

LESS SAFE: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Research shows that solitary confinement is not effective at addressing prison violence and may contribute to increased recidivism.



Research funded by the U.S. Department of Justice found that “experiencing [short-term solitary confinement] during incarceration is associated with a 7 percent increase in the likelihood of recidivism, and experiencing [extended solitary confinement] during incarceration is associated with a 14 percent increase in the likelihood of recidivism.”¹ Another study found that “neither the experience of [solitary confinement], nor the number of days spent in [solitary]” reduced the likelihood of future misconduct.²



Data analysis on the impact of solitary confinement found that solitary confinement did not reduce recidivism in the community but that direct release from solitary to the community increased recidivism.³ **The head of state prisons notes that “research consistently shows that solitary confinement as a tool does not decrease institutional misconduct or violence, including assaults on staff.”⁴**

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT



RECIDIVISM

MORE SAFE: REDUCING SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Corrections agencies that have reduced and reformed solitary confinement saw a decrease in violence—both between incarcerated people and correctional officers and among those incarcerated. After comparing rates of violence in Colorado, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, and Ohio before and after reductions in solitary populations, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported in 2014, “where the use of administrative segregation has been reduced... there has been no adverse impact on institutional safety.”⁵

North
Dakota

State prisons reduced solitary confinement by almost 75 percent, with violence largely decreasing. **“Both incarcerated persons and staff members reported improvements in their health and well-being, enhanced interactions with one another, and less exposure to violence following the reforms.”⁶**

Maine

The head of the prison system said that **reductions in solitary confinement led to “substantial reductions in violence**, reductions in use of force, reductions in use of chemicals, reductions in use of restraint chairs, reductions in inmates cutting [themselves] up...” Self-cutting went from being a weekly incidence to almost never occurring.⁷

MORE SAFE: THE ALTERNATIVES TO SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Programs and approaches used as alternatives to solitary confinement include:

San Francisco: The Resolve to Stop Violence Project (RSVP) in San Francisco jails involves full days of out-of-cell group programming and engagement for people convicted of assault, sexual violence, and other violent acts and people repeatedly convicted of “heinous crimes.”⁸ The program was associated with large reductions in violent incidents, as well as decreased jail time and rearrests for violent crimes.

New York City: The Clinical Alternative to Punitive Segregation (CAPS) at Rikers Island responds to infractions with therapeutic approaches rather than punitive ones or isolation, focused on people with mental health diagnoses. The program provides full days out of cell coupled with treatment and has shown reductions in violence and self-injury.⁹

North Dakota: Statewide, prisons reduced solitary confinement by limiting its use (only for serious violence that resulted in injury); enhancing mental health screenings and placement decisions; implementing positive behavior-based interventions; using alternative treatment units with enhanced out-of-cell time; and changing staffing credentials, training, and roles.¹⁰

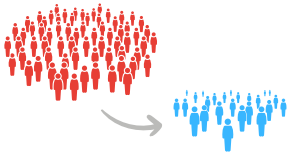
New York state: The Merle Cooper program was the opposite of solitary while keeping some people separate from the general population—with full days out of cell, extensive programming, and the ability to earn the right not to be locked in at night. It had positive outcomes on violence and was praised by staff, administrators, and participants.¹¹

Washington state: As part of a pledge to reduce solitary confinement by 90 percent, corrections leaders plan to improve staff training and staffing ratios, expand access to programming for all people in prison with programming targeted to those at risk of placement in restrictive housing, and expand more opportunities for out-of-cell time in restrictive housing areas.¹² **Washington state’s head of corrections says they want the system to “develop a nation-leading standard for the use of solitary confinement” directed at reducing “recidivism by setting up individuals for a greater chance of success when they are released.”**

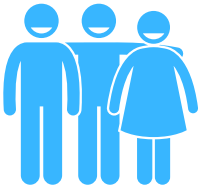


REFORMING SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AS PART OF OVERALL SYSTEMS CHANGE

In addition to specific programs or initiatives, correction systems can reduce solitary confinement when they:



Reduce the incarcerated population: A 2007 study found that individuals with histories of violent behavior were more likely to commit violent acts when housed in an overcrowded facility.¹³



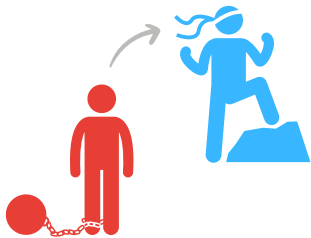
Increase visitation: A 2012 study found that individuals who were visited while incarcerated were less likely to commit both high and low-level misconduct.¹⁴ Correctional departments can disrupt violence by fostering meaningful human connections and systems of support.



Increase the use of positive incentives: Reward systems in prison are used as an alternative to punitive methods of prison management. Current research shows that these systems are “effective in advancing mental health among mentally ill participants, decreasing violent behavior among high-risk participants, increasing academic achievement, and reducing problem behavior among young adults.”¹⁵



Increase out-of-cell time to various environments: A study of reforms that led to reductions in solitary confinement in Oregon found that increasing out-of-cell time and programming for people in solitary, including access to the outdoors, decreases violence against staff and self-injury and improves staff mental health and well-being.¹⁶



Grow autonomy for people who are incarcerated: As opposed to the “control model” that dominates U.S. corrections, some European prisons rely on a “responsibility model” that gives incarcerated people greater freedom and responsibility, while prison staff enact the minimum amount of control required to keep order. In a Norwegian prison that uses this model, violent behaviors and threats are extremely rare.¹⁷ Oregon has drawn upon this approach in its efforts to reduce solitary confinement, with documented success.¹⁸



Improve training: Like a number of other places, North Dakota’s reforms to reduce the use of solitary confinement included changing correctional officer training and culture.¹⁹

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