**JUVENILE SOLITARY CONFINEMENT**

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**This fact sheet offers key facts and resources about the state of the law on juvenile solitary confinement.**

**Negative Effects of Solitary Confinement on Juveniles**

According to a joint report issued by Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union, solitary confinement “engender[s] significant levels of anxiety and discomfort,” and young people have fewer psychological resources than adults do to help them manage the stress they experience in solitary confinement. For many adolescents in prison, developmental immaturity is compounded by mental disabilities and histories of trauma, abuse, and neglect. These factors can exacerbate the mental health effects of solitary confinement. Many of the young people interviewed for the report spoke about struggling with one or more of a range of serious mental health problems during their time in solitary, including thoughts of suicide and self-harm; visual and auditory hallucinations; feelings of depression; acute anxiety; shifting sleep patterns; nightmares; and uncontrollable anger.

**Solitary Confinement of Juveniles in the Federal System**

In January, 2016, President Obama banned the practice of holding juveniles in solitary confinement in federal prisons, saying it could lead to “devastating, lasting psychological consequences.” President Obama said federal prisons would no longer use solitary confinement for juveniles or for inmates serving time for low-level infractions. He said the change, along with expanded mental health treatment, would affect as many as 10,000 inmates in the federal system, about a tenth of those being held in solitary confinement in the United States, including in state prisons.

**Punitive Solitary Confinement in Juvenile Facilities**

- 21 jurisdictions prohibit the use of punitive solitary confinement in juvenile facilities by law or practice.

- 20 more states impose time-limits on the use of punitive solitary confinement, ranging from 6 hours to 90 days. Among states that allow punitive confinement, the most common limits on the amount of time that juveniles may spend in isolation are 3 to 5 days.

- 10 states either place no limit on the amount of time a juvenile may spend in punitive solitary confinement or allow indefinite extensions of their time limits through administrative approval.

**Non-Punitive Solitary Confinement in Juvenile Facilities**

- Of the 21 states that ban punitive solitary confinement, at least 19 continue to use solitary confinement for other purposes, such as safety concerns.

- Only 7 of the 19 set limits on the maximum time a juvenile can spend in non-punitive solitary confinement, and the majority of those limits range from 3 to 5 days.

- 7 of the 19 provide that the juvenile should be released when he/she regains self-control, irrespective of the time limit, but those decisions are often left to the discretion of the corrections officer.

**Further reading:**

1. Obama, Barack. "Barack Obama: Why We Must Rethink Solitary Confinement." *The Washington Post*. 26 Jan. 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/barack-obama-why-we-must-rethink-solitary-confinement/2016/01/25/29a361f2-c384-11e5-8965-0607e0e265ce\_story.html?tid=a\_inl&utm\_term=.301b7767e33e>.
2. “Growing Up Locked Down: Youth in Solitary Confinement in Jails and Prisons Across the United States." *American Civil Liberties Union*. 2012. <https://www.aclu.org/report/growing-locked-down-youth-solitary-confinement-jails-and-prisons-across-united-states>.
3. "51-Jurisdiction Survey of Juvenile Solitary Confinement Rules." Lowenstein Center for the Public Interest, July 2016. <https://www.lowenstein.com/files/upload/51-Jurisdiction%20Survey%20of%20Juvenile%20Solitary%20Confinement%20Rules.PDF>.