National Religious Campaign Against Torture, Solitary Watch and Tamms Year Ten present

A PRIMER ON SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES
WHAT IS
SOLITARY CONFINEMENT?
WHAT IS

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT?

A form of imprisonment that **DEPRIVES PEOPLE OF HUMAN CONTACT**
People are held in solitary confinement in **NEARLY EVERY PRISON** in the United States.
And in supermax prisons **DESIGNED FOR ISOLATION**
People are **ALONE** in small concrete cells
People are **ALONE** in small concrete cells

**FOR 22 TO 24 HOURS A DAY**
There is **NO COMMUNAL ACTIVITY**

**NO CLASSES**

**NO GROUP YARD**

**NO RELIGIOUS SERVICES**

**NO CONTACT VISITS**
There is **NO COMMUNAL ACTIVITY**

**NO CLASSES**
**NO GROUP YARD**
**NO RELIGIOUS SERVICES**
**NO CONTACT VISITS**

Often **NO PHONE CALLS**
Food is **PUSHED THROUGH A SLOT** in the door.
Typically, someone in solitary only leaves the cell to shower
Typically, someone in solitary only leaves the cell to shower

Or **EXERCISE ALONE**

in a concrete pen
Tamms supermax, Illinois. Photo: Chicago Tribune

or a CAGE
Sometimes there are **NO WINDOWS**
Sometimes there are **NO WINDOWS**

Sometimes there are **WINDOW SLITS**
WHO ENDS UP IN SOLITARY?
A SMALL NUMBER of people in solitary have committed violent acts in prison.
A SMALL NUMBER of people in solitary have committed violent acts in prison

Some of them may require separation from the general population, and greater security measures, though NOT ISOLATION, which only worsens behavior and causes mental damage.
A SMALL NUMBER of people in solitary have committed violent acts in prison

Some of them may require separation from the general population, and greater security measures, though NOT ISOLATION which only worsens behavior and causes mental damage.

Most people are put in solitary for NON-VIOLENT MISBEHAVIOR, or because they are considered “HIGH RISK PRISONERS”
NO JUDGE OR JURY sentences people to solitary confinement.
NO JUDGE OR JURY sentences people to solitary confinement

The decision to put someone in solitary is made SOLELY BY PRISON OFFICIALS

Drawing: Thomas Silverstein, held in solitary confinement for 31 years
COMMON REASONS
for placement in solitary confinement
Refusing to return a food tray

Failure to obey an order promptly

Testing positive for marijuana

Possession of an excess quantity of postage stamps
Gang “validation” based on **tattoos** or **reading materials**

Possession of **five dollars** or more without authorization

Refusing to return a **food tray**

Testing positive for **marijuana**

**Self-mutilation or attempted suicide** for the purpose of manipulation

Possession of an **excess quantity of postage stamps**
It’s often the MOST VULNERABLE people who end up in solitary:
It’s often the MOST VULNERABLE people who end up in solitary:

- People with mental illness or developmental disabilities
- Children and youth
- LGBTQ individuals
- Non-English speakers
- Women who have been sexually assaulted by corrections officers
- Anyone who complains of abuse
At least **ONE IN FOUR** individuals in solitary has an underlying **MENTAL ILLNESS**

Drawing: Todd (Hyung-Rae) Tarselli
At least **ONE IN FOUR** individuals in solitary has an underlying **MENTAL ILLNESS**

In isolation, most break down further

Drawing: Todd (Hyung-Rae) Tarselli
Treatment, if any, usually consists of **THERAPY CONDUCTED THROUGH FEEDING SLOTS**

Drawing: Martin Vargas
Treatment, if any, usually consists of **THERAPY CONDUCTED THROUGH FEEDING SLOTS**

Or **“GROUP THERAPY”** sessions held in adjoining cages
If individuals try to harm or kill themselves, they may be CHAINED TO THEIR BEDS.
50% of prison suicides take place among the 2-8% of prisoners in solitary confinement.

