



# Youth justice custodial practice manual

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Youth Justice Custodial Services Practice Manual (<http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual>) > Working with young people in custody (<http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual/working-with-young-people-in-custody>) > Promoting positive behaviour (<http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual/working-with-young-people-in-custody/promoting-positive-behaviour>) > The importance of promoting positive behaviour (<http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual/working-with-young-people-in-custody/promoting-positive-behaviour/the-importance-of-promoting-positive-behaviour>)

## The importance of promoting positive behaviour

- Being in custody can have a positive or a negative impact on young people's wellbeing and behaviour.
- The way you interact with young people and contribute to the unit's environment can promote a positive and healthy setting for young people to address their behaviour.

### When to use this procedure

- At all times when dealing with young people in order to encourage them to behave in the most positive manner possible.

### What else you need to know

Make sure you have read and understood the following procedures:

- [How we work with young people in custody](http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual/introduction-to-working-in-the-custodial-precincts/how-we-work-with-young-people-in-custody) (<http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual/introduction-to-working-in-the-custodial-precincts/how-we-work-with-young-people-in-custody>)
- [How to promote positive behaviour at Parkville Precinct](http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual/working-with-young-people-in-custody/promoting-positive-behaviour/how-to-promote-positive-behaviour-at-parkville-precinct) (<http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-manual/working-with-young-people-in-custody/promoting-positive-behaviour/how-to-promote-positive-behaviour-at-parkville-precinct>)
- [How we deal with difficult behaviour](http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial-) (<http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-custodial->)

[manual/working-with-young-people-in-custody/responding-to-challenging-behaviour/how-we-deal-with-difficult-behaviour](#))

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## **Staff responsibilities**

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Find your role below to see what your responsibilities are:

- [All staff](#)
  - [Unit Supervisor](#)
  - [Unit Coordinator](#)
  - [Unit Manager](#)
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### All staff

#### **At all times when working with young people**

- Be aware of the backgrounds and needs of the young people you are working with, and how this may impact their view of themselves, the world around them and their behaviour.
  - Establish positive working relationships with young people to work with them most effectively.
  - Get to know the young people on the unit in order to understand their behaviours.
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### Unit Supervisor

#### **Every day**

- Ensure that the unit works to a clear routine. Display information about chores, education and programs clearly so young people know the daily routine.
  - Conduct a community meeting each day.
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### Unit Coordinator

#### **When supervising unit staff in their direct work with young people**

- Monitor staff members' understanding of the young people they work with. If needed, identify opportunities to enhance staff members' knowledge and skills in working with this client group.
- Ensure that staff engage positively with young people, appropriately encourage and support

young people to successfully complete their custodial sentence.

- Monitor and provide feedback on the skills and personal qualities staff bring to their work with young people.
  - If staff need to improve their skills in this area, support them through identified training, increased supervision, peer support or other appropriate methods.
  - Work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders to develop plans for young people.
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## Unit Manager

### At all times

- Ensure all staff know how promoting positive behaviour works, and give them a copy of the **Promoting Positive Behaviour manual**.
  - Ensure all elements of Promoting Positive Behaviour are implemented.
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### The procedure in detail

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- [Introduction to Promoting Positive Behaviour](#)
  - [The Promoting Positive Behaviour approach](#)
  - [Self-fulfilling prophecy – the importance of expecting good behaviour from young people](#)
  - [Interacting with young people](#)
  - [Adolescent development](#)
  - [Positive behaviours to look for](#)
  - [Addressing underlying problems](#)
  - [Pro-social modelling – staff as role models](#)
  - [Daily routines](#)
  - [Community meetings](#)
  - [Working as a team](#)
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## Introduction to Promoting Positive Behaviour

A key task in youth justice precincts is to address young people's offending behaviours and help them to prepare for a non-offending life in the community.

In addition to looking at behaviours that are related specifically to offending, young people's day-to-day behaviour on the unit is also relevant as it has an impact on them, on other young people and on staff.

Promoting Positive Behaviour is an evidence-based behaviour-change model to help you respond effectively to young people's behaviour in custody.

Strategies to promote positive behaviour range from providing support to individual young people, to applying broader initiatives in the unit and precinct environment.

