

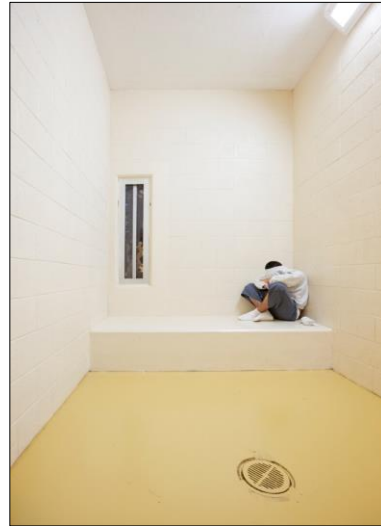
JUVENILE DETENTION ALTERNATIVES INITIATIVE

JDAI Juvenile Detention Facility Standards

Strategies to Eliminate the Unnecessary Use of Room Confinement

The revised JDAI Detention Facility Standards prohibit the use of room confinement for discipline, punishment, administrative convenience, retaliation, staffing shortages, or reasons other than as a temporary response to behavior that threatens immediate harm to a youth or others. While some JDAI sites currently comply with this standard, others will need to work toward phasing out and prohibiting the use of room confinement for reasons other than threat of immediate harm. The standards reflect the advice of dozens of practitioners and nationally recognized experts. They include what these advisors have identified as the necessary elements of reducing and eliminating the inappropriate use of room confinement. This document outlines the key aspects of reforming the use of room confinement and highlights where the standards reinforce these strategies.

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(1) Adopt Clear Limits on the Use of Room Confinement in Facility Policy

- Officials should review existing policies and make revisions to clarify appropriate and inappropriate uses of room confinement. Room confinement should only be used as a temporary response to behavior that threatens immediate harm to a youth or others. Room confinement should not be used for discipline, punishment, administrative convenience, retaliation, or staffing shortages. Room confinement is defined as “the involuntary restriction of a youth alone in a cell, room, or other area.” See standards VII(B)(1)(a)-(b).
- Facility policy should require staff to release a youth from room confinement as soon his or her behavior no longer poses an imminent threat of harm to the youth or others. Administrators should adopt procedures that require staff to assess a youth’s readiness for release at frequent intervals, as well as the steps that staff should take to help the youth return to programming as soon as possible. See standards VII(B)(1)(c)-(f).
- Officials should outline the alternatives to room confinement in the situations where it is not permitted. For example, instead of using room confinement as a form of discipline for serious rule violations, policy should require staff to develop special individualized plans that may limit certain privileges until a youth demonstrates better behavior. See standard VII(B)(2).
- Administrators and supervisors should clearly communicate these policies to staff and youth. At the same time, facility leadership should provide opportunities for staff to express their apprehensions about the transition away from the use of room confinement and address those concerns up front. See standard V(D)(6).

(2) Develop an Institutional Culture in Which Staff View Room Confinement as an Intervention to be Used in Very Limited Circumstances

- Creating this type of institutional culture begins with hiring staff who have the necessary skills and temperament to work with adolescents. When considering new employees, administrators should identify those individuals who demonstrate good listening skills, patience, and genuine caring for youth. See standard V(A)(1).
- Administrators should ensure that staff receive adequate training on adolescent development, de-escalation techniques, crisis management, and conflict resolution. Training on these issues helps prevent serious incidents from arising and ensures that staff only use room confinement as a temporary response to behavior that threatens immediate harm to a youth or others. See standard V(C)(4)(d).
- To reduce and eliminate the use of room confinement for other reasons, such as discipline, staff must understand the harms associated with use of room confinement and believe that there are effective alternatives to its use. Administrators should help staff develop expertise in the facility's behavior management program through training and application of the system to real-life scenarios. Staff should understand the range of sanctions that are available to address rule violations, as well as strategies that they can use to encourage youth to avoid problem behaviors in the future. See standard V(C)(4)(d).
- Administrators and supervisors at the unit and facility levels should consistently reinforce policy about the appropriate use of room confinement. This includes praising staff for successfully employing alternatives to room confinement as well as holding staff accountable when they use room confinement inappropriately. Facility leadership should be prepared to transfer or remove staff members who do not share these values or who consistently violate facility policy. See standards V(D)(3)-(4), (8).

