



BEYOND THE BASICS: THE EXPANSION OF RNR

WATCP CONFERENCE 2026

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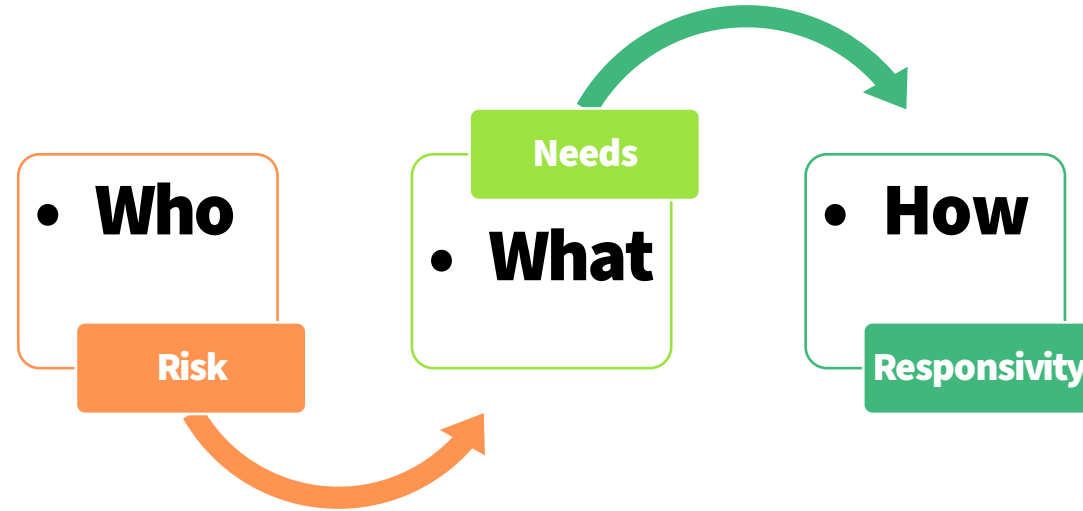


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Jason is a popular speaker at national conferences, he specializes in making behavioral interventions and peer support strategies practical for frontline justice and recovery professionals.

NOT A BASIC RNR TRAINING



- **The challenge isn't awareness – it is implementation and fidelity**
- **Session Focus:**
 - **Critique and Defense of RNR**
 - **Expansion of RNR**
 - **Practical Application**

RNR – DOMINANT BUT DEBATED

- **Globally, RNR remains one the most influential framework**
- **Critiques have been increasing in the academic literature**
 - **Strength and consistency of evidence**
 - **Methodological rigor of studies**
 - **Excessive self-referencing**
 - **Uneven support across principles**
 - **Weak operationalization**
 - **Correlation (Predicative) but not causal or able to explain desistance**
 - **(indent one more level) Not why people have those behaviors/traits**
 - **(same indent as above) Not how to change those targets**
 - **Deficit based**



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Criminal Justice

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An updated evidence synthesis on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model: Umbrella review and commentary


Seena Fazel ^{a,*}, Connie Hurton ^a, Matthias Burghart ^b, Matt DeLisi ^c, Rongqin Yu ^a

Are risk–need–responsivity principles golden? A meta–analysis of randomized controlled trials of community correction programs