Promoting Positive Behaviour is based on the following principles:

- All staff are positive role models.
- Young people are kept busy, have a structured day and engage in a range of activities.
- All staff monitor young people's behaviour constantly and intervene early to prevent difficult behaviours escalating.
- Positive behaviour is noticed and acknowledged by verbal feedback, and an appropriate behavioural grade is given daily.
- All staff are fair and consistent in how they respond – young people should be able to expect all workers to respond in a similar way.

Having frequent positive interactions with young people is one of the most important things you can do. When you notice that a young person is behaving well, and immediately recognise and reinforce that behaviour.

The approach of concentrating on positive behaviour is widely used in disability services, in schools, and by parents with their own children. It has a sound and proven theoretical basis.

Although the focus is on positive behaviour, you also need strategies for dealing with young people's inappropriate behaviour. This is covered in the section on dealing with young people's difficult behaviour.

Difficult behaviours are used as an opportunity to highlight positive behaviour and to discuss alternative ways to behave.

Behavioural strategies for individual young people should be linked to the offending risks, needs and goals identified through the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY) and the Client Assessment and Plan (CAP).

Every activity and interaction in custodial units should fit with the Client Service Planning process (CSP) for each young person.

The model will be used to determine opportunities for temporary leave, parole and remissions.

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## The Promoting Positive Behaviour approach

The Promoting Positive Behaviour approach is based on evidence from the literature and from feedback from custodial staff.

One of the most effective ways to increase positive (desired) behaviours is to recognise and give feedback for positive behaviours whenever they occur, instead of focusing on and responding to difficult behaviours.

Having a focus on positive behaviour helps young people take responsibility for their actions.

It also provides some effective working strategies to minimise stress at work.

The approach is designed to:

- increase acceptable behaviour, social skills, positive relationships and resilience in young people
  - provide staff with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities
  - be fair and consistent, protecting and promoting young people's basic rights, and involving them in decision making
  - maintain safety and security while encouraging positive techniques to reinforce appropriate behaviours
  - encourage a collaborative approach to addressing behaviour, involving custodial and community staff, health and education providers and families
  - look beyond managing behaviour within youth justice precincts, to help the young person manage their life in the community.
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## Self-fulfilling prophecy – the importance of expecting good behaviour from young people

What we expect, all too often, is exactly what we get. This is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy and it explains how our beliefs or expectations about people affect the way they will behave.

For example, if we label someone as 'difficult', and treat them as if we expect them to be difficult, we may in fact encourage difficult behaviour in them.

Mostly, as human beings, we behave pretty much according to the way we're treated.

This is how it works:

- We develop beliefs about people and therefore expectations about how they will behave.
- We communicate those expectations through certain cues (or signs) – body language, tone of voice, the type of words we use.
- People tend to respond to these cues by adjusting their behaviour to match them.
- The result is that the original expectation becomes true – if we expect a young person to behave well (or poorly), this is what we get.

We know that body language makes up the greatest part of our communication. If you expect that a young person will not behave well, they will pick up on this through tiny non-verbal cues and signals from you, and will act on your expectations – even if they are not communicated in words.

When we have low expectations of people's behaviour, they are not motivated to act positively and develop, and in fact this may encourage poor behaviour. For example, young people may seek negative attention (punishment) if they are not getting regular positive feedback.

In order to encourage young people to behave in a positive way more often, you have to act as though you have every expectation that this is what they will do.

Tips for achieving this include:

- Pay close attention to young people's behaviour and check that you are basing your view of them on objective facts and not just on history (what they've done in the past) or their reputation (what others say about them). This helps you to respond appropriately to their actual behaviour – both positive and negative – rather than on any preconceived ideas about

them.

- Take great care not to communicate any low expectations. Young people may initially have limited ability to act appropriately, but you need to communicate an expectation that each young person will do the best they can to improve their behaviour, within the limits of their abilities.
  - Make sure you give young people useful feedback on their progress. This feedback should be honest but constructive and focused on continuous improvement. The approach should be, 'I want you to show me how well you can do', not, 'This is what you've shown me you can't do'.
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## Interacting with young people

Day-to-day interactions with young people are a critical component of work in custodial units.

As a youth justice worker, you use your interpersonal skills to motivate young people in all areas including their behaviour on the unit and participation in programs and case management.

