

NOT MEAN

there's always a reason

103 young people with experience in criminal justice



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Changefactory Knowledge Centre
Published 2021, 2nd version 2022
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The photos are of participants in the survey

THANK YOU

A thousand million thanks to you kind, brave and wise children who've shared experiences and given important advice for this report. We know that the experiences and advice are dear-bought.

Know that you are wise, kind and important. You know what it's like to meet the police, the conflict council and the correctional service after doing something criminal, and what it takes for you to feel better and stop doing crime. You're the ones who have this knowledge. Norway and the rest of the world need this knowledge.

THANK YOU for sharing experiences and giving advice so children can be met safely when they've done something illegal. With all of you it was possible to obtain this knowledge.

Now it's up to national authorities, politicians, directors of public prosecutions, police, conflict councils, correctional services, students and others who meet young people who've committed crimes to take the advice seriously and use it wisely.

THANK YOU FROM OUR HEARTS

TO ADULTS WHO WANT TO HELP

You adults who meet us have to remember that none of us are mean. Each one of us is doing the best we can. We want to stop doing bad things. To achieve that, we need you to understand and show us that you know we're not mean. When you meet children who commit crimes, we hope you remember that we're still children.

For you to be able to help us stop doing crime, it's important that you understand that there are many reasons why we end up doing bad or illegal things. We've had a lot of painful feelings, experienced a lot of painful things, and lost a lot of trusts. You'll be able to help us when you understand that you need to focus on the reasons why we do illegal things.

Some of you are the adults who can gain our trust and who can help us stop. You understand that we're actually kind. Tell us what we are and try to find out why we do what we do. You know that you need to help us with the reasons why we do these things. You know that we've often experienced many painful things and that we also need to be met with kindness, safety and love. We know you can be found in schools, the police, outreach services, the correctional service and the conflict council.

Whenever you meet a child who's done something bad or illegal, remember that the child wants to be stopped. Punishment, harshness and scolding don't stop crime. Meet all children with the mindset that they're not mean. Each one of you can be the one to help a child feel better in their life.

TO POLITICIANS

When children are described as dangerous, violent, repeat offenders, criminals and with little respect for the police, this can have major consequences directly in children's lives.

The results of this qualitative survey show that the ways we've met children who commit offenses until now, haven't worked as intended.

5 % of the children stopped doing crime after meeting the police

Children are asking Norway to find new solutions. They have dear-bought advice about what it takes to stop committing crime.

To punish is too easy. According to children, it isn't the right way to go. Politicians have to take these answers seriously in order to find solutions that work better.

If Norway wants to stop children in a safe way, children's procedural rights must be written explicitly in laws, regulations and guidelines. These national frameworks are decisive. These are the rights children have according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to how they should be met. These rights must also be part of the syllabus in the education and in the practice descriptions for professionals who are going to meet children.

If Norway really wants to prevent violence and youth crime, the way we look at, think about, talk about and write about these children must be done in wiser ways. The children need to feel that Norway cares about them, and needs them. They need to feel that they're our children.

The qualitative survey in brief

Changefactory has, since 2009, carried out qualitative surveys with children who've been in contact with the police. After the previous qualitative survey with children who've used violence, "Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside" (2020), was published, both police and politicians requested more knowledge from children who'd been in conflict with the law. They wanted knowledge from children about concern conversations, interrogation and punishment.

In the spring of 2021, Changefactory carried out this qualitative survey with 103 children and young people with experience from concern conversations, interrogation and punishment. The aim was to collect concrete advice about how the police and other adults can meet children who've done something criminal in a way that feels safe for the children and which can contribute to them being able to feel better in their lives afterwards. This can lead to less crime.

Questions and topics

A semi-structured interview guide was designed based on responses from children in previous qualitative surveys, and questions from politicians and adults who meet children and young people who've been in conflict with the law. Professionals went through the interview guide, and gave input to ensure that the qualitative survey would collect the knowledge professionals needed. The questions were tested in cooperation with children and young people. The interview guide was adjusted before the researchers began interview sessions.