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Sources of Mixed Findings

Fidelity

Measurement

Model Reduction

Context Diversity

Why RNR Remains the Standard

Consistency

- 30+ years

Fidelity Improves Outcomes

Predictive

Context Diversity

RNR REMAINS THE STANDARD

Sources of Mixed Findings

Fidelity

Measurement

Model Reduction

Context Diversity

Risk

Needs

Why RNR Remains the Standard

Consistency

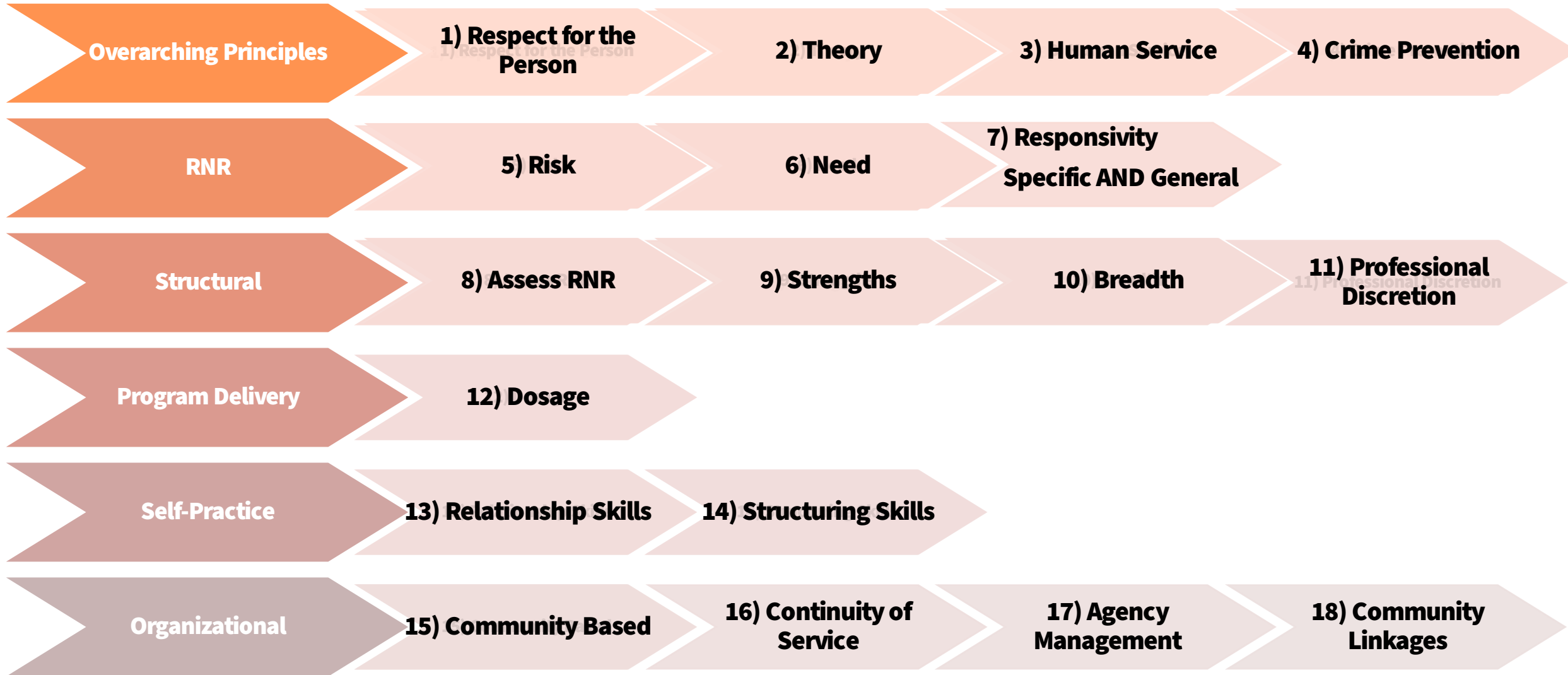
- 30+ years

Fidelity Improves Outcomes

Predictive

Context Diversity

EXPAND, DON'T REDUCE



OVERARCHING: PRINCIPLE 1

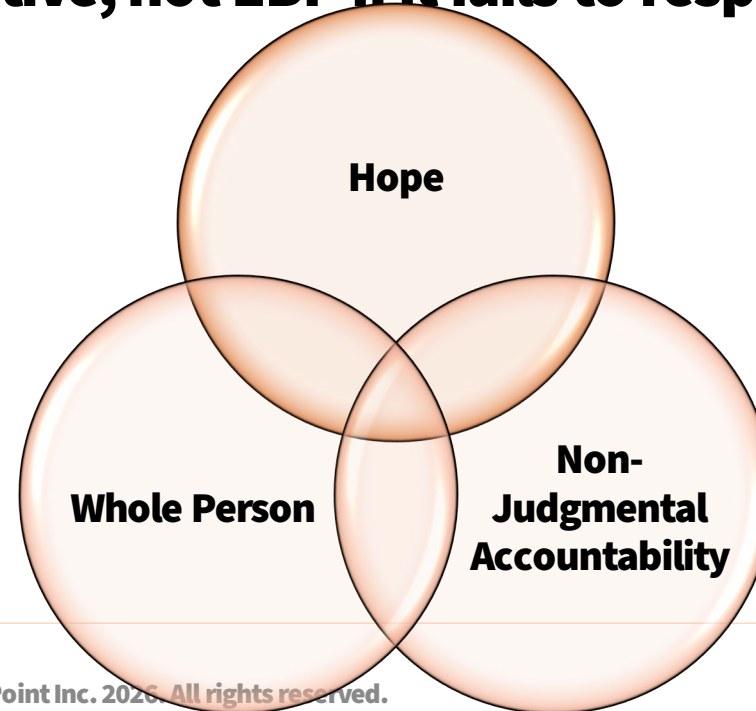

- **1) Respect for the person**
 - **Humane, ethical, lawful, and respectful of autonomy**
 - **Serve the whole person**
 - **Minimal mandatory baseline**
 - **[indent one more level] Even if effective, not EBP if it fails to respect the person**

UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD MEANS I CARE ABOUT YOU, YOU HAVE VALUE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING TO PROVE IT TO ME, AND **NOTHING WILL CHANGE MY MIND.**

IT'S SEEING SOMEBODY AS A WHOLE AND COMPLETE AND WORTHY PERSON STARTING FROM A PLACE WHERE **CARE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE EARNED.** IT'S JUST ASSUMED. EVERYBODY GETS CARE.

YOU'RE ALLOWED TO MESS UP. YOU'RE ALLOWED TO HAVE STRUGGLES, BUT THAT IS NEVER GOING TO INVALIDATE YOUR WORTH, AND IT'S NEVER GOING TO INVALIDATE MY CARE FOR YOU.

ALEX SHEVRIN VENET
THE CULT OF PEDAGOGY PODCAST, EPISODE 214



OVERARCHING: PRINCIPLES 2-4

- **2) Theory**
 - **Practices grounded in empirically supported psychological theory**
 - **EBP = Evidence AND Explanation**

- **3) Human Service**
 - **Must include human services delivery**
 - **[indent] Must go beyond surveillance and sanctions**
 - **Change cannot occur through punishment alone**

- **4) Crime Prevention**
 - **Crime prevention is a systems level goal**
 - **[indent] Requires providing services, access, coordination, and continuity**

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES TAKEAWAY

- **Big Picture**
 - **Everything connects – or nothing sticks**
- **Concrete**
 - **Prioritize procedural justice**
 - **Collaborative comprehensive case plans**
 - **Replace directives with guided problem-solving**
