

# Positive Relationships, Better Outcomes

**A guide for staff in secure settings**

This guide, produced by NCB, provides practical advice and ideas about how to build positive relationships between staff and young people in secure settings. It draws directly on the views and ideas of young people who have been resident in secure settings.

The guide was written by Rachel Pope and edited by Laura Smith for NCB. We would like to thank Barnardo's Advocacy Service for undertaking the consultations, all the young people that took part and the staff at HMYOI Hindley who made it possible.

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**Advice and practical tips**

**from young people**



# Introduction

## Relationships between staff and the young people they work with matter.

They matter because they have an impact on a young person's behaviour and feelings, on the behaviour and feelings of staff members, and on the overall ethos and atmosphere of the institution. They can even have an impact on young people's well-being and progress while the young person is within a secure setting.

**Among the factors most likely to have a beneficial impact on a young person's behaviour in a secure setting are:**

- ◆ a prosocial ethos fostered by good relationships between staff and young people, and good models of behaviour
- ◆ opportunities to take responsibility, exercise personal autonomy and make decisions.<sup>1</sup>

It can feel really difficult to build good relationships if resources are stretched, if the facility is understaffed or if the behaviour of the young people is challenging or even violent.

Building a positive ethos is a complex task which needs senior management commitment and requires appropriate time and resources, and sometimes specialist input. The young people you work with are likely to have had poor

relationships with adults and authority figures in the past. Being in a new environment, away from family and friends, can lead them to test boundaries and limits – including yours.

This guide cannot and does not try to address all of these issues. What it does do is try to convey – in the words of young people – how negative relationships affect them, and some simple things that can be tried to help build the fundamentals of a good relationship.

The guide assumes that your institution is already putting into practice the Code of Practice on Managing Behaviour in Secure Settings (see back page). It is designed to complement the Youth Justice Board's Juvenile Awareness Staff Programme (JASP). JASP, and a link to this guide, are to be made available via the YJB's Youth Justice Interactive Learning Space at [www.yjils.org.uk](http://www.yjils.org.uk).

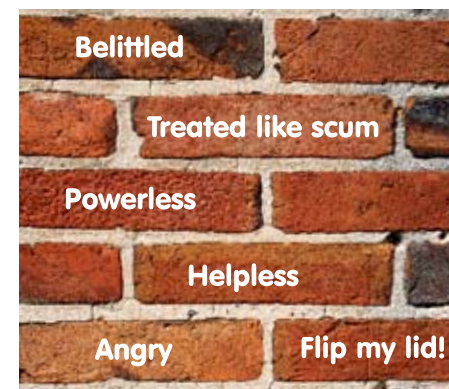
The guide draws directly on the views and ideas of young people who have been resident in secure settings. They were gathered through a project involving HMYOI Hindley and Barnardo's Advocacy Service. We would like to thank the young people for their willingness to take part in this project, as well as the staff who made it possible. We hope you find it useful.

# A young person's perspective

We asked a group of young people to think about the things that can create a barrier to effective relationships. They said, if prison staff:

- 'Think that they are better than us'
- 'Don't give us enough time'
- 'Abuse their power'
- 'Have different rules for different young people'
- 'Wear a uniform that creates a wall'
- 'Laugh at us when an incident happens'
- 'Wind us up using personal comments'
- 'Are too strict'
- 'Act in the same way as past workers who we have had a bad experience with'
- 'Don't know enough about our personal circumstances'

## This is how we feel...



Young people found it helpful to represent these feelings as a 'wall' which prevents effective communication between young people in custody and adults.

## What's your perspective?

It's difficult to build a good relationship without acknowledging how you feel too.

Before turning the page, imagine what the 'bricks' would be for you in the wall. Think about how you feel when you've had a difficult day, when young people don't respond to you, however hard you try, and when you feel like you're being pulled in five different directions at once.

Also think about the strategies you use when you feel like this, and which are most effective.

<sup>1</sup>Rutter M, Giller H, and Hagell A (1998) *Antisocial Behaviour by Young People*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# 10 top tips for turning the negatives into positives

Young people were asked what would help to improve relationships between themselves and staff. Many of their answers related to things that staff can do.

## 1. Remember we are individuals

Say hello to us when you see us, call us by our names and try and find out a bit about us.

This means active listening, in other words, making time to be available and being interested in what we are saying.

## 2. Be good at listening

## 3. Be reliable

If you say you will do something for us, please remember to do it.

## 4. Be caring and helpful

Ask how we are without waiting for us to tell you that something might be wrong; and if possible try and recognise the signs that suggest we might need help.

