behavioral features and assess the degree of probability of destructive behavior of convicts.

When studying personal files, data that informally characterize the convicted person are taken into account (membership in extremist and terrorist organizations, religious sects; heightened conflict, results of forensic psychiatric examination, unusual circumstances of the crime commission) [4; 6; 8; 10]. Special attention should be paid to those convicted for the first time, who were brought up or lived in prosperous conditions and had good life prospects (increased danger of reactive states associated with an unexpected "fall down" and problems during the adaptation period), as well as persons who categorically do not plead any guilt, underline the injustice committed against them (broken voice intonations when discussing a painful topic for them, tears, other brightly colored emotional manifestations).

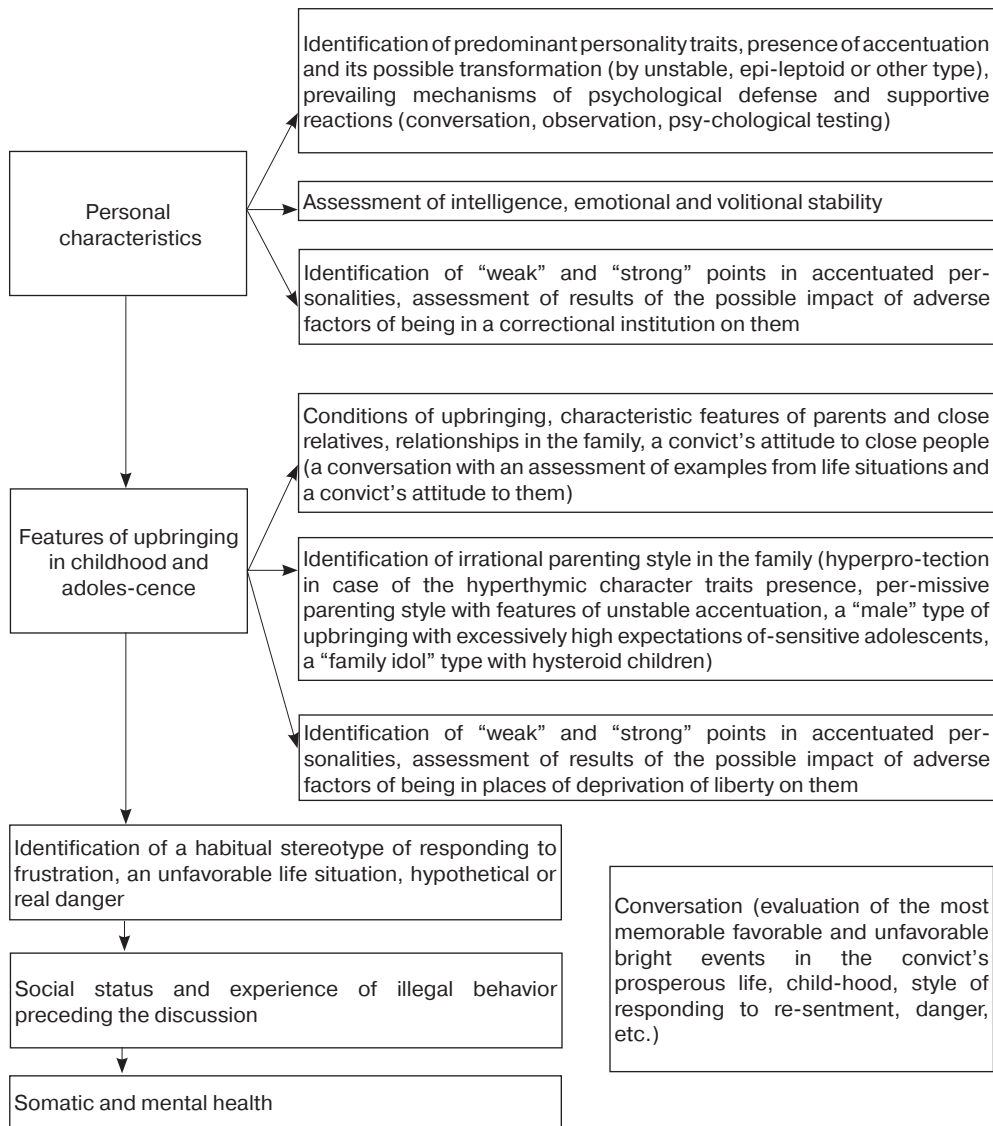


Figure. Algorithm for identifying deterrent and provoking factors of destructive behavior of convicts necessary to assess the degree of risk and probability of their manifestation

In order to obtain the maximum amount of information in conditions of time shortage, it is possible to combine group (survey, questionnaire, testing, observation of the process of filling out questionnaires and the incentive material of questionnaires with the identification of persons who differ in some way from the rest of the convicts or are clearly trying to be like everyone else) and individual diagnostic work methods (conversation, observation during conversations).