When the interview guide was ready, the researchers prepared the method. They linked various method tools to the specific questions, to ensure that all children would have the opportunity to share experiences and advice. The questions and method were adjusted again after the first sessions had been completed. Answers that are repeated by many children are summarised in the form of text or bullet points. Percentages are calculated based on how many have answered the question.

The main themes were

What has been good about concern conversation
What hasn't been so good about concern conversation
What makes adults feel safe for children during concern conversation
How do concern conversation have to be to stop crime
How can young people get help to feel better inside

What has been good about interrogation
What hasn't been so good about interrogation
What makes adults feel safe for children during interrogation
How are interrogations that feel safe
What rights do children have during interrogation
How does the defence lawyer feel for children during interrogation

What's helpful and not that helpful when society wants to punish children and youth
In what ways do adults feel safe enough for children to help stop crime
About youth follow-up, youth punishment and community service

Of the ones taking part in the qualitative survey

65% have had a concern conversation
93% have been in interrogations
70% received a punishment

Of the ones who have received a punishment

37% received youth follow-up
19% were sentenced to youth punishment
14% were sentenced to community service

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to everyone under the age of 18

The participants in the qualitative survey were between the ages of 13 and 20. The average age was 16 years. Therefore, in this report, we've chosen to refer to the participants as children.

TO
EVERYONE
IN CHARGE



CHILDREN DON'T HAVE LEGAL PROTECTION

65% of the children have had a concern conversation
3% of these have stopped doing crime

93% of the children have been in interrogations
25% of these had a defence lawyer
42% were told about their rights

37% of the children have had youth follow-up
4% of these stopped doing crime after youth follow-up

19% of the children have been sentenced to youth punishment
6% of these stopped doing crime after youth punishment

14% of the children have been sentenced to community service
0% of these children stopped doing crime after community service

Are these our children?

At home, they may have been met with scolding, house arrest or violence. At school, they may have been met with bad notes and expulsions. Some have been moved to strict institutions by child welfare services. Some have parents who've been advised to set clear and strict boundaries for them at home. They may have been met by the police with involuntary searches, use of force, custody cell or other punishment.

Are we pushing the children away?

The way Norway has dealt with children who have committed crimes has made many feel worse inside. Children tell about pain in their hearts and lumps in their throats. They've had stress in their bodies, in their heads and become scared and unsure of what'll happen next in their case, and of what'll happen in their lives afterwards.

Norway has often scared children away instead of helping them. Some have felt pushed out of society, and have felt more alone. Some have been afraid to seek help, some have been so afraid of the police that they haven't dared to call them when they've needed to.

Children have said that the way Norway has met them when they've committed crimes has often made it difficult to stop committing more offences or seeing themselves as criminals. They've felt labelled and haven't been able to see a way out. They can have waited in fear for the police to get them for something. Some have stayed inside because they've been afraid that the police have been waiting for them outside. They may have thought that the police don't like them, and haven't been able to trust the police.

Children have often started to think that they're mean and that's why they're met in that way. When children think they're mean, a lot of hurt has piled up in their bodies. They may also have started doing bad things to themselves to escape from the feelings inside.

Children have often been too poorly informed about their rights. It's made them uncertain about what would happen to them. Children have often not had a defence lawyer during interrogations.

The follow-up that children in conflict with the law receive has to help them feel better inside. This will determine whether more children are helped out of crime. There rests a heavy responsibility on the authorities to get this right.

Do these children have legal protection?

The knowledge from children in this report shows that Norway has a long way to go to safeguard the legal protection of children who are suspected of crimes. Today's legislation doesn't adequately protect these rights. The legislation is made for adults. Children's rights are only mentioned in a few paragraphs.

Parental involvement is described by professionals as largely helpful. The knowledge from children in this report shows that children don't always experience it that way. When the police involve parents early on, it can, for example, prevent children from talking honestly to the police. Current legislation doesn't sufficiently ensure that children can speak to the police in a safe way. At the same time, the police are dependent on children being able to speak in a safe way, in order to have good interrogations that in turn can contribute to solving cases.

The laws need to be written in ways that professionals can understand and ensure children's rights, with provisions where children's rights are clearly stated. The provisions that deal with children should be collected in separate chapters so that professionals can more easily ensure children's legal security in a good way.

