

Solitary Confinement of Juvenile Offenders

Approved by Council, April 2012

To be reviewed by June 2017

By the Juvenile Justice Reform Committee

Solitary confinement is defined as the placement of an incarcerated individual in a locked room or cell with minimal or no contact with people other than staff of the correctional facility. It is used as a form of discipline or punishment.

The potential psychiatric consequences of prolonged solitary confinement are well recognized and include depression, anxiety and psychosis¹. Due to their developmental vulnerability, juvenile offenders are at particular risk of such adverse reactions². Furthermore, the majority of suicides in juvenile correctional facilities occur when the individual is isolated or in solitary confinement.

Solitary confinement should be distinguished from brief interventic "time out," which may be used as a component of a behavioral treat program in facilities serving children and/or adolescents, or seclusion, which is a short term emergency procedure, the use of which is governed by federal, state and local laws and subject to regulations developed by the Joint Commission, CARF and supported by the National Commission of Correctional Healthcare (NCHHC), the American Correctional Association (ACA) and other accrediting entities.

The Joint Commission states that seclusion should only be used for the least amount of time possible for the immediate physical protection of an individual, in situations where less restrictive interventions have proven ineffective. The Joint Commission specifically prohibits the use of seclusion "as a means of coercion, discipline, convenience or staff retaliation." A lack of



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resources should never be a rationale for solitary confinement.

The United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty establish minimum standards for the protection of juveniles in correctional facilities. The UN resolution was approved by the General Assembly in December, 1990, and supported by the US. They specifically prohibit the solitary confinement of juvenile offenders. Section 67 of the Rules states:

"All disciplinary measures constituting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment shall be strictly prohibited, including corporal punishment, placement in a dark cell, closed or solitary confinement or any other punishment that may compromise the physical or mental health of the juvenile concerned." In this situation, cruel and unusual punishment would be considered an 8th Amendment violation of our constitution³.

Measurements to avoid confinement, including appropriate behavioral plans and other interventions should be implemented⁴.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry concurs with the UN position and opposes the use of solitary confinement in correctional facilities for juveniles. In addition, any youth that is confined for more than 24 hours must be evaluated by a mental health professional, such as a child and adolescent psychiatrist when one is available.

References:

1. Grassian, Stuart. "Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement." *Journal of Law and Policy*. (2006): 325-383.
2. Mitchell, Jeff, M.D. & Varley, Christopher, M.D. "Isolation and Restraint in Juvenile Correctional Facilities." *J.Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*, 29:2, March 1990.
3. Vasiliades, Elizabeth. "Solitary Confinement and International Human Rights: Why the U.S. Prison System Fails Global Standards." *American University International Law Review* 21, no. 1 (2005): 71-99.
4. Sedlak, Andrea, McPherson, Carla, *Conditions of Confinement*, OJJDP, May 2010.