



Promoting Positive Behavior in Restrictive Housing

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“I have inmates ask me daily how their behavior logs are looking. If they’re not doing well, they ask what they can change. They take more responsibility for their actions and now understand their behaviors impact progression. The behavior logs have changed the way we interact with the offenders.”

~ OFFICER DEREK PALMER

When we place offenders in restrictive housing, we expect them to demonstrate positive behavior and we claim to use that as a factor in deciding whether they progress through a restrictive housing program or level system and whether they are ready for return to general population. There are two main problems with this: (1) we often have no mechanism in place to track and document positive behavior; and (2) even if there was a way to document it, ‘positive behavior’ is often not clearly defined. In fact, many jurisdictions define positive behavior as the absence of further disciplinary violations or sanctions. In other words, rather than setting clear behavioral expectations that can be recognized and affirmed, we wait for offenders to commit rule violations.

When corrections officers at the South Dakota State Penitentiary (SDSP) began monitoring positive behavior amongst its restrictive housing offenders on each shift, it was a game changer. Officers and supervisors saw immediate results – not only were the offenders complying with basic rules, they were more respectful in their communication and engaged in their own progress. So, how did SDSP do it?

Officer-Driven Daily Behavior Log

Officers working in SDSP experience the same daily stresses and action packed shifts that mark most restrictive housing environments. Despite these challenges, they were eager to put their ideas into action and at the same time alleviate some of the behaviors that may not be fully disruptive but are frustrating when they persist.

SDSP officers designed and implemented a no-cost method to track and reward positive behavior every day, on every shift in the Restrictive Housing Program. The SDSP Daily Behavior Log takes very little time and effort to complete and allows officers to engage offenders differently than they had before. The logs are reviewed in monthly out-of-cell case management sessions and by a Level Review Committee as a tool to assist in the decision to move an inmate up a level or retain him at the same

level. As Sgt. Tammy Hillan explains, “The logs are a way for officers to have tangible input into the offender’s progress and into the restrictive housing review process.”

The *SDSP Daily Behavior Log* monitors six behaviors – leaving windows, doors, and lights uncovered; keeping cell walls clear; beds made during the day; standing for count; proper use of the call button in the cell; and respectful behavior. These seem very simple, so why has it been so effective in improving the environment in restrictive housing?

The log is an officer-driven, easy-to-use tool to acknowledge on a very regular basis when offenders are doing well and provide immediate feedback when they are not. Because the affirmation and disapproval of behaviors is timely and done without the introduction of a formal disciplinary report, it opens up dialog between the offender and staff. Offenders are eager to hear how well they are doing or to talk about how and why they struggled on the prior shift or the previous day. In sum, the log facilitates interactions that help promote prosocial behaviors, such as appropriate response to constructive feedback and how to appropriately engage with staff, and provides an avenue for officers to have real input into inmate performance and progression.

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE PENITENTIARY DAILY BEHAVIOR LOG

Inmate Name: _____
 DOC Number: _____

Place an “X” in the appropriate box. (C=Compliant, N=Non-Compliant)

Every inmate needs an entry in each category, a minimum of once per shift. Comments are required for non-compliant behavior and can be used for further explanation. Any time during the shift a non-compliant behavior occurs, it should be recorded.

Date	Time	Staff Last Name (Printed)	Nothing covering windows/doors/lights		Nothing drawn or displayed on walls		Bed made between 9:00am-4:00pm		Standing for Count		Proper Use of Call Button		Respectful Behavior		Comments
			C	N	C	N	C	N	C	N	C	N	C	N	

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