Children's procedural rights must be ensured

The reactions children who commit crime are met with have to aim to help them with what's causing them to commit crime. Children have to be met in ways that ensure their procedural rights. The parliamentary justice committee made the following decision in 2020:

The Storting asks the government to ensure that procedural legislation and the Administration Act are in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's fundamental rights to express themselves freely, information, privacy and that decisions are made in the best interests of the child.

When the procedural rights become clearer in the special laws, it becomes clearer for the police and prosecutors how they can stop crime in a way that feels safe for children and they can have better informed cases.

The specifics of the criminal reactions then have to be adapted to each individual child to a much greater extent than they are today. Regulations and guidelines have to be based on knowledge from children and clearly describe children's procedural rights. It will be crucial for the police to better know how to proceed to secure these rights in all aspects of their work with children.

In all legislation, regulations, guidelines, guides, action plans, initiatives and measures, children's procedural rights have to be clearly described. Norway and all other countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child are obliged to do so.

REACTIONS OF THE FUTURE

N O R W A Y U N D E R S T A N D S

In the future, adults understand that punishment creates ice around the heart of children

Adults understand that children have to be met with warmth even after breaking the law

Adults understand that punishment can take away children's trust and faith in adults

Adults understand that punishment can prevent motivation to do better

Adults know that children want to be stopped from committing crimes

Adults know that we have to melt the ice around hearts in order to help

Adults know that we have to draw children who commit crimes closer to us

T H E R E F O R E

Therefore adults no longer punish children

Adults give children reactions, to help with the reason why

The reactions are based on safety, understanding and kindness

Adults understand children better and can therefore help more people

ADVICE FOR ADULTS

The adults must understand why

Before a reaction is decided, adults have to understand why we commit crimes. The reaction aims to help us with the reason why. We have to find out together how we can work through what's hurting inside. The police know that in order for us to stop committing a crime, we need help with the reasons behind the crime.

Adapt the reaction for each individual child

The specifics of the reaction we receive is made in cooperation with us. A person we trust is responsible for thinking with us about what we need to stop committing crimes. We're given enough information about existing possibilities. The adult makes it possible for us to be honest about what we need to stop. If we're unsure, the adult doesn't decide for us, but continues to come up with alternatives and talks with us about what we think is the best solution. The adult doesn't judge and doesn't focus on what we've done, but how they can help us going forward. The adult goes as far as they can to achieve a solution that we want. If it doesn't work, they have to explain honestly and try to meet us in the middle.

Give us a safe adult

When the reaction is determined, adults know that we need an adult we trust to follow up on us going forward. We're given information about what it means for an adult to follow up on us, why it's a good idea and how long it's planned for. We're told that the follow-up may include talks, meetings, activities or other things.

We're asked if we have an adult we trust who could be this adult. If the adult is asked, but doesn't want to or can't, this is explained to us honestly and we get help to find someone else. If we don't have a specific adult we want to follow up on us, an adult can suggest an adult who's gotten good feedback from young people in the past.

Find something that matters more

The adults find something that we feel is important, and we can fill up our days with, together with each of us. It has to be something that can

mean more to us than crime or drugs, and that is something we WANT strongly enough so that we can let go of the life we've had. It may be trying a job, completing something in school to be able to study, getting involved in something that we're passionate about or doing something that helps others. The adults need to ask us to think big and not let ourselves be stopped by what we think we can't achieve. It's okay to try different things, to find what gives enough sense of achievement, joy, challenge or strength.

We may need help from adults to do or manage to do these things. The adults have to help us dare to dive in to find what our dreams are. We may also need help with money, with getting somewhere, with waking up in the morning or other things that need to be in place. The adults have to find out what kind of help we need to make this happen, together with us.

Don't give up if we fall back

If we make a mistake, like relapsing into drugs, committing crimes or not being able to do parts of the reaction, the adult tries to find out what happened and why. We talk together about how it can be avoided in the future and what we need to be able to do it. Adults know that making the reaction more severe can cause us to lose motivation to get away from crime. The adults find out whether we need more follow-up from the adult we trust or whether some changes need to be made quickly to the contents of the reaction together with us.