- **Self-assessment questions**
 - **Does this decision reflect our stated model—or is it driven by habit, frustration, or convenience?**
 - **Are we designing conditions for success or reacting to failure?**
 - **If I were in the client’s shoes, would this response: make sense to me, show that I was heard, and give me a path toward success?**

RNR: PRINCIPLES 5-7

- **Not sharing anything new, but giving some reminders:**
 - **Risk Principle**
 - **[indent] Use the right assessment the way it is meant to be used**
 - **[same indent] Determines intensity**
 - **Needs Principle**
 - **[indent] Compliance is not the same as change**
 - **[same indent] Anything that is removed must be replaced**
 - **Responsivity**
 - **[indent] General responsivity is the default, not an option or suggestion**
 - **[same indent] Not about barriers, it's about maximizing success**
 - **[same indent] Not a description nor an excuse. It is about adaptation, accommodation, and customization.**

RNR TAKEAWAY

- **Big Picture**
 - **Don't take it for granted, familiarity is not fidelity**
 - **Activity is not an intervention**
- **Concrete**
 - **Track adherence across all aspects of the program**
- **Self-assessment questions**
 - **Can I explain how each decision/policy is based in Risk-Need-Responsivity?**
 - **Are we implementing RNR as designed—or adapting it based on habit, preference, or convenience?**
 - **Are outcomes a reflection of system design—or individual staff effort?**

STRUCTURAL: PRINCIPLES 8-9

- **Assess RNR**
 - **Decisions are based on validated assessment instruments**
 - **[indent] Disciplined and directed decision-making**
 - **[double indent] Allocation, targeting, delivery, sequencing**
 - **[indent] The purpose of assessment is to calibrate services not to label people**

- **Strengths**
 - **Leverage strengths for success**
 - **Strengths are the answer to deficits**
 - **Build and affirm new strengths**
 - **Strengths determine longevity of change**

STRUCTURAL: PRINCIPLES 10-11

- **10) Breadth**
 - **Breadth scales with risk**
 - **Criminogenic needs are like an “anti-social eco system”**
 - **[indent] Must address the “driver” AND as many associated needs as possible**
 - **Use to identify sequencing of interventions**