If individuals try to harm or kill themselves, they may be CHAINED TO THEIR BEDS.
PEOPLE OF COLOR GET SENT TO SOLITARY IN DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBERS
THOUSANDS OF KIDS UNDER 18 are held in solitary confinement

Photo: Richard Ross
THOUSANDS OF KIDS UNDER 18 are held in solitary confinement. They are put there as punishment or “FOR THEIR OWN PROTECTION”
At last count, there were 81,622 PEOPLE in isolation in U.S. prisons and jails.
At last count, there were **81,622 PEOPLE** in isolation in U.S. prisons and jails

**AT LEAST 25,000** are in long-term solitary confinement in supermax prisons
At last count, there were **81,622 PEOPLE** in isolation in U.S. prisons and jails.

**AT LEAST 25,000** are in long-term solitary confinement in supermax prisons.

In other democratic countries, the practice is rarely used.
IS SOLITARY CONFINEMENT TORTURE?
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **MENTAL HEALTH** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **MENTAL HEALTH** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Largely from the **INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS**
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **MENTAL HEALTH** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

**COMMUNICATION** and **SENSORY STIMULATION** are psychological and physiological needs

Largely from the **INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS**
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **MENTAL HEALTH** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

**COMMUNICATION** and **SENSORY STIMULATION** are psychological and physiological needs. Largely from the **INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS**

They are **FUNDAMENTAL**
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **MENTAL HEALTH** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

**COMMUNICATION** and **SENSORY STIMULATION** are psychological and physiological needs

Largely from the **INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS**

They are **FUNDAMENTAL**

We need them to create a **SENSE OF OURSELVES** in community with others
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **MENTAL HEALTH** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

COMMUNICATION and **SENSORY STIMULATION** are psychological and physiological needs

Largely from the **INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS**

They are **FUNDAMENTAL**

We need them to create a **SENSE OF OURSELVES** in community with others

And **RECREATE** it!
Our **SENSE OF SELF** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **IDENTITY** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

Our **MENTAL HEALTH** is built and rebuilt **EVERY DAY**

**COMMUNICATION** and **SENSORY STIMULATION** are psychological and physiological needs

Largely from the **INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS**

They are **FUNDAMENTAL**

They provide the **REFERENCE POINTS** we use to orient and **CALIBRATE** our senses and perceptions

We need them to create a **SENSE OF OURSELVES** in community with others

and **RECREATE** it!
Without these reference points, **OUR BRAINS GO INTO CRISIS**
Without these reference points, **OUR BRAINS GO INTO CRISIS**

Which explains why people in solitary confinement experience:

- **Hallucinations**
- **Paranoia**
- **Despair**
- **Panic**
- **Psychosis**
- **Self-Mutilation and Compulsion to suicide**

**These are EXPECTED CONSEQUENCES of isolation**
Without these reference points, **OUR BRAINS GO INTO CRISIS**

Which explains why people in solitary confinement experience:

- Hallucinations
- Paranoia
- Despair
- Panic
- Psychosis
- Self-Mutilation and Compulsion to suicide

These are **EXPECTED CONSEQUENCES** of isolation.

When people break down in solitary, it’s **NOT** because they are **WEAK**.
It’s because they are SOCIAL BEINGS
It's because they are **SOCIAL BEINGS**.

Animals are **relational creatures**, who need contact to **maintain a sense of ourselves** and to **establish a sense of reality around us**.
In 2011, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture called for a **GLOBAL BAN** on the use of solitary confinement in **EXCESS OF 15 DAYS** and a **COMPLETE BAN ON INDEFINITE ISOLATION**
He also called for a **BAN** on the **ISOLATION OF YOUTH** and all people with **SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESSES**.

In 2011, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture called for a **GLOBAL BAN** on the use of solitary confinement in **EXCESS OF 15 DAYS** and a **COMPLETE BAN ON INDEFINITE ISOLATION**.
He said this treatment constitutes CRUEL, DEGRADING and INHUMAN TREATMENT, and often OUTRIGHT TORTURE.

In 2011, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture called for a GLOBAL BAN on the use of solitary confinement in EXCESS OF 15 DAYS and a COMPLETE BAN ON INDEFINITE ISOLATION.