Ask what we need after the reaction

When we've finished the reaction, the adult who's followed up on us asks us what further help and support we need in order not to commit more crime. We're given information about the possibilities and who we can contact for help. We also get to know that the adult who's followed up on us can continue to follow up on us for a further period of time. We make a plan together for how we'll continue to work towards achieving our goals and achieve things that are important to us.

CHILDREN
HAVE THEIR
OWN RIGHTS



Children's human rights

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated in Norwegian law through the Human Rights Act in 2003. Several of the rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are also a part of the Norwegian Constitution. Only some of the rights are included in the various special laws. The general idea has been that the Human Rights Act should be used in combination with the special laws.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children procedural rights. These are rights that describe how children should be met in all actions and decisions that concern them. These are, children's right to information, to express themselves freely and the right to respect for their privacy. These rights must be secured before one can assess what is in the best interest of the child.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child prepares general comments on the interpretation of the text of the convention. The Norwegian Supreme Court has determined in HR-2018-2096-A that the general comments must be given - considerable weight. Therefore, the general comments must also be given weight when dealing with children who are in conflict with the law.

CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW ALSO HAVE PROCEDURAL RIGHTS

Children who break the law ask us to understand that there's always a reason when bad things happen. Getting to the bottom of it should be the main focus to prevent it from happening again. To succeed in that, they have to be met in a safe way.

There's a broad correspondence between what children explain as important when it comes to being met in a safe way and children's procedural rights. When bad things happen, these rights make it possible to meet the child in a way that ensures that they can talk about what has happened. In this way, children's trust in adults can be maintained, children's rights be secured and cases resolved more quickly.

National authorities and everyone who works with children have a duty to know about and contribute to ensuring children's procedural rights. Next follows a brief presentation of the procedural rights.

How to assess what's in the best interests of the child

- In accordance with UNCRC art. 3 and The Constitution of Norway (Grl) art. 104

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the child's best interests must be a primary consideration in all actions and decisions affecting a child. This applies both when the police have a suspicion about a child, stop the child in the street, take the child in for a concern conversation or in interrogations.

In order to find out what's in the best interest of the child, the adults must ensure that the child has received sufficient and understandable information, that the child is free to express their opinions, and that the child's right to privacy is safeguarded. These are children's rights in process. They must be met before a decision can be made as to what's in the best interests of the child.

The child's right to information

- A prerequisite for the right under UNCRC art. 12 children's right to express themselves freely, see CRC General Comment nr. 12 para. 25.

The UN Children's Committee states that children have the right to receive the information necessary in order to be able to express themselves freely. This means that the child must, among other things, receive information about::

- the situation and the matter at hand
- what will happen if the child shares information about what has happened
- what decisions will be made and which alternative solutions exist

The information must be given in a considerate and understandable way, it must be repeated when needed, and the child must be given new information in the case along the way. The right to information is a prerequisite for the child to be able to speak freely about actions being taken and decisions that are being made. Therefore, this right is very important.

The child's right to express themselves freely

- In accordance with UNCRC art. 12 and Grl. art. 104

In all actions and decisions that concern them, children have the right to express themselves freely - about what the child thinks and their opinion about what the child wants to express. If adults propose solutions other than what the child wants, the child must be allowed to express their opinion about how the child thinks this will turn out. The child's right to speak freely doesn't depend on the consent from parents or others with parental responsibility. As a starting point, the child's best interests can't be used as justification for children not being heard in various processes. The word freely means that adults must provide an environment where the child feels respected and safe when they're going to express themselves. To make it feel safe, the child must be given the opportunity to have a person with them that they trust implicitly. As far as possible, children must be allowed to talk to an adult they feel safe with. Children must also have the opportunity to express themselves in an environment that feels safe.

Expressing oneself freely also means that the child:

- mustn't be subjected to manipulation, influence or pressure
- must express their own views, not those of others
- receives enough and comprehensible information to be able to speak freely
- can speak directly to the decision-maker, if the child wishes. Alternatively, it must be ensured that the child's statements reach the decision maker in a safe way
- has the right to think what they want and say what they want, and this must be included in the assessment of what's in the best interests of the child
- their statements must be given weight, in accordance with the child's age and maturity

If it's considered that the child's statements should not be given weight, it must be documented and justified what the consequences could be for the child to act contrary to the child's statements. The assessment of whether the action or decision has such a beneficial effect for the child that it clearly outweighs the disadvantages of acting contrary to the child's views must also be documented and justified.