- **Professional Discretion**
 - **Professional discretion must be structured and bounded**
 - **Only after risk and needs have been determined**
 - **Must be documented, based on evidence, and explainable**
 - **Less than 10%**

STRUCTURE TAKEAWAY

- **Big Picture**
 - **Assessments are the foundation of the structure**
 - **Everything else builds on that foundation**
- **Concrete**
 - **Track rates and reasons for overrides**
 - **Collaborative comprehensive case plan**
 - **The intervention choices and sequence are client specific not program specific**
- **Self-assessment questions**
 - **Are strengths just listed in the case plan or are they being used?**
 - **Can we trace this decision back to the assessment data?**
 - **Is the plan based on assessed individual needs or program needs?**

PROGRAM DELIVERY: PRINCIPLE 12

- **12) Dosage**
 - **Based on risk level**
 - **What counts?**
 - **[indent] Only counts time that is spent on a targeted criminogenic need of the individual**
 - **[indent] Must evidence based**
 - **[indent] Must meet general and specific responsivity**
 - **[indent] Must have active components**
 - **What doesn't count?**
 - **[indent] Routine or procedural meetings**
 - **[indent] Passive presence or non-attendance.**
 - **What might count?**
 - **[indent] Secondary needs or protective factors AFTER primary criminogenic needs addressed**

PROGRAM DELIVERY TAKEAWAY

- **Big Picture**
 - **Dosage drives change only when it is targeted, structured, evidence-based, and delivered with fidelity.**
- **Concrete**
 - **Over-programming can increase recidivism time so every minute matters***
 - **Design contacts at all levels around evidence-based interventions**
- **Self-assessment questions**
 - **Could an observer identify which criminogenic need was the focus of this contact?**
 - **What was the specific intervention used and does that meet dosage standards?**
 - **Are we counting what is easy or what matters?**

SELF-PRACTICES: PRINCIPLE 13-14

- **13) Relationship Skills**

- **Working alliance is what matters**

Empathy

Active Listening

Transparency

Consistency

Respect

Collaborative

Authentic

Purposeful

- **Conversational style is better than conformity or authoritarian style**

- **14) Structuring Skills**

- **Deliberate and predictable structure for interactions and interventions**

- **Skills must be explicitly taught and practiced, not assumed**

- **[indent] This means the inclusion of structured roleplay to teach and practice skills**

SELF-PRACTICE TAKEAWAY

- **Big Picture**
 - **Alliance engages, but practice changes**
- **Concrete**
 - **Over-programming can increase recidivism time so every minute matters***
 - **Design contacts at all levels around evidence-based interventions**
- **Self-assessment questions**
 - **Is what I'm doing increasing engagement or resistance?**
 - **From their perspective would they feel I am working with them or acting on them?**
 - **When was the skill modeled and practiced not just discussed?**
 - **From the client's point of view, does the program feel predictable or inconsistent?**

ORGANIZATION: PRINCIPLES 15-18

- **15) Community Based**
 - **Interventions should be delivered in the least restrictive setting**
 - **Allows change to be practiced and sustained in the environment where risk is encountered**
- **16) Continuity of Service**
 - **Alignment of RNR principles across settings and phases of care**
 - **Prevent interruption, dilution, reset**
 - **Continual reinforcement**
- **17) Agency Management**
 - **Policies, procedures, supervision, training and QA all reinforce EBP**
 - **Fidelity is a function of organizational culture not only staff dependent**
- **18) Community Linkages**
 - **Intentional, structured connections to external services and resources**

ORGANIZATIONAL TAKEAWAY

- **Big Picture**
 - **Outcomes are a function of system design, not individual effort**
- **Concrete**
 - **Internal fidelity AND external integration.**
 - **Intentionality behind each policy, procedure, and decision.**
- **Self-assessment questions**
 - **Is fidelity embedded in our program or is it dependent on individuals?**
 - **Are we focused on progress in the program or sustained change in the community?**
 - **Are we strengthening their community support system or substituting for them?**
 - **Are we acting in coordination with the community or as a parallel system?**

The RNR Ecosystem

RNR is not an acronym, it's an eco-system.

What does this mean to you?

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WATCP 2026 BEYOND THE BASICS:
The Expansion of RNR



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