(3) Maintain Adequate Staffing Levels

- Facilities should have enough direct care staff on duty to adequately supervise youth. Maintaining low staff-to-youth ratios allows staff to engage directly with individual youth. These interactions allow staff to reinforce positive messages and detect conflicts that may be brewing before they escalate into serious incidents. Additionally, facilities need sufficient staff to employ strategies that are alternatives to room confinement. Alternatives such as writing letters of apology, engaging in community service, or reflecting on the causes of the misbehavior require supervision and often engagement between youth and staff. See standards V(B)(1)-(3).
- Mental health professionals can provide a range of services that help facilities prevent and respond to incidents. Facility officials should ensure that there are sufficient numbers of mental health professionals to meet youth needs through individual planning, counseling, crisis management, development of behavioral contracts, and participation in multi-disciplinary behavior management teams. Facilities can benefit tremendously from tapping the expertise of mental health professionals when designing specific interventions for youth who present particularly challenging behavior. See standard II(D)(4).

(4) Develop a Robust Array of Programming and an Effective Behavior Management System

- Facilities that keep youth busy with a wide range of engaging programming often see far fewer incidents than facilities that lack structured programming. Facility officials should think creatively about new ways to use resources, staff, and other professionals in the facility, and to reach out to volunteers and other community-based organizations. See standards IV(B)(1)-(18).
- Research shows that the best way to encourage someone to follow rules and improve behavior is to provide incentives for good behavior alongside proportionate sanctions for negative behavior. Facilities that rely on well-designed behavior management programs are better able to motivate youth to follow facility rules without resorting to the use of room confinement. The key components of such programs include setting clear expectations, offering rewards that are meaningful to youth, providing rewards at frequent enough intervals so that youth understand the connection between their behavior and the incentives, and ensuring that staff consistently implement the system across shifts and units. See standards IV(D)(1)-(7).
- Staff should use a wide array of sanctions other than room confinement to respond to rule violations. Examples might include added work details, written assignments, mediation, limited access to canteen items, or other restrictions. For youth who engage in assaultive or chronically disruptive behavior, facility officials may need to develop special individualized plans that may include restriction of certain activities or privileges. Facilities often use multidisciplinary teams to develop such plans, which usually include identification of the causes and purposes of the negative behaviors, concrete goals that the youth can work toward to have the restrictions lifted, and a guarantee that youth will not be denied certain basic rights. See standard VII(B)(2).
- In facilities that have not yet abolished the use of room confinement as a form of discipline, youth must receive certain due process protections prior to imposing room confinement as a sanction for misbehavior. Due process ensures that youth are notified of specific allegations against them, able to tell their side of the story, and receive a decision from an individual who was not involved in the incident. See standards VII(D)(3)-(6).

(5) Create a Physical Environment That Reinforces High Expectations and Positive Behavior

- Like everyone else, youth respond to their environment. Moreover, their environment affects their perceptions of themselves. Youth who are housed in secure facilities that are sterile and prison-like are more likely to think of themselves as prisoners, inmates, and troublemakers than are youth housed in more home-like settings. This does not require making facilities less secure. Introducing murals and artwork on walls, t-shirts and pants for youth (rather than prison jumpsuits), and non-correctional staff uniforms can help a facility create a more positive environment that is centered on promoting good behavior. See standards VI(A)(4), (6), (8), (9) and VI(E)(1).



A housing unit at the Elliot Leahy Center in Worcester, MA.

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- Large housing units present challenges in supervising youth and preventing and responding to incidents. To the extent that officials can set up smaller living units or units with fewer youth per unit, they should do so. In facilities built with large living units, administrators can break youth up into smaller, easier-to-manage groups for programming.

(6) Monitor the Use of Room Confinement and Identify Resources to Address Any Problems

- Administrators should keep close track of the use of room confinement in order to determine whether reforms are having their intended effect. Facility leadership should collect and regularly analyze data on the use of room confinement, and should include room confinement reduction as a goal of the facility's continuous quality improvement plan. See standard VII(B)(11).
- Open channels of communication between youth, staff, and administrators will help identify concerns before they escalate into systemic problems. Developing a responsive and well-functioning grievance process for youth, family members, and third parties provides administrators with valuable information, including information about the inappropriate use of room confinement. See standards VII(F)(1)-(23).
- If data reveal a need for additional training or technical assistance, administrators should be prepared to obtain help. Officials in JDAI sites can do one or more of the following as a starting point.

Visit the JDAI Help Desk
jdaihelpdesk.org/SitePages/conditionsofconfinement.aspx

*Contact the Center for Children's
 Law and Policy*
 Dana Shoenberg
 Deputy Director
dshoenberg@cclp.org
 202-637-0377 x107

Contact the Youth Law Center
 Sue Burrell
 Staff Attorney
sburrell@ylc.org
 415-543-3379, x3911