The child's right to respect for their privacy

- according to UNCRC art. 16, Grl. art. 102 and ECHR art. 8

The Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy. In practice, this means that professionals cannot automatically share information from or about the child within the service, with other services or with parents.

Sharing of information must be in accordance with law, and the intervention in the child's privacy must be necessary. In many cases, information is shared, from or about the child, without the child's right to privacy being assessed. If information is shared without the child's knowledge, the child may lose trust in the adult who passes the information on. Safeguarding children's right to respect for their privacy is an important prerequisite for children's right to express themselves freely.

The child needs to know what can happen to what the child shares, before an adult starts talking with a child. When professionals consider sharing information from or about the child with others, it's an action or a decision that affects the child. Adults must therefore inform the child that they're considering sharing information, and they let the child express themselves freely about it, before the information is shared. This applies to all children regardless of age. It must also be assessed whether it's in the child's best interests to share the information.

This doesn't mean that other professionals, services or parents should never receive information from or about the child. But the procedure for securing the right to information and to express oneself must be followed, and there must be a legal basis for sharing information. In addition, adults must consider whether it's necessary to share information.

OTHER RIGHTS THAT CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW HAVE

In addition to procedural rights, children in conflict with the law have special protection in UNCRC art. 40.

1. States Parties recognise the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognised as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.

2. b) Every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has at least the following guarantees: (...) (ii) To be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her, and, if appropriate, through his or her parents or legal guardians, and to have legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his or her defence, (...)

Article 40 UNCRC states that children who are accused of or have committed a criminal offence have the right to be treated in a way that promotes the child's sense of dignity and self-worth. Furthermore, the article emphasises children's right to receive information about the accusations.

General Comment No. 24: on children's rights in the child justice system

In CRC general comment no. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system, the committee points out that children and young people must be treated in a child-friendly way. This comment has not been translated into Norwegian yet.

Among other things, the committee states that exposure to the criminal justice system harms children and can limit their development. Furthermore, the committee states in section 2 that; *In all decisions taken within the context of the administration of juvenile justice, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration. Children differ from adults in their physical and psychological development, and their emotional and educational needs. Such differences constitute the basis for the lesser culpability of children in conflict with the law.*

The committee emphasises the difference between children and adults, and shows how this difference forms the basis for recognition of a separate system with a differentiated and individualised approach.

This clearly shows that young people in conflict with the law have special rights when dealing with the police and other actors in the criminal justice system. In order for Norway to be able to say that it respects the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, also for children who commit crimes, children must be treated in a child-friendly way in the criminal justice system.

Important excerpts from the UN Children's Committee's General Comment no. 24

Paragraph 46: ... Proceedings should be conducted in an atmosphere of understanding to allow children to fully participate. Developments in child-friendly justice provide an impetus towards child-friendly language at all stages, child-friendly layouts of interviewing spaces and courts, support by appropriate adults, removal of intimidating legal attire and adaptation of proceedings, including accommodation for children with disabilities.

Paragraph 59: Coercion leading a child to a confession or self-incriminatory testimony is impermissible. The term "compelled" should be interpreted broadly and not be limited to physical force. The risk of false confession is increased by the child's age and development, lack of understanding, and fear of unknown consequences, including a suggested possibility of imprisonment, as well as by the length and circumstances of the questioning.

General Comment No. 12: The child's right to be heard

Paragraph 58: Article 12, paragraph 2, of the Convention requires that a child alleged to have, accused of, or recognised as having, infringed the penal law, has the right to be heard. This right has to be fully observed during all stages of the judicial process, from the pre-trial stage when the child has the right to remain silent, to the right to be heard by the police, the prosecutor and the investigating judge. It also applies through the stages of adjudication and disposition, as well as implementation of the imposed measures.