Informal, social interactions also provide many opportunities to model appropriate behaviour and communication skills to young people.

Your ability to build a positive, honest and respectful relationship with young people is a key factor in encouraging them to change their attitudes and behaviour.

Don't tell young people how to act – show them.

The way you deal with conflict and anger teaches young people key lessons for when they are faced with challenging situations themselves.

**It is never appropriate for a staff member employed in a youth justice precinct to swear or shout at a young person, make verbal threats or act abusively in any other way.**

- You may sometimes consciously use the tone or volume of your voice to get a young person's attention or to signal that you are serious about a conversation.
  - This is an acceptable communication skill and is not the same as shouting at a young person in anger or shouting in a way that indicates that a situation is getting out of control.
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## Adolescent development

Young people's behaviour in custody should be seen in the context of the changes that occur during adolescence.

The time between childhood and adulthood generally involves the development of independence, relationships, identity and a sense of purpose for life.

You need to be aware that while many young people in custody look fully grown, they may not be mature in terms of their emotional, social and thinking development.

Culture and gender also affect an individual's behaviour and the way that they perceive and interact with the world around them.

Young people's ability to reach emotional, social and thinking maturity can be affected by a range of factors including:

- the amount of support they have from their family, school and community
- the influence of peers in their life
- their vulnerability to stress
- alcohol and other drug use
- emotional or mental health problems
- risk-taking behaviour.

Young people in custodial precincts commonly have more difficulty than most young people during the transition from childhood to adulthood. This may result in significant behavioural problems.

More information about ways to work constructively with young people is found in the sections on **How we work with young people in custody** and **How to promote positive behaviour**.

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## Positive behaviours to look for

Positive behaviours for young people in custody are grouped into four key areas:

- participating in education and programs
- getting on with others
- taking care of yourself and your room
- unit housework.

These are the behaviours you should look for when giving timely and positive feedback to young people. Examples of positive behaviours within each of these areas follow.

### **Participating in education and programs**

- Goes to education willingly
- Works towards meeting educational goals
- Behaves in the classroom
- Gets involved with case planning
- Takes part in unit meetings and other unit activities
- Supports others and is a team member in groups
- Addresses the reasons for their offending

### **Getting on with others**

- Respects others and their belongings
- Talks to others calmly
- Shows self-control in difficult situations

- Follows staff direction during incidents
- Uses good manners
- Helps other young people when they are upset
- Complies with unit rules and boundaries

## Looking after yourself and your room

- Showers daily, using soap and deodorant
- Brushes teeth twice daily
- Dresses neatly in clean clothes
- Makes bed and tidies room
- Cleans bathroom daily
- Keeps room and the environment free from graffiti
- Does laundry

## Unit housework

- Starts assigned jobs when asked
- Works without distracting others
- Works independently
- Finishes cleaning properly
- Does extra jobs voluntarily

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## Addressing underlying problems

The unit staffing team needs to ensure that any underlying health or personal issues a young person might have are addressed. This should occur as part of the case management process.

**It is the Key Worker's responsibility to find out about their client's needs so they can understand how these may impact on their behaviour and contribute to their offending.**

A young person's medical issues, such as diabetes, withdrawing from substance use or adjusting to a new medication, can have a significant effect on their behaviour.

You should not make judgements about a young person's health without consultation with the appropriate health worker.

If a young person is on medication, talk to the health service about possible side effects and get advice on what sort of monitoring is needed.

Factors relating to the environment and their current situation can affect the mental health of young people in custody – including the stress of being detained and being away from familiar surroundings.

Incidents such as an upsetting phone call or bad news from a family member can contribute to young people 'acting out' on the unit.

If you have any concerns about a young person's health and wellbeing you should consult with the health service to decide on a course of action. This should be done in consultation with the Unit Coordinator.

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## Pro-social modelling – staff as role models

Pro-social modelling is a way of working with young people with the goal of teaching them how to behave positively.

You are a role model to young people in custody and you demonstrate, through your everyday actions and behaviour, how adults should interact with others and overcome problems.

Pro-social modelling shows young people that positive behaviour is a more effective way to achieve their goals than disruptive behaviour.

As a youth justice worker, you use your interpersonal skills to motivate young people in all areas including their behaviour on the unit and participation in programs.

