

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Using the Criminal Court Assessment Tool

### Overview Information

The **Criminal Court Assessment Tool** (CCAT) is one of several tools available to conduct Risk-Need-Responsivity assessments. Attributes unique to the CCAT include:

- Developed by the Center for Justice Innovation
- Free and non-proprietary
- 10 administrative questions, 25 assessment questions
- Does not require clinical or legal expertise to administer—designed to be administered by case managers, probation, and pretrial services workers
- Produces a “score” by highlighting both a risk category and needs flags
- Available in English and Spanish
- To administer the CCAT, staff must complete all of the free training modules, which are available online in the Center’s [CCAT Training Series](#)

**Defining Risk** under Risk-Need-Responsivity theory is strictly limited to assessing the likelihood that a person will be arrested again on a new charge. It is

not used to determine a participant’s bail amount or to perfectly predict a participant’s future behavior. It is a factor that informs the services that will be recommended to an individual participant, and at what intensity.

- **Risk:** Determine *how much treatment* is appropriate
- **Need:** Determine the *type of treatment* most appropriate (e.g., housing, substance use counseling, mental health services, etc.)
- **Responsivity:** Determine *how to deliver treatment* appropriately
- Make treatment responsive to individual life situation and to cognitive and emotional styles/abilities

### Response Matrix

- Assessed risk level, in tandem with the level of a participant’s lead offense, should be used in conjunction with a Response Matrix (see below) to determine an equitable and proportionate length of program participation and number of sessions/hours of programming to complete before graduation from community court

- See the [Risk-Need Responsivity: Response Recommendations for Community Courts](#) publication for more information

## Example of a Response Matrix

RISK LEVEL	LOWEST LEVEL OFFENSE 0-2 months	MEDIUM LEVEL OFFENSE 2-4 months	HIGHEST LEVEL OFFENSE 4-6 months
Low Risk	Voluntary services	1 session	3 sessions
Moderate Risk	1 session	3 sessions	5 sessions
Moderate-High Risk	2 sessions	4 sessions	6 sessions
High Risk	3 sessions	5 sessions	7 sessions

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What level of education is required?

To conduct a CCAT assessment, no specialized education is required, but you are required to complete all of the free training modules in the Center’s CCAT Training Series.

### What about juvenile cases?

The CCAT is not for use on a juvenile population. Even for adult participants, juvenile cases may still be a question when considering a participant’s prior offenses. Only cases charged as adult criminal cases court as prior offenses for purposes of the CCAT.

### What if we aren’t sure how to score something?

In all situations, the scorer should err on the side of being less punitive and adding less points to a participant’s risk score. If the same issues of ambiguity come up again and again, (1) create a policy that errs on the side of being less punitive, and (2) write down and use that policy for all staff conducting CCAT assessments.

### What about bail?

The CCAT is *never* to be used to determine bail or release from custody decisions.

### What about local validation?

The Center for Justice Innovation strongly encourages sites using the CCAT or considering use of the CCAT to first conduct a local validation with a research partner to ensure that the CCAT is best capturing your local policies and nuances and that it is producing fair outcomes.

### What about automating the CCAT?

Several jurisdictions have worked with their IT department to create an internal digitized version of the CCAT. This is a great idea because it can eliminate any errors in score calculations and it can also serve as a way to automatically store score data for future analysis. However, take special care that the data is secure.

### **Can the CCAT questions be self-reported by participants in advance?**

No. It may be tempting to create an app or a survey to give participants, however, the CCAT is designed to be used in conjunction with both (1) an interview, and (2) the participant's verified criminal record. A significant reason to give the CCAT in an in-person interview format is to informally assess their affect and other needs that may be visible to the interviewer, but not immediately reflected in the CCAT questions. The interview is also the court's first step towards establishing trust and rapport with a participant, which is essential to a court that values *community* and *engagement*.

### **Why do we need a participant's criminal record?**

In order for a person's score to be assessed accurately, it is inappropriate to rely solely on their memory when it comes to prior offenses. Use a verified criminal report for each participant.

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#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

To learn more about implementing the Criminal Court Assessment Tool and access training materials, please email [CJTTA@innovatingjustice.org](mailto:CJTTA@innovatingjustice.org).

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