ALWAYS
A
REASON
WHY



ALWAYS A REASON WHY

The children who have taken part in this survey have taken drugs, had drugs on them, sold drugs to others, driven under the influence, set fire to buildings and houses, stabbed others, carried weapons, used weapons, participated in fights, started fights, shoplifted and robbed people, stolen cars, broken into places, vandalised, used violence against others and the police, threatened others and the police.

In this part, experiences and advice from children are presented about why crime happens, and what adults can do to stop children in a safe way. Anyone who meets children should read this part. It may be wise to read it with an open heart, before you read the experiences from and advice for the concern conversations, interrogations and punishment.

Not mean, there are different reasons why

Summarised experiences

Reasons why children could commit crime:

Others have done something bad to them

- they've experienced a lot of unsafety in their lives
- they've been bullied at school
- they've grown up with parents who drank a lot, took drugs or were on medication
- they've grown up with parents who have been very angry, violent or sexually abusive at home

Felt alone

- they've felt that they didn't belong anywhere
- they've felt that no one cared about them
- they've had few friends
- they've been afraid of losing friends, losing their place or appearing weak

Had difficult thoughts about themselves

- they've felt as if many people thought that there was lot wrong with them
- they've felt that they don't deserve to be happy
- they've thought that they've disappointed everyone around them
- they've felt like bad role models for younger children who looked up to them

To get away from bad feelings

- they wanted to take a break from life or what felt painful
- they did it as an escape, to get their minds on something else
- they felt adrenaline and excitement when doing crime
- they couldn't stop committing crime because they were afraid that the bad feelings would return

Wanted to help others

- they've tried to help others who are having a hard time
- they've stolen food to give to those in need

QUOTES

The first bad thing I did was steal. My family had no money, so it became logical to steal to help them.

I struggled to fit in with groups of friends and other groups of people. In the gangs that committed crime, everyone could belong. Then I became part of a gang like that.

When I did something bad, all I could think about was that I didn't have to get caught. Then I forgot the pain inside me for a little while. Gradually, the excitement became the opportunity not to think about what was painful.

At school, no one wanted anything to do with me. Inside I felt like I was worth less than everyone else. Finally I had enough. I brought a gun to school and threatened them.

It's about something painful. Not everyone in the police gets it. It's not to be cool, it's to not feel the pain.

I'm beaten at home. I can't be there, so I'm out doing bad things.

We haven't chosen. How we grew up made the choice for us.

I've done bad things. But I'm not mean or a criminal. Still, I'll continue to be, as long as the adults think of me like that.

From the law's point of view, I've done something wrong, but if the ones who decided knew everything, they would know that I was really the victim.

No one commits crime because they want to be rude. There's almost always stress, pain and a lot of betrayal from adults underneath.

We had a lot of money at home, so I used to steal from the family to buy food for the addicts. They have the cutest smiles, and I see in their smiles how kind they really are.

It's absolutely horrible. They don't understand that I don't do things to be an asshole. I just need the adrenaline, and the calmness. So that I don't have to be afraid or sad. I can't handle those two feelings. No one wants to be a criminal.

Want to be stopped

Summarised experiences

Reasons why children want to be stopped:

- they haven't wanted to get drunk, steal, fight or do other bad things
- they haven't wanted to commit crimes
- they've known that it's illegal and wanted to get out of it
- they wanted to feel good and be like others
- crime has been the best they could do, at that time
- they've needed help to stop doing crimes

What it could be like for children when they weren't stopped in a safe way:

- they haven't stopped doing crimes after being in a concern conversation or interrogations
- they haven't stopped doing crimes after they've received or been sentenced to a punishment
- they've felt that punishment and consequences were scary and unsafe, and made it worse
- they've felt that the police stopped them, spoke harshly or rudely to them, or took them to the police station because of how they look, where they live or who they're friends with
- it's felt like the police have taken them without a good reason
- it's created bad feelings which have led them to do bad things

QUOTES

None of us want to do illegal things. I know what I'm doing is bad and stupid. I don't want to continue with it.

We want out of it, this isn't what we want with our lives.

This way of living is scary. Almost none of my friends are alive now. Do they think we want it that way?

No one wants to be addicted to drugs. It's not a good life, nobody wants to have it like that.

