

Improved training to reduce conflict in youth custody

- Staff to be trained on how to better de-escalate conflict and use physical restraint as a last resort to ensure the safety of the child and others
- Independent review finds restraint is a necessary option for preventing serious further harm
- Experienced panel will scrutinise its use

An independent [report](#) by Charlie Taylor found that ways of holding children in custody, which can cause pain if they struggle or fight back, are sometimes necessary to protect themselves or other children from more serious harm. However, improved training will now see this used less and only as a last resort.

A cross-agency expert panel will be established to scrutinise the use of restraint. They will meet regularly to review the use of restraint and ensure ones that cause pain are only being used when there is no alternative and to protect the child or others from further harm. In addition, training on how to safely apply them will no longer be taught alongside other methods to manage behaviour, to make it even clearer that these are a last resort designed only to protect children from further injury.

A [taskforce](#), with Sir Alan Wood of the Youth Justice Board acting as an independent advisor, was also set up to look into the use of separation and the effect it has on a child's development.

Separation is when young offenders are placed in a different part of the establishment and do not mix with other children. This typically happens if they have been behaving violently or there is a risk of them hurting another child or being hurt themselves. The report found that when used properly, separation was an effective means of protecting children but there were inconsistencies in how it was being used. These inconsistencies risked the practice being perceived as unfair, which is a major factor in misbehaviour.

In response, specialist training is now being provided so staff better understand children may need to be separated from others in custody and the impact it can have. This will also ensure officers have detailed plans for reintegrating each child back into the mainstream population as quickly as possible.

Facilities across the estate are also being improved to ensure children who need to live separately from others for a period, for their own and others' safety, are still able to readily access education, healthcare and other support services. Regardless of their crime, it is vital that a child's right to change for the better is not unnecessarily restricted and that they receive the support they need to turn their lives around.

Justice Minister Lucy Frazer said:

The number of children in custody has halved in the last seven years thanks to better early intervention but for those that do enter youth custody, we must ensure that is not a sign of things to come.

These children have too often been failed in their young lives and I'm determined to make sure that doesn't continue when they enter the justice system.

Specialised training for staff and new approaches tailored around each child's individual needs will allow us to give these children the best possible chance to overcome their problems and turn their lives around.

The reforms announced today follow a number of changes already made by the Youth Custody Service earlier in the year to improve how separation is used. This includes ensuring each site has a senior manager responsible for overseeing the process and improved data collection so best practise can be shared across the youth estate.

These are just the latest in a series of youth custody measures introduced by the Government, which has seen staffing levels increase by more than a third since 2017 and will see all officers receive degree-level training.