Familiarization with the convict during his stay in the quarantine department is important. The practice of psychological work shows that a person who passed stages of arrest, preliminary, pre-trial and judicial investi-

gation, was in custody for a sufficiently long period and arrived to serve his/her sentence in a correctional institution unfamiliar to him/her is in a state of increased anxiety, chronic stress, nervous expectation and uncertainty about the future. The only exceptions are probably those convicts for whom staying in penitentiary institutions is more familiar than being free, as well as criminal leaders who expect special privileges for themselves in advance. Naturally, the above factors are singled out conditionally and not exhaustive [1; 11; 12; 15].

Preliminary information is taken into account, clarified, does not determine the specialist's attitude to the subject, and even more

so does not affect the conclusions made by him/her. Some experienced psychologists, skilled at conducting conversation, often prefer to work from scratch in order to create their own, unclouded idea of a person, and only then get acquainted with the documents available in their personal file.

The author's personal experience of working with convicts of the category under consideration, analysis of the practice of penitentiary psychologists, as well as experience of developing and implementing methodological support for this work suggests that the conversation should not begin with questions about criminal-legal characteristics of the crime committed. Such questions only lead to an unnecessary loss of time and do not meet objectives of the survey. The purpose of the first conversation during the psychocorrection work is to get a general impression of a particular person, assess his/her current psycho-emotional state, make a forecast of behavior, as well as determine what relates to the strengths and weaknesses of his/her character.

It is more expedient to let convicts speak out themselves (if they are really ready for this and have an urgent need), ask them questions about themselves, their family, previous work, future plans, etc. [16, pp. 436–440].

This removes the accumulated irritation and gives the opportunity to confess (in a non-religious sense) in positive communication and receive, if not approval and sympathy, then at least understanding. It is counterproductive to evaluate what has been told, especially to moralize (narrators can draw conclusions themselves, not being forced to) at this stage of communication. It is better to ask convicts about certain moments, letting them know that they are listened to attentively.

Besides, it makes it possible to assess the socialization level of the convicted person before incarceration, find out positive and negative facts of the nature of relationships with close relatives, degree and possibilities of their support at a difficult moment. This ensures actualization of anti-suicidal factors, formation of the sense of responsibility for persons important to convicts or timely identification of the moments that can provoke destructive behavior.

What is more, information about work activity (education, work experience and skills, standard of living, etc.) with a high degree of reliability allows us to assess adaptation opportunities, level of conflict in relationships with others, potential internal resources, and possible problems of resocialization.

Finally, though convicts are usually reluctant to talk about future plans, this topic activates anti-destructive factors, stimulates thoughts about the future from the very first days of being in a correctional institution, distracts from thoughts about the past, including those related to traumatic circumstances, and the present.

In other words, the psychocorrective effect begins already at the first conversation. It is worth avoiding discussions on political and religious topics, and even more so staying away from argument and dictating anything.

During the conversation, the intellectual level of an interviewee, level of his/her knowledge of the Russian language is taken into account.

There are often situations when the convicted person does not want to communicate with the psychologist. In this case, the following technique is effective. The psychologist observes and describes the current state of the convict as follows: "convict K. refused to fill out forms and answer questions during a preliminary conversation without expressing any motives (or the motive expressed by him/her is indicated). He was sitting on a chair with his head down, shoulders lowered, gaze fixed on one point (the current depressive state is described)" or "during a preliminary conversation convict B. refused to fill out the questionnaire and answer questions, expressing a negative attitude to the survey. The pose was tense, the look was hostile, a half-contemptuous smile (description of the oppositional attitude)". Most likely, watching the psychologist's behavior, the convict will ask, "What are you writing about me? I have not said anything". It is possible to calmly read to the convict what is recorded and ask what he disagrees with, and this is already the beginning of a dialogue.

