



STOP SOLITARY

Ending the Solitary Confinement of Youth
in Juvenile Detention and Correctional Facilities

Corresponding with Youth About Solitary Confinement

An effective *Stop Solitary* campaign should seek to show that young people in the custody of your state or community juvenile justice system are subjected to solitary confinement and describe what solitary confinement is like for them—using personal stories. One effective way to gather this information is by corresponding with young people in juvenile justice facilities. You can identify youth in juvenile justice facilities by reaching out to advocates, community groups, family members, and public defenders. It is particularly important to work with attorneys when young people are represented or have pending delinquency, criminal, or civil cases. The following is a template letter and survey you can send an individual (directly or through his or her attorney or other representative) to find out more about their experience in solitary confinement.

Dear [NAME],

I hope this letter finds you well. I am contacting you because [*describe how you got their name and information*].

My name is [X] and I am with [*X organization with X purpose*]. We are concerned that juvenile detention and correctional facilities in [State] often put youth in isolation or solitary confinement either for safety, as punishment, or for other reasons.

I understand that you may have been held in room confinement, solitary confinement, or some other form of isolation—this means locked for more than 22 hours a day by yourself in a cell or elsewhere with limited or no human contact, programs, or other activities. If this is true, I hope you will share your experience with us, although I know these things may be difficult to think about and write about.

[*Organization's Name*] is collecting stories from youth about their experiences in solitary confinement because we are going to [write a report/talk to legislators/talk to journalists] about this issue. We want to include the stories of people like you so our leaders and the public can better understand what happens to youth in the juvenile system. We will use the stories of people who have been impacted by solitary confinement to advocate for change. If you are willing to write to us about your experience, we will not publish your name or information that could identify you.

Note, however, that officials at many juvenile justice facilities can read and record correspondence to and from incarcerated youth.

Please also note that we are unable to provide legal aid or other assistance in individual situations [*if you work at an organization that does provide legal aid, it is important to distinguish between correspondence that may lead to representation—and therefore cause certain confidentiality obligations to attach—and research for the purposes of legal advocacy*].

UNFORTUNATELY, OUR ORGANIZATION IS UNABLE TO ASSIST ON YOUR DELINQUENCY OR CRIMINAL CASE(S). Our advocacy on this issue as relates to you only addresses the conditions of your confinement, not the reason for your sentence. Please do not include information about your case in our correspondence, and please do not mail us documents that you need returned.

In this letter I have included a list of questions below for you to consider—please feel free to share additional thoughts or comments about the solitary confinement of youth in juvenile facilities. You can share my contact information and the questions with anyone who you think would have information that would help this investigation.

Thank you for your time and for thinking about writing to me about your experience.

Sincerely,
[X]

Questions for you to consider answering:

[You should either space these questions like a survey, with lines for responses, or include extra sheets of paper for the individual to use to provide their responses. You should also include a self-addressed stamped envelope for the response, if doing so is permitted by the facility.]

Today's date: _____

Biographical information:

1. What is your full name? Do you have a nickname or do you go by another name?
2. How old are you? What is your date of birth?
3. How old were you at the time of the crime for which you are incarcerated?
4. How old were you when you were held in detention before trial or adjudication? What were the dates you entered and left detention?
5. How old were you when you were adjudicated? What was the date?
6. How old were you when you were transferred to a juvenile justice facility? What was the date?

About your time in a juvenile justice facility/place of detention (if you were held in solitary confinement in more than one facility, please answer these questions for one experience and then answer them again for the other):

7. Were you placed in solitary confinement while you were in a juvenile justice facility? What did the cell or room look like? Did you have a cell mate?
8. Did you have water and hygiene supplies while in isolation/room confinement/solitary confinement?
9. Did you have a toilet in your isolation/room confinement room/cell? If you did not have a toilet, how did you go to the bathroom?
10. What were you told when you were placed in isolation?
11. Were you placed in solitary confinement as a punishment for your actions?
12. Were you placed in solitary confinement to protect you because of your age, size, or another characteristic?
13. Were you placed in solitary confinement for a medical or mental health purpose or for suicide watch?
14. Were you placed in solitary confinement because you asked to be in isolation?
15. How long were you held in solitary confinement each time? How much total time did you spend in solitary confinement? Can you give dates?

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16. How did being in solitary confinement make you feel? Describe your feelings.

17. How much time, each day or each week, were you allowed out of your cell or room? What would you do while you were out (shower, exercise, use the phone, have visits, etc.)?
18. While you were in solitary confinement, were you able to access mental health services/programming? Were they provided in your room or outside your room? Describe them.
19. While you were in solitary confinement, were you able to access education services/programming? Were they provided in your room or outside your room? Describe them.
20. Did being in isolation impact or change you? Describe what you mean.
21. How would you describe the overall experience of being in solitary confinement? What would you tell another person about what you went through?
22. What do you think about the use of solitary confinement by juvenile justice officials? Do you think there are alternatives that achieve the same purpose? If so, what are they?
23. Would you do anything differently if you were in charge of the facility? What would it be?
24. What advice would you give to a youth who was about to be placed in solitary confinement?
25. Do you know anyone else who was placed in solitary confinement? What is their name? Contact information?
26. Do you have family members or friends who I could interview about your experience? What are their names? Contact information?