

AVP Prison Handbook

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Working in Prisons

Running AVP workshops in prisons can be highly rewarding but can also be quite challenging.

The great majority of the prison population is male, predominantly young and serving relatively short sentences. Over 90% of offenders have either mental health and/or substance abuse problems and literacy and numeracy levels amongst prisoners are often low; also, being a closed community, some participants may be reluctant to share deep personal problems. The selection of participants and their levels of motivation can be rather variable, which can lead to participants with short attention spans and sometimes disruptive behaviour. The workshops also need to fit into the prison regime which can sometimes present logistical challenges. Nevertheless, prisoners in general value the workshops highly, especially when they learn that the facilitators are volunteers and the prison authorities and staff also recognise the value of the workshops.

AVP in UK Prisons

AVP started work in British prisons in 1992 and has worked in 28 prisons across the UK. During this time, workshops have been delivered for male and female prisoners, prison staff and young offenders. In some cases, inmate facilitators and prison staff have been trained to help run workshops. However, working in prisons depends on support from governors and senior prison staff and where there is a significant turnover of senior staff, establishing long term relationships can be difficult. So the scale and pattern of AVP work in prisons varies from month to month. At present, there is a successful long term partnership with HMP Addiewell in Scotland (where the prison system differs from that in England and Wales) and there have been recent workshops in HMP Parc in Bridgend and discussions are taking place with a new prison in North Wales.

English and Welsh Prisons

There are 143 prison establishments in England and Wales.

Adult males

Offenders are classified according to their sex, age and offence. Generally male offenders over 21 are sent to local prisons in the first instance. Those serving short sentences complete them in a local prison but those with longer sentences are transferred to a 'training' establishment. Some prisoners may be on remand i.e. awaiting trial or sentencing. Prisons are designated according to the degree of security they provide:

- Category A (often known as 'dispersal' prisons) are maximum security establishments for those offenders considered the most dangerous or those most likely to escape.
- Category B and Category C prisons correspond to intermediate levels of security.
- Category D are open prisons and are for offenders who are trusted not to escape and for resettlement.

Young Offenders

Male offenders under 21 will be allocated to Young Offender Institutions which may be a separate prison or part of an adult prison. Offenders aged 15-17 (juvenile offenders) are

the responsibility of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and may be held in separate accommodation for juveniles. Alternatively, they may be placed by the YJB in LASU (Local Authority Secure Units) or Secure Training Centres.

Female Offenders

Women's custody is less rigorously segregated than men's prisons; women's prisons are 'Open' or 'Closed' depending on the degree of risk posed by the women imprisoned. Women offenders have particular needs that cause great concern partly due to the impact of their custody on family members.

Scottish Prisons

There are 16 prison establishments in Scotland and they range in size and type. Prisoners are generally classified by gender, age (those aged 21 and under are classified as young offenders) and length of sentence (those sentenced to four years or more are long-term and others short-term).

SECTION 2 PRISON PROCEDURES

Security searches

For those who are going into prison for the first time, security procedures can be an intimidating experience. As an AVP facilitator, you should find that you enter as an honorary staff member and be subject to a much less intense search than a friend or family member of a prisoner. If you have arrived by car, the best policy is to leave everything you don't need in the car. Normally, you are allowed to take in papers and folders and often pens and a small amount of coin change but no liquids. Always inform prison staff, if possible in advance, of any drugs (including prescription medication) you have with you. The entrance gate should have a locker for you to use and you should leave wallets, purses, phones etc. there.

In some prisons, there will be no search at all — you might just be asked if you have any prohibited items (e.g. mobile phone, chewing gum, penknife, etc.). At the other extreme, in a high security prison, you may have to remove your shoes and jacket, watch and pocket contents and be subject to airport type security. You could be asked to open your mouth, lift both your feet and even have your ears looked into. Finally, you could be asked to stand while a drugs dog walks past you. Every prison has its own rules and procedures and even in the same prison they can change from day to day.

Please Note:

- Be mindful that prison staff work in a restrictive and stressful environment.
- Remember that releasing staff to escort people around the prison can sometimes cause operational difficulties.
- If in doubt about any situation in relation to security, ask advice from a Prison Officer.
- Respect the privacy of prisoners. Be careful who you talk to on the outside about the work you're doing. Never divulge the name of the prisoners you work with.

Personal safety

There are many civilian staff and volunteers working inside prisons. For the majority of the time you will be in a very safe and controlled environment and incidents are unusual. However, all of those working in prisons must be aware of some of the basic and

sensible precautions for their personal safety. Depending on the type of prison, the prison may well give training in breakaway techniques and 'jailcraft'. The following is some general advice to all those facilitating in prisons:

- Ensure that you know how to report worrying incidents or intimidation.
- Your workspace may be fitted with a panic alarm button in case of an emergency. Ensure that you have been given full instructions of where the alarm button is situated and how to use it.
- Do not give any contact details to any prisoner or be specific about where you live.
- Do not agree to do anything on behalf of any prisoner, however trivial, (e.g. take messages, buy any goods etc.)

Disclosure of information

All information shared in prison workshops is kept strictly confidential unless a facilitator believes:

- there is a real possibility of escape from a prison
- there is a serious risk of harm to self or others
- it could be detrimental to the security of the establishment and/or any prisoner, staff or volunteer working within the prison.

At the beginning of any workshop it is important to explain these exceptions to confidentiality in discussing the working agreement.

Reporting disclosure

If a prisoner discloses information to you that requires you to breach confidentiality, you should act immediately. Any disclosure that occurs during a prison workshop must be reported to the lead facilitator in the first instance and then to appropriate member of prison staff, regional coordinator and to the prison project coordinator.

Dealing with serious incidents in prisons

If an incident occurs which can be handled within the workshop group (such as a biased remark), discuss the incident with your team. There are some incidents of inappropriate behaviour by a prisoner that must be reported to prison staff, such as threatening language or behaviour, or sexual harassment. Reporting it is protection for you and for the AVP programme, and for the other prisoners in the workshop whose safety could be jeopardised by becoming involved.

Procedure

1. Tell someone immediately; report the incident to the lead or a co-facilitator.
2. If the incident cannot be dealt with within the workshop then inform the regional coordinator and the Prison Officer on duty (or AVP link member of the prison staff).
3. Any severe incidents, even those resolved well, should also be reported to the AVPB Trustees as well as the Regional Coordinator.

Finally

Remember that working in prisons, though challenging at times, can be very rewarding.