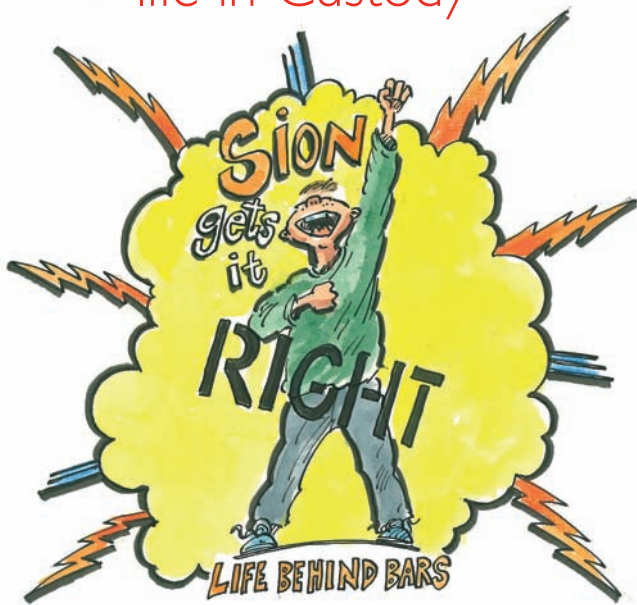


Young persons guide to life in Custody



Barnardo's
Cymru

RHOI'R DYFODOL YN ÔL I'N PLANT
GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE

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If this is your first time inside and you are not sure what to expect you might want to read this booklet.

It has been written and produced by a group of young men in custody at HMP Young Offenders Institute Stoke Heath and is based on their own experiences.

It won't give you all the answers but it might help you while you are new and trying to settle in.

Life inside is not easy but like Sion you can use some of the tips to get it right.



How you might be feeling

When you first come into custody your head is probably a bit battered and you don't know what to expect, but don't worry it just takes time to adjust.

It's natural to feel gutted or a bit stunned and stressed out.

You might be feeling a bit shy or timid and not want to speak to anyone. Some lads get upset and there's nothing wrong with that, we all cope in different ways.

Just remember it's not as bad as you think it's like when you start a new school; everything is different and you don't know anyone. Then you settle in and just get on with it and you're not the new lad anymore.



Myths you might have heard

When friends and family heard I was going into custody some of them told me stories about the sort of things that happen to lads like me inside.

They joked about being careful in the showers and warned me not to drop the soap; I laughed at the time but it stuck in my head and I did worry. I didn't know if I would be safe or not.



It turns out that a lot of people get told those kinds of stories before they come in but it's just to tease or wind you up.



Routine

I never really had a routine on the outside but here I know where I am, what I'm doing and when I'm doing it. It's nice knowing what to expect of the day.

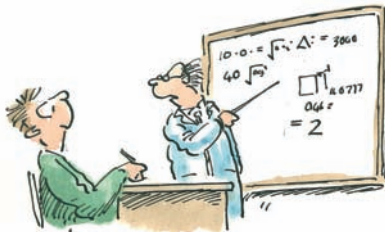


07.30 wake up



08.00 breakfast

08.30 morning activities



12.00 lunch



13.30 afternoon activities



17.00 dinner



18.15 association time



What you've left behind

Family

It's hard because you don't get to see or talk to your family like you could before; they get upset and you feel guilty for letting them down and you know they are disappointed. The best thing ever is getting to talk to them or getting their letters, but you can feel angry and disappointed when they don't come.

Friends

It's irritating when friends say they are going to write and they don't; they all promised to keep in touch and visit, but so far none of them have. But I understand it's a long way to come and not everyone has got the money or a car to get here. So don't be too disappointed if not everyone keeps their promises.

Girlfriends / partner

It's just easier not to have a girlfriend or partner in here because even with trust you can get really jealous and angry just thinking about what could be going on... it is nice to have the letters though.

Time

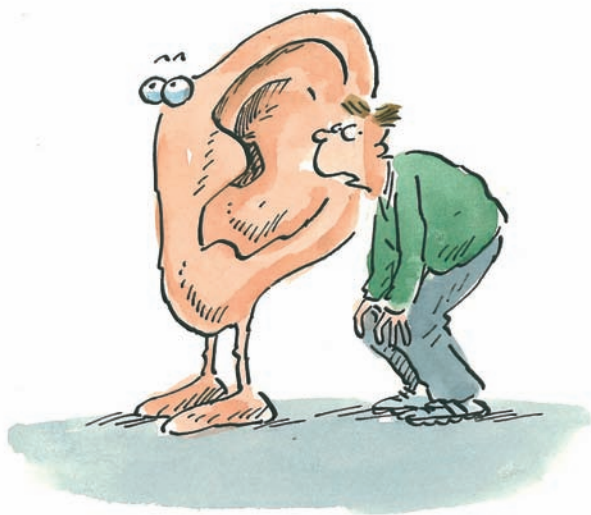
Time stands still in here. Everything is changing outside and moving on without you. Friends are getting jobs and cars and just getting on with life and you feel like your life is carrying on without you.

