

## EVIDENCE SUMMARY

### Isolation and its effect on people in prison

#### How does being in isolation affect people and what can make it worse?

We know from studies of people in the community who have been isolated during pandemics that it is common to feel:

- Frustration
- Boredom
- Irritation
- Anxiety
- Fearfulness (of infection and/or others being infected)
- Depression
- Anger

These feelings can worsen if people are isolated from other people for a long time; their normal daily routine is restricted; they do not get the basic things they need and they do not understand what is going on, why things have changed and for how long the changes will be in place.

Being in isolation in prison can aggravate these feelings, particularly for certain groups of people, so it is important for staff to recognise this during the current Covid-19 pandemic, and know what practical things they can do to:

- help manage the current situation and support people in isolation to cope with the restrictions in place; and,
- help people understand and cooperate with the changes to reduce the negative effects of spending long periods of time in their cells

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- Isolating people to contain the virus should NOT be seen as a punishment
  - People should have the basic things they need in clean and decent cells
  - People should have things to do and be able to contact family and friends
  - People should have the right information about access to help and support
  - People should be kept up to date about the pandemic
  - Some people feel the effects of isolation more than others and will need extra support
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#### *Basic needs*

People cope better in clean environments and if they have the basic things they need. It is, therefore, important to ensure that there is adequate food and water, that people get the medication they need, when they need it and that, wherever possible, they get as much access to showers, personal property and exercise.

### *Keeping busy*

Giving people advice on how to pass the time can help to reduce **frustration** and **boredom**. Encouraging people to have a daily routine and giving them things to do like in-cell activities and distractions will also help. There is a lot of material available including:

- activity packs
- DVDs and CDs
- in-cell physical exercise and mindfulness/wellbeing exercises

### *Keeping in touch*

Help people to keep in contact with family and friends by phone or prison mail and remind them of the support available via Samaritans, the Listener Scheme and peer support.

Help people to stay connected to the outside world via radio and TV - this can provide them with a better understanding of the pandemic and how everyone is having to making changes and adjust to restrictions on daily life to protect themselves and others.

### *Keeping people informed*

It is important to update people regularly about the pandemic and to make sure that they know why isolation is necessary to keep them and others safe. If people understand the reasons for changes to regimes, the restrictions that result from these and the longer-term benefits, this can increase compliance and make it easier for them to cope.

Updating people regularly on the changes to regimes and their living conditions gives them the opportunity to talk about their concerns. It also gives staff the opportunity to check their wellbeing and raise the alarm if they are concerned about how people are coping.

### *Encouraging people to adapt to change during Covid-19*

Providing regular, clear and accurate information is the best way to reduce **fear**. Using simple language to explain what is happening, why and how it affects them and others can reduce **anxiety**, and increase trust in the actions being taken. Explaining clearly and checking that people understand how they can access medication, arrangements for food, exercise and how to get support can be reassuring and help them to adapt to the restrictions in place.

By using their knowledge of people's needs, staff can talk to people about the specific things that matter to them and make sure that they get the right information in a way that makes sense to them. This means respecting concerns, treating seriously people's feelings about being more restricted and isolated from normal prison life and getting them some answers.

People are likely to cooperate more if they are involved in what is happening and have somewhere to go to discuss their doubts and concerns. Offering incentives and showing appreciation - letting people know that, in cooperating with restrictions/significant changes to normal prison life, they are helping to contain the virus and reduce the risk of it spreading can be **powerful, motivate people to cope and reinforce compliance**.

Finally, be aware of the stigma attached to isolation. In addition to providing people with good information about the virus and why things have changed to reduce the risk of it spreading, it is important to ensure that follow up care is provided to anyone who has been in isolation.