We really respond to praise, but it needs to be given out fairly.

## 5. Recognise and reward things that are done well

## 6. Have a sense of humour

It's good to be able to give and take a joke.

## 7. Understand where we are coming from

People who are closer in age to us seem more on our level, but it's also about understanding a bit about what makes us tick and how to manage difficult situations.

## 8. Be trustworthy and honest

No gossiping about us to other staff.

## 9. Be patient

We know that's not easy sometimes, but it helps to keep the situation calm.

Don't swear to try and get in with us, it doesn't work!

## 10. Be polite and respectful

Ever wondered what the perfect staff member looks like to a young person (not counting yourself of course)?

# Meet the ideal worker

as created by young people:



organised

reflects our diversity

chilled

recognises achievements

not swearing

happy

dressed casually

good listener

good at relating to people

## A note on the importance of speech, language and communication

As many as 60 per cent of young people in the youth justice system may have communication needs. This isn't something that was mentioned by the young people we spoke to – for obvious reasons. But it's a critical issue if you are trying to build rapport or encourage positive behaviour. The Communication Trust's guide *Sentence Trouble* has some useful hints on how to identify if someone has communication needs, and how to support them if they do, for example by always using their name at the start of a conversation, by using simpler language, by checking things back with them and by seeking their views on what would help. See the back page to find out how to get a copy of *Sentence Trouble*.

# Ideas from young people for everyday practice

## 1. Say hello and smile

'He calls me by my name and says hello whenever we see him.'

## 2. Think about what it feels like from the young person's perspective

'The governor showed he understood my feelings of being new here.'

## 3. Ask questions and be interested

'When I came in they showed interest in my tattoos so I could relate to some officers and this made us talk, and helped me get to know them.'

'The first time my personal officer introduced himself he also gave me a sanction and I never really trusted him after that.'

## 4. If you are a personal officer, think about how you can get this important relationship off to a good start

'As soon as a new lad shows signs that he might have a bit of an attitude, staff might be less enthusiastic to try and build the relationship.'

## 5. Keep firm boundaries if someone new starts challenging you - but don't let it stop you from trying to build a relationship

## 6. Where possible, try to explain why you need to respond in particular ways in particular situations

'There are ways of saying no and the reasons why we can't do something or have something - not just saying no.'

## 7. If you think you might forget something that you have said you would do, carry a notebook and ask the young person if it's OK for you to jot it down as a reminder to yourself

'We get on best with officers who do what they say they are going to do to help you rather than saying they'll do something then not getting back to you.'

'Officers sometimes carry things on... when something is resolved or we are punished, that should be the end of it.'

## 8. Once a matter is resolved, move on and put it behind you

Please now take a moment to reflect on the young people's views and ideas, and think about how they could help you to build positive relationships with the young people you work with.

I can put the following ideas into practice easily...

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I might need support or access to resources to put these ideas into practice...

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These are some ideas of my own...

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And remember, you can make a big difference to a young person's life. One young person recalls the big impact that a positive relationship with one staff member has had:

**'It has made me think about doing good things instead of getting into trouble. And I want my mum to think of me doing good things instead of bad things.'**

## Find out more

### [www.ncb.org.uk/healthyoutlooks](http://www.ncb.org.uk/healthyoutlooks)

A range of resources for practitioners working with vulnerable young people in the secure estate and other settings. Includes *Delivering Every Child Matters in Secure Settings: A practical toolkit for improving the health and well-being of young people*, which contains information and practical ideas for staff.

### [www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/common-core](http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/common-core)

The common core of skills and knowledge sets out the basic skills and knowledge that everyone who works with children and young people is expected to have. The common core is currently being refreshed and covers six key areas:

- ◆ effective communication and engagement
- ◆ child and young person development
- ◆ safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child or young person
- ◆ supporting transitions
- ◆ multi-agency and integrated working
- ◆ information sharing.

### [www.sentencetrouble.info](http://www.sentencetrouble.info)

An online resource developed by the Communication Trust in response to the fact that at least 60 per cent of young people in the youth justice system have communication needs. The site can enable you to find out what communication needs are; get advice; download resources, including the detailed guide; and share information and ideas.

### [www.yjb.gov.uk/publications](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/publications)

Download the YJB's *Code of Practice for Managing the Behaviour of Children and Young People in the Secure Estate*, which sets out a framework and identifies the essential components and the underlying principles of effective practice, including the expectation of good behaviour and the focus on recognition and reward.