Psychologists in the process of their work with convicts show a desire to incriminate the latter, find contradiction in the facts with the

immediate voicing of these discrepancies. It is important to understand that the psychologist is not a judge or an investigator. His/her goal is not to establish the truth, but to evaluate the interlocutor's interpretation of certain events, how he seeks to show him/herself, in what ways he/she achieves this, how he/she speaks, what experiences he/she seeks to hide, whether facial expressions and other external markers change at the same time (the process is called "calibration of the internal state"), why he/she does this, etc. In the interview with the psychologist, the convicted person, as a rule, distorts at least two-thirds of the information given, since he/she tries to show him/herself from the best side, defiantly opposes him/herself, seeks to find self-justification for the committed actions, tries in turn to manipulate the specialist and even has fun [9, pp. 585–590]. This is natural, and it makes no sense to discuss anything, often artificially provoked.

At subsequent meetings, already more purposeful, newly arisen questions are clarified, convict's individual participation in the implementation of the psychocorrective work program is discussed (his/her consent is obtained, its essence is explained, etc.), the facilitation process is carried out.

Without asking questions about the crime committed, the psychologist should explain to the convicted person that the professional goals of his/her work are primarily related to the desire to help a person to deal with him/herself, find acceptable explanations for actions, etc. The specialist should emphasize that he/she does not solve client's problems, but, using professional knowledge, he/she can bring the convict closer to understanding a difficult life situation and identify hidden resources that will help him in life. It is unprofessional and illiterate to threaten that a record will be made of the convicted person's refusal to participate in educational work and the corresponding consequences will follow.

When working with persons convicted of extremism and terrorism-related crimes on the religious basis, it is quite effective to involve priests in joint work. At the same time, the psychologist should have a general idea of the religion professed by the convict in order to understand whether his client is really

religious or religion serves only as an external cover to justify improper acts; if the religious aspect is important in convict's life, then is it possible to use positive aspects of religious teaching that will help to realize the fallacy of previous ideas.

The purpose of a conversation concerning religious beliefs cannot be a theological dispute. It is only important for the psychologist to sow doubts about the correctness of the conclusions made by the convict within the framework of a certain religious teaching (its radical interpretation) and make them contemplate on it. The rest belongs to the jurisdiction of the priest.

#### *Conclusion*

Human psychophysiological resources are not unlimited, therefore, a long period of psycho-emotional stress always ends with a period of exhaustion, asthenization (hence some problems of the adaptation period). It is in this state that a person is characterized by increased suggestibility and waits for moral support. Informal leaders from among the convicts, having no psychological education, successfully carry out their "psychological" work, recruiting new arrivals to the institution from the first day.

The sooner a person who finds himself in difficult life circumstances receives a certain amount of sympathy and support and necessary information, the more he/she will feel gratitude and trust in the psychologist. This is the basis of psychological impact for the purpose of both preventing undesirable manifestations, correcting and educating, and manipulative submission to one's influence. This seemingly simple situation is not always clear to the staff of the penitentiary system, as the practice of inspections of territorial bodies of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia shows.

The psychocorrective impact will be effective, if the work is based on the predetermined goal that takes into account the current situation, intellectual level and psycho-emotional state of the convict, as well as preliminary information obtained from various sources (personal file, materials of the previous examination, testing, questionnaires, evaluative statements about the convict from other convicts and employees, convict's reactions to such remarks, etc.).

The purpose and objectives of building initial and subsequent meetings with the person convicted of extremism and terrorism-related crimes, taking into account his/her individual characteristics, should be implemented with the help of the presented algorithm. Besides, it is important to explain the difference in psychological, psychiatric and other types of assistance to convicts in the process of initial psychocorrection. The psychologist should clarify that it is important for religious people to know to what extent psychology conforms to religious norms, show the convicted that the purpose of psychology is to help people get out of difficult situations and, in general, learn to be wiser and live in harmony with themselves and the world around them, and many psychological postulates stem from spiritual teachings.

Personal professional experience of the article author, as well as the experience of interaction with colleagues, indicates that it is the underestimation of the first psychodiagnostic conversation, its formal conduct, as well as the insufficient consideration of personal characteristics of those convicted of terrorism and extremism-related crimes, is a fairly common case in the practice of penitentiary psychologists. There is every reason to believe that the correction of such shortcomings in communication with the category of convicts under consideration will allow the penitentiary psychologist to create a common semantic space with convicts more successfully within the framework of the first communication, as well as in the further process of their correction and re-socialization.

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