

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Solitary Confinement* (Restrictive Housing) of Adolescents

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“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects.” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Adolescents (persons under 18 years of age) are at particular risk of psychiatric consequences of solitary confinement (also referred to as restrictive housing or segregation), including depression, anxiety, and self-harm, including suicide. Extreme isolation deprives adolescents of their full potential for cognitive growth and maturation and may lead to substantial psychopathological consequences. Adolescents in solitary confinement are also denied access to the educational and vocational programming afforded adolescents in the general detention or incarceration populations, further limiting their ability to successfully navigate adult life. Solitary confinement of juveniles disproportionately affects Black youth.

APA Position:

It is the position of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) that solitary confinement of adolescents in a juvenile detention or adult correctional facility should be avoided due to the potential for serious harm, including death, to the adolescent. If the custodial authority in juvenile or adult correctional facilities places an adolescent in solitary confinement, the adolescent should have access to mental health care, medical care, education, recreation and health care clinicians to create and implement a safe and therapeutic plan that removes the adolescent as quickly as possible from solitary confinement.

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*Solitary confinement is here defined as locking in a room or cell, for disciplinary reasons, an incarcerated or detained individual, with minimal or no contact with others, for 22 or more hours per day.