That's why it is important to keep in touch with people outside so you still feel part of your old life. If you don't it can be really weird when you get out and you can feel like you don't fit or belong there anymore.



Mates and people you can talk to

If you've got mates in here you're laughing! Life is just so much easier. But there are other people you can talk to as well.



There is a listening service here which you can use; listeners are other inmates who will listen and offer advice or speak on your behalf. It might not be for you but it does work for some.

If you want to you can talk to staff about problems, but this depends on how you feel and how you think you get on with them. They're not there to be your friend but they can help sometimes if you need them. There is other stuff here as well like Samaritans and people over in health care. We have listed them in the back of this book.

Don't worry if you haven't already got friends here because the place is set up so it is easy for you to make some. For example, you always have the same seat at dinner time so you're with the same people and at association you can have up to thirty lads there so you naturally start chatting to people. It reminds me of my old youth club.



Coping strategies is just another way of saying what you do to unwind and de-stress yourself. When you're at home there are loads of simple things you probably did like



going out with your mates, walking the dog, going fishing, riding your bike, smoking a joint or having a beer, talking to your family.

All these coping strategies are lost when you're inside, so it's really important that you find new ways to de-stress. Here are a few simple things you can try:-

- go to the gym
- go to sleep
- breathing & relaxation techniques - see the occupational therapist in health care
- watch TV
- eat something
- acupuncture, this can really chill you out

Keep your head down and have a good attitude towards other people, that includes the staff, they can be alright if you're ok with them. If you're a pain and make life harder they can make your life harder.

Be yourself.

Don't lie about your background, it's a small place and everybody talks.



Make an effort to talk and get to know people, if you're too quiet people think your being off with them.

You need to be confident but not too confident. You don't want to be cocky but you can't let people take the mick out of you either. Once people start with that they all join in and then you just get bullied.



It's just like starting a new school here and like school bullying does happen. People will have a little laugh and a joke at you because you're the new lad, but it doesn't last long. Try and be confident and stand up for yourself, people only bully you if they think they can.

You're finding your way at first like with anything new but after a couple of weeks you do start to relax and most people here are easy to get on with so you can make friends.

If you do have a problem with bullying there are people you can talk to like a listener or staff. Staff do keep a close eye out for bullying so they can help.



You will soon get the hang of this, it's like a reward system for good behaviour and the extra treats can really make a difference. I know when I lose my privileges I feel frustrated and in a bad mood, but I can always earn them back.

Here's how it works and the privileges you can get:-

There are three levels 'basic', 'standard' and 'enhanced'. You move between the levels by earning merits (for good work and behaviour) or demerits (for poor work or behaviour).

Enhanced

- TV remote
- rug
- option to borrow play station for one week
- option of curtains
- option of quilt covers.



Standard

– no demerits for a week

- socialisation every other day
- shower gel
- trainers
- TV.



Basic

– 3 demerits in a week

- prison issue toiletries
- 'corks' black shoes
- association on weekend only
- limited canteen.



Staff can give you a demerit for anything they think is out of order, so if you give them cheek you're probably going to get a demerit. It is possible to get 'loss', it means you lose all your privileges and can get kicked off the wing.



Adjudications or loss

- loss of TV
- loss of association time
- loss of privilege.



The little things you might miss

It's natural you're going to miss some of the small things you took for granted at home, here are some of the things I miss:-

- having a bath when I want one
- take away
- wearing my own clothes
- opening the fridge and choosing what I want for tea
- arcades
- girlfriends.



The biggest problem in here is boredom; you have plenty of time to think about things.

One of things I think about all the time is my future and my plans for when I get out.

On the outside there were no plans; I just drifted through and didn't take any responsibility for my future. I didn't want a job and I didn't want to go to college so instead I picked up habits like sleeping in late, drinking, and smoking, and eventually I ended up here.

I know that if I don't take control and have a plan I will be back in here before long.

I have blamed a lot of other people for my past but my future is up to me. I have a lot of things to sort out but there are people I can ask for help.

My plan includes:-

- where I am going to live
- where I am going to get my money from
- deciding if I can afford college or do I need a job
- what I need to change so I don't come back here.

My Youth Offending Worker has been helping me answer some of these questions, and I have seen a chap from Careers who visits. Nothing is definite but at least I have a plan.

The best feeling ever

The best feeling I have ever had in my whole life is the feeling you get as you walk out of the gates and you are free. It's a total buzz and I can't describe it. It's not quite real and it's the best feeling in the world.

All I want to do is go home open the fridge and have a bath!



Further support or help

You can speak to any wing staff about how to get in touch or use one of these services, or look in your induction book.

- Personal officer / wing staff
- Barnardo's counselling service
- Advocacy service
- Listeners / Insiders
- Samaritans
- Chaplaincy centre
- Health care
- Doctor
- Psychiatrist
- Occupational therapist
- Juvenile substance misuse service

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