

# Custody and Covid-19

As you will have experienced, Covid-19 has had a impact on all families, communities and workplaces. All have in someway faced increased anxiety, uncertainty and change over this time. This short document considers the potential impact of Covid-19 on those young people in custody and how to keep this in mind whilst supporting resettlement.

The secure estate have responded in differing ways, some of which include:

- Stopping visitations from family and external professionals
- Changes in the education provision (some centres stopped educational sessions others provided workbooks)
- Increased welfare checks and support
- Increased access to TV
- Limited access to fresh air
- Increased isolation in rooms
- Possible changing in staffing and staffing numbers

These changes will have been helpful for some and difficult for others. **Each person is different.**

Imagine if your main source of information on what's happening in the outside world is the news, what picture might you create? What picture do those in custody have?

## Potential impacts on wellbeing

Within centres there will have been a number of sudden changes and feeling of uncertainty and anxiety will have been raised. It is likely that young people experienced some or all of the following:

- ◆ Staff may have felt anxious about their own safety
- ◆ Young people may feel worried about family and friends
- ◆ Bereavement
- ◆ Loss of opportunities
- ◆ Increased anxiety
- ◆ Impact of isolation

Young people with a history of early trauma will be quick to sense anxiety in others. This can make them alert for danger as they mirror the anxiety.

Furthermore their access to positive relationships or coping strategies may have been restricted.

Typically isolation leads to a decline in wellbeing. Thus why solitary confinement was used as a punishment.



Some recent reports suggest that in YOIs some young peoples wellbeing has improved in isolation. Why might that be?

## Supporting young people who have been detained

In order to help tailor support to individuals so we can give them the best possible chance at life, we need to develop a picture of the young person's strengths as well as recognise what situations might be difficult for them. Think about their life growing up as well as their time in custody. It will also be important to think about what experiences they have had as a family.

How did they learn to survive through trauma and challenges?

Do we see them using the same strategies now?

What are the downsides of these strategies?

Support should think about ways to minimise triggers to distress and to provide multiple opportunities to develop new coping strategies.

### Talking about and planning for resettlement (with a Covid-19 flavour)

Be guided by the young person. Below are ideas of different ways we could ask questions. We've used Covid-related examples but these ideas can be used in all contexts.

*N.B. Please consider the language and communication needs of your young person and adapt accordingly if in doubt seek a consultation with SaLT.*

#### Curious questions

"What has it been like for you over the last few days/month in custody?"

"How much have you been following what's been happening with Covid?"

"A lot of people have been worried about what this means for them and their family — did you notice any worries like this?"

#### Planning/coping questions

How would you know if you were struggling?

How would I know if you were struggling?

What could we try that might help?

Are there any other people that it would be helpful to involve?

#### Normalising

A lot of the young people I've been speaking to have said....

It's been really difficult at home with my children do you think your dad's been feeling like that?

#### Wondering Statements

These don't necessarily need an answer it can be a bit like talking out loud.

"so you've had lots of time on your own whilst in custody...."

...You said you've found this helpful. I guess when you're back at home with Mum and your siblings it might be harder to have time on your own. I wonder how you might find your own space.

...You said you were looking forward to spending time with your friends, I wonder if that might be a bit of a shock to your system, often it takes us time to get back into the swing of things.

Remember the core elements of a trauma informed relationship and work to include them in every interaction.

**Safety, Trust, Choice, Collaboration and Empowerment**

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## Typical responses to resettlement (based on research by Beyond Custody)

It takes time to adjust to life outside custody this is often referred to as reorientation.

Young people report a period of reorientation immediately following release. Many find this period difficult and describe life initially **feeling strange** and weird. Many young people can feel surprised by these feelings as they had focused on release as being a positive. This period of reorientation tends to be accompanied by an **increase in anxiety and distress**.

Some young people react to the **disorientation** by becoming quiet and **withdrawn**. They may not want to talk to anyone or leave their home or bedroom. This can be exacerbated by a **fear** of getting back into trouble if they leave the house and being returned to custody. The outside may also feel unsafe, with the young person feeling scared of others.



Maybe because of the increased anxiety, sensory stimulation or increased activity many young people describe increased feelings of **tiredness**. They may find it initially hard to get back to the activity levels they had before custody.

It is likely that friends and family may also struggle with increased anxiety and struggles to adjust as their child/sibling/friend returns.

The changes required to transition from custody to the community can not be underestimated. Children can feel quickly **overwhelmed**, lost and confused. Things that were once familiar seem unfamiliar. Finding that some things have inevitably changed makes reorientation particularly hard. All relationships need to be rebuilt and renegotiated. Some people in the young persons life might want to know lots about their experiences in custody others will want to pretend its never happened. Both types of reaction can be difficult for the young person to know how to respond to.

### Life is never easy!

So the evidence shows us that resettlement will be tricky for all young people. However whilst in custody and while planning for resettlement many young people will struggle to hear or understand this, preferring to hold tightly to their imagined return. Our role is to let them know that their return might be difficult and understand that they might not believe us right now and that that's ok but as we continue to build our relationship our hope is that if things turn out to be tricky or not how the young person hoped, then they feel safe to talk to us about it.

We use our understanding of the young person to support them to gradually reorient to their new life. A support package should be flexible to the changing needs of the young person

Visit Beyond custody ([beyondyouthcustody.net](http://beyondyouthcustody.net)) for more information including the following reports

- Developing trauma-informed resettlement for Young custody leavers
- Custody to community

If you would like more information or support in this area, why not contact the Youth Justice Psychology Team to book in a consultation on:

[YJPsychology@nottshc.nhs.uk](mailto:YJPsychology@nottshc.nhs.uk)



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