He also called for a BAN on the ISOLATION OF YOUTH and all people with SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESSES.

He said this treatment constitutes CRUEL, DEGRADING and INHUMAN TREATMENT, and often OUTRIGHT TORTURE.
JOIN THE MOVEMENT TO STOP TORTURE IN YOUR STATE!
Campaigns to end solitary confinement have sprung up in many states, and on the national level.

To found out about **EVENTS, ACTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS**, visit:

[www.solitarywatch.com/action/](http://www.solitarywatch.com/action/)
PEOPLE OF FAITH AND CLERGY have played a CRITICAL PART in the movement to end solitary confinement.

They believe that “TORTURE IS A MORAL ISSUE”
To join the **NATIONAL RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN AGAINST TORTURE**, visit:

nrcat.org/torture-in-us-prisons
THE CAMPAIGN TO END SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN NEW YORK
In New York, where **NEARLY 4,000 PEOPLE** are in solitary, activists are fighting to end isolation in both state prisons and city jails.
THE MOVEMENT includes:
- Religious congregations
- Students
- Lawyers
- Mental health practitioners
- Civil liberties and human rights groups
- Family members of people in solitary
- Survivors of solitary confinement
Like the U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture, they want to **LIMIT SOLITARY TO 15 DAYS**

They are **PURSUITING REGULATION, LITIGATION, LEGISLATION, AND EDUCATION**
Like the U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture, they want to LIMIT SOLITARY TO 15 DAYS

They are PURSUING REGULATION, LITIGATION, LEGISLATION, AND EDUCATION

In response to this pressure, the rules governing solitary in New York have begun to change
JOIN THE FIGHT TO END TORTURE IN NEW YORK:

NEW YORK CAMPAIGN FOR ALTERNATIVES TO ISOLATED CONFINEMENT  nycaic.org

NEW YORK CITY JAILS ACTION COALITION  nycjac.org
THE CAMPAIGN TO END
SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
IN CALIFORNIA
In California, where more than 10,000 **PEOPLE** are in solitary confinement, the movement started within the supermax prisons themselves.
In 2011 and again in 2013, men in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay State Prison organized a HUNGER STRIKE TO PROTEST CONDITIONS.
In 2011 and again in 2013, men in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay State Prison organized a HUNGER STRIKE TO PROTEST CONDITIONS.

Individuals accused of being gang members had been placed in solitary INDEFINITELY.
In 2011 and again in 2013, men in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay State Prison organized a **HUNGER STRIKE TO PROTEST CONDITIONS**

Individuals accused of being gang members had been placed in solitary **INDEFINITELY**

Some had been in isolation in **SMALL, WINDOWLESS CELLS** for as long as **20 YEARS**
At the height of the strike, 30,000 PEOPLE in California’s prisons were REFUSING FOOD.
At the height of the strike, **30,000 PEOPLE** in California’s prisons were **REFUSING FOOD**

Some remained on hunger strike for nearly **TWO MONTHS**
Support Pelican Bay Prisoners' Hunger Strike
The strikers won **FEW CONCESSIONS** from the state.
The strikers won **FEW CONCESSIONS** from the state.

But they helped **RAISE CONSCIOUSNESS AND SPUR** on the movement against solitary confinement.
TO JOIN THE FIGHT TO END TORTURE
in California:

PRISONER HUNGER STRIKE SOLIDARITY
www.prisonerhungerstrikessolidarity.wordpress.com

CALIFORNIA FAMILIES TO ABOLISH SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
www.abolishsolitary.com
Produced for the
NATIONAL RELIGIOUS
CAMPAIGN AGAINST
TORTURE

This presentation is made possible by support from the following partners and sponsors:

- Tamms Year Ten
- Solitary Watch
- Parsons The New School for Design
- New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement
- The Flom Family Foundation
- Fund for a Just Society of the Unitarian Universalist Church
- The Van Abbemuseum

Written by Laurie Jo Reynolds and Jean Casella
Designed by Debbie Hovens and Laurie Jo Reynolds