

HOW TO CREATE AN AUTISM-ADAPTED PRISON?

Life in prison brings along a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity. What can be helpful?

Ivan works in the technical department of a prison. There's cake with the coffee. "Just cut off a piece," says the guard. Ivan is visibly confused. The guard realizes this and gives a clearer instruction: "There are six of us, just cut off a piece so that each of us has a roughly equal piece."

Say what you mean

Clear communication helps everyone. Use unambiguous and concrete language. Explain why something is not possible or is changing. Write in short sentences and use pictures if necessary.

Explain prison jargon.

On a strike day in prison, Renzo quickly explodes. He finds it difficult that the walk outside is at a different time without knowing in advance. This causes a lot of uncertainty and builds up stress.

Offer predictability

Fixed appointments, calendars, or schedules can provide stability. Communicate clearly about changes in advance. Also, explain what will remain the same. The fewer uncertainties, the better. Predictability offers peace of mind.

Hamid does not sleep well because his mattress feels very hard and uncomfortable. He prefers to sleep on the slatted bed base. Therefore, he props his mattress upright against the wall. This leads to arguments. Hamid is given permission to try a different mattress.

Provide a sensory-friendly environment

Prison is full of sensory stimuli, due to many sounds, lights, smells, and touch. Some autistic people are more sensitive to certain sensory stimuli. Consider whether you can prevent or reduce overstimulation.

Bart excels in writing and clearly structuring texts. He immediately recognizes ambiguities or missing information. Bart enjoys proofreading forms, questionnaires, and written instructions for people in prison. He often makes a lot of good suggestions for improvement.

Work with strengths

In addition to challenges, autism also brings strengths. Everyone wants to belong and be seen. Make the most of someone's talents.

Provide an overview

When someone has just arrived in prison, there can be a lot of uncertainty. Where are you? Where do you need to go? How does imprisonment or detention work? What does an activity look like? It can be helpful to explain this (visually).

Anka is late for her appointment with the psychologist. She is having trouble finding her way around the prison: all the corridors and doors look the same. We added colored walking paths to each wing and put up information signs near the rooms that are visible from a distance. Now Anka can orient herself better.

Give time

Autistic people sometimes respond more slowly, especially to sudden changes or unclear situations. Try to be patient and understanding when it takes a while to respond to a question or instruction.

Sofia is usually not ready in time for a shower or to work out. Because of this, she often can't participate. Sofia is frustrated because she really wants to go. It helps her to knock on the door five minutes beforehand. This gives her time to make the transition and to be on time to participate in the activity.



These tips are based on a pocket booklet developed by sterkmakers in autism.



Broaden your view on autism

You can learn more about autism by, for example, talking to autistic people, attending an autism experience session, or reading, watching, or listening to more information.