I just felt useless when I did bad things. I didn't want to have it like that, I needed help with a way out.

ADVICE FROM CHILDREN

Make it safe and build trust

For us to be able to tell you what you need to know to stop crime, it has to feel safe. If we can feel that you trust us, we can trust you more easily. If it feels like your goal is to catch us and give us a punishment, it's almost impossible to feel safe, and impossible for you to gain our trust.

To make it safe, adults who can show warmth are needed. Speak in a calm voice and remind us that we're worth a lot. Tell us you know we're kind at heart - regardless of whether we've done something bad or not.

Tell us a little bit about yourselves. It's nice to hear about something that's important to you, something you love, or something else that makes you the person you are. It's difficult to tell important things to someone we know little about.

We ask you from the bottom of our hearts to do your best and not give up on us. Then we can believe that you really care. Even if we commit crimes again, we ask you not to give up. When we know that you'll keep believing in us, we'll be able to trust you. When we trust you, we'll try not to disappoint you. Then we have you in mind, and we can try our best not to do crime.

Understand that there's a reason why

To stop crime, you have to understand that crime always has a reason. Adults must always work to find out why we commit crimes. There's always a reason why. When adults understand why, they can understand how to help us quit.

Adults have to focus on why children and young people commit crimes, not on the fact that they do it. Without that, crime can't be stopped. If the reason isn't looked for in each young person, the hurt will only come out in other ways. For example, we can stop breaking into places, but start doing drugs. We can stop driving when we've been drinking or doing drugs, but start fighting or using weapons. We can stop hitting others but start hurting ourselves.

In order to find out what hurts, adults have to understand how crucial it is. Arrangements have to be made so that we can talk to an adult who feels as safe as possible. This adult has to ask us why we do what we do. Ask in a way so that we know that you really want to know and that you want us to feel better in our lives.

Show that you want to help

For us to be able to explain why we commit crimes, we have to feel safe and feel that you want to help. Remind us again and again that we aren't mean. Tell us you really want us to make it happen. Tell us that you want to help us so that we feel better inside and avoid committing crimes. Tell us what you can help with and how we together can find out what help we should get.

Remember to not just focus on us getting better with the practical things in life. Advice about who we should be friends with and which areas we shouldn't hang out in doesn't help a lot. It also doesn't help that you use rewards or consequences to get us to go to school. You have to help us with the reasons we have inside. To help us with that, you have to show us with words and actions that you really want to help.



KNOWLEDGE FROM CHILDREN ABOUT
CONCERN CONVERSATIONS



CONCERN CONVERSATIONS

65% of the children in the survey have been in a concern conversation

The concern conversation is a term used about conversations the police have with children and their guardians, and is a tool recommended for use when unwanted/criminal behaviour that could develop into a criminal career is uncovered. (Guide for the police's concern conversation, "Dialog for ansvar og positiv endring"/"Dialogue for responsibility and positive change").

States parties should enact legislation and ensure practices that safeguard children's rights from the moment of contact with the system, including at the stopping, warning or arrest stage, while in custody of police or other law enforcement agencies, during transfers to and from police stations, places of detention and courts, and during questioning, searches and the taking of evidentiary samples. Records should be kept on the location and condition of the child in all phases and processes. (UN Children's Committee General Comment No. 24 paragraph 41).

Random whether or not it helps

3% have stopped committing crimes after the concern conversation

Summarised experiences

Why the concern conversation could feel helpful for children:

- they've met good adults who showed the children that they wanted to help, worked to understand why crime happens and how the children feel inside
- the adults have used kind words and said that they know that there's a reason why children commit crimes
- the adults have shown that they understand that the children aren't mean, and that they don't really want to do bad things

Why the concern conversation could feel unhelpful for children:

- it hasn't felt safe to tell the truth when the police haven't worked to gain the children's trust first
- they haven't known that the reason the police wanted to talk to them was that they were worried about them, or wanted to help them
- they've felt that the police haven't tried to understand their side
- they've met police who've been strict in their voice, shouted or felt angry
- they've become scared of the police, and lost faith that the police want to help them
- it's felt unsafe when the concern conversation's been in a room that's felt cold
- they've felt that the concern conversation has been more like an interrogