

Youth Dignity Guide

The Youth Dignity Guide (YDG) was initiated by OYCR staff who observed interactions between Probation staff and youth within Secure Youth Treatment Facilities. These observations revealed several promising practices alongside areas for improvement in youth care. The YDG project aims to provide a straightforward introduction by offering suggestions for dignified care to youth in custody. Moreover, it prioritizes low-cost or no-cost solutions, easy implementation, and accessibility for both youth and staff in juvenile facilities.

The project's focus areas were identified through on-site visits, youth and community feedback, and the personal experiences of OYCR staff who were within the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).



1. Frequent Communication with Loved Ones

Families and support networks are a critical component for youth and transitional aged youth upon reentry into the community from incarceration. Fortunately, many youths will return to their families after release; however, not all youth will return to families but rather a support network. Research shows that incarcerated individuals who maintain ties with their support networks have higher success rates and lower recidivism rates upon release. Maintaining family and community connection while incarcerated is key to successful reentry; therefore, a statewide standard should be developed with input from system and community stakeholders, so all incarcerated youth are provided with free & frequent communication to families and support networks.

2. Access to Educational Material

When youth and transitional aged youth are provided access to education while incarcerated, their chances of rehabilitation and successful reentry into the community increase. Providing youth with the opportunity to obtain college or vocational education will make a positive difference in their lives. Research shows that prison bachelor's degree programs reduce recidivism rates and help incarcerated people find better-paying jobs after being released. Additionally, educational support should be offered to all students, both in-person and virtual, especially for students with individual educational plans.

3. Transitional Plans Prior to Re-Entry

Youth and transitional aged youth should have a transition plan prior to release. In the planning phase, youth should explore the challenges and opportunities they will experience and identify support networks that will help with transition. Youth should not have to navigate reentry into the community post incarceration alone and unprepared.

- Quarterly Youth Training Workshops
 - a. Trainings that will assist with transition
 - b. Trainings on Youth Bill of Rights, PREA, Youth Dignity Guide
- Extending transition services post-release, including:
 - a. Mental Health
 - b. Education
 - c. Housing
- Coordinating with outside agencies
 - a. Review partnering agencies
 - i. Ex. Mental health, Behavioral Health, Education partners, Community-Based Organizations.
- Developing individualized programming based on specific needs
 - a. Assessment
 - b. Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) / Family engagement /Child and Family Team (CFT)
 - c. Individual Rehabilitation Plan

4. Expanded Visitation Policies

Youth and transitional aged youth benefit greatly by staying connected with their loved ones. Often, youth have positive people, who are not immediate family members, that can contribute to the youths' rehabilitation and reentry. Youth should be allowed to maintain these positive relationships by having the opportunity to meet in person during visitation or community events. The goal is to allow young people to maintain positive relationships with their loved ones and supporters that may contribute to their overall treatment/rehabilitation.



- Who?
 - a. Family
 - b. Extended family
 - c. Friends
 - d. Clergy
 - e. Sponsors/Therapists
 - f. Undocumented loved ones
- Inform families when:
 - a. Visiting is not available
 - i. Unforeseen Circumstances
 1. Covid-19
 2. Group disturbance
- Family Events/Furloughs
 - a. And other activities where family development can take place.

5. Use First Names

The ability to allow youth to be called by their preferred legal name contributes to the overall well-being of the youth and the facility. By allowing youth to identify their preferred name demonstrates a level of respect from staff. As a result, youth can feel more inclined to remain composed and participate in programming and treatment when respect is established between staff. In addition, the use of a youth's preferred name promotes youth self-esteem and softens the realities of incarceration. The purpose of this is to promote positive mental health, increase youth development, and increase facility safety by providing youth the opportunity to self-identify themselves.

6. Outdoor Programming

Access to outdoor education and programming contributes to youth development and mental wellbeing. Research shows participation in outdoors activities has the potential for bolstering adolescent's resilience to environmental stressors, including those associated with incarceration. Furthermore, facilities that incorporate outdoor programming such as camps, are proven to increase rehabilitation success rates by 50% compared to secured facilities. Research on outdoor programming suggests positive impacts on self-esteem as well as reductions in delinquency recidivism rates.

7. Room Stationary

Arts, crafts, and writing allows a youth to self-analyze and express emotions and moods that may be challenging for them to express verbally. Often, youth within the juvenile justice system tend to exclude themselves in activities that may seem foreign. However, if youth are engaged in similar activities they were engaged in prior to incarceration, such as painting, listening, or writing music, research suggests youth would be more willing to engage in group activities. Research also shows that the arts can have a positive impact on youth development, and positive social and emotional behaviors including empathy, sharing, and mood control. The purpose of this focus area is to allow youth to have stationary in their rooms they can use to express themselves such as but not limited to: pencils, pens, note pads, books, magazines, music devices, etc.

8. A Working Mirror

Having access to a clear operable mirror allows for youth to self-examine their physical appearance. Research shows that not having the ability to see oneself is dehumanizing.

Generally, when a person has a positive perception about their physical appearance, their mental well-being is also positive.

9. Culturally Appropriate Hygiene

Access to culturally appropriate hygiene allows youth to maintain a manicured physical appearance and is inclusive to the diverse needs of the youth population in the Juvenile Justice system. Additionally, by providing the opportunity for youth to groom oneself, youth can remain in their best physical appearance possible.



10. Therapeutic Animals

Therapeutic animals play a crucial role in supporting the well-being and development of youth. For example, therapeutic animals offer unconditional love, companionship, and comfort, which can be especially beneficial for youth experiencing emotional distress, anxiety, or depression. By developing a clear pathway to utilizing therapeutic animals, youth can begin to develop a sense of purpose while under care and supervision.

11. Access to Snacks

Access to snacks, particularly healthy and nutritious options, is vital for supporting youth development by providing essential nutrients, sustaining energy levels, fostering healthy eating habits, improving concentration, and contributing to overall physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Being able to grab a snack, at the youth's convenience, is a low-cost way to normalize a living situation while at the facility.

12. Comfortable Quality Bedding

Comfortable quality bedding is crucial for youth development as it directly impacts their physical health, cognitive function, emotional well-being, and the formation of healthy sleep habits. Providing a comfortable and supportive sleep environment is essential in fostering a

conducive atmosphere for restful and restorative sleep, contributing to overall youth development. Comfortable bedding should not be a part of an incentive plan. It should be statewide standard.

13. Community Meals

Community meals offer a multitude of benefits for youth, including social development, cultural understanding, relationship building, healthy eating habits, life skills, and a sense of community belonging. These shared experiences can positively impact their growth, development, and overall well-being. A youth should be provided the opportunity to have meals with their peers and to converse with them as appropriate.

14. Incentive Behavioral Plan

Balancing incentives with opportunities for autonomy, guidance, and nurturing a sense of internal satisfaction in doing the right thing is crucial for comprehensive youth development. All youth should be provided the opportunity to earn incentives.

15. Personal Clothing & Shoes

Encouraging self-expression through clothing choices while also understanding and respecting appropriate boundaries and guidelines is crucial for striking a balance between personal expression and societal expectations. All youth should be provided the opportunity and support to wear non-governmental provided clothing.

Supporting Sources:

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- “Even if one accepts the premise that certain crimes should be punished with incarceration, by no means does that incarceration have to include all of the hardships that are taken for granted, especially the lack of human contact.”
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- [New program allows incarcerated students to get bachelor's degrees alongside peers on the outside](#)

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- **CA Senate Bill (Hueso)**

- CA SB 416 (2021-2022) – Incarcerated Student’s Bill of Rights
- A bill which ensures college programs in prisons are provided by institutions such as community colleges or state universities with transferable credits.
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15 Things You Can Do by Next Tuesday to Improve the Dignity and Humanity of Incarcerated Youth

- Encourage Frequent Communication with Loved Ones
- Provide Access to Educational Materials
- Create Early Designed Transitional Plans
- Expand Visitation Policies
- Use a Youth's First Name
- Incorporate Outdoor Programming
- Provide Room Stationary
- Provide a Working Mirror
- Provide Culturally Appropriate Hygiene Products
- Access to Therapeutic Animals
- Access to Snacks
- Comfortable Quality Bedding
- Encourage Meals with Conversation & Community
- Allow Youth to Earn Rewards
- Provide Personal Clothing & Shoes