Your ability to build a positive, honest and respectful relationship with the young person is a key factor in encouraging them to change their attitudes and behaviour.

The way you deal with conflict and anger teaches young people key lessons for when they are faced with challenging situations themselves.

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## Daily routines

As much as possible, life in a custodial environment should operate to a typical household routine:

- Young people get out of bed early on weekdays.
- Community meetings are run each day.
- Young people are engaged in programs and education during business hours.
- Meal times are shared with staff and young people sitting together.
- Young people have regular housework to do on the unit.
- Active recreational activities and quiet downtime are provided each day.
- There is a regular bedtime for young people.

The daily routine should be discussed on the unit frequently. This gives young people a sense of purpose in planning for the day and also provides staff with an opportunity to reflect on and plan for any challenges ahead.

For example, the early morning routine – supervising young people to get out of bed, shower, dress, tidy their room and have breakfast – may set the tone for the day.

Some young people take longer than others to do the same things. Trying to rush them can cause unnecessary stress for all, so you should consider waking slower young people before everyone else so they have enough time to get ready.

Mealtimes should be a communal experience for all in the unit, with an expectation that good manners are used.

Bedtime is also a critical time in the units. The period after dinner and before bedtime should be used to relax and wind down from the day's activities.

Young people may be encouraged to shower, have supper and watch some television or chat among themselves or with staff before going off to their rooms. It is better not to move directly from periods of heightened activity, such as the gym, straight to bed.

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## Community meetings

- Community meetings are an opportunity to reflect on the day.
- They allow you to highlight positive behaviours displayed by young people and provide a forum for issues to be aired.
- Clear rules for appropriate conduct in meetings should be decided together with the young people, for example, not speaking over people when they are talking.
- Community meetings should be facilitated by a staff member who is comfortable leading the group.
- All staff on duty in the unit should attend.
- The meeting can cover:
  - a reflection on the day's events
  - highlighting positive behaviours
  - debriefing young people on incidents, and inappropriate behaviours when these have occurred
  - setting expectations
  - introducing new young people and staff members
  - discussing the next day's routine and upcoming events.

It is important that community meetings are not used to discuss each young person's achievement in each of the four behavioural areas. The appropriate forum to do this is in the one-on-one discussion.

**Remember – praise publicly, address individual issues privately.**

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## Working as a team

### Communication between staff

Systems need to be in place to ensure all staff are aware of strategies for the smooth running of the unit including responding to young people's behaviour.

It is important to work together to help young people manage their behaviour – communicate, consult and collaborate.

Information sharing and staff support takes place through:

- organised forums, including:
  - team meetings
  - supervision processes
  - consultation with the Unit Health Coordinator
  - Daily Safety Advice
  - shift handover
  - training or development days
- documenting information in case notes or the Communication/Day Book
- specific meetings with all unit staff to:
  - discuss behavioural issues
  - discuss which strategies work and which do not
  - develop a consistent approach to working with particular young people
  - enhance general unit approaches
- share and debrief some of the frustrations associated with working with young people who show inappropriate behaviours
- informal avenues, for example, conversations with other staff about strategies that have been tried previously and tips on working with particular young people.

Refer to the section on case notes for information on how to document young people's behaviour.

## **Internal consultation**

Health, education and program staff should be consulted to assist in the implementation of individual behaviour strategies.

This ensures that young people receive consistent messages about their behaviours, and that these messages are reinforced at meetings between staff.

The Unit Coordinator should ensure that consultation occurs between youth justice precinct staff and internal providers in relation to developing and implementing Individual Behaviour Management Plans.

The Clinical Supervision Program can assist with debriefing when units experience serious issues with individual young people's behaviours.

## **External collaboration**

A range of workers and services play a significant role in promoting positive behaviour in youth justice units.

Custodial staff need to work collaboratively with health, education, program and area youth justice staff to encourage appropriate behaviour and reduce young people's risk of reoffending.

The Area Youth Justice Worker usually has significant background information, as they have often worked with the young person before they entered custody.

The Unit Coordinator should ensure that the Key Worker collaborates closely with the Area Youth Justice Worker in all aspects of case planning and implementation.

The Unit Coordinator is responsible for liaising with Child Protection and Disability Services and must update them on any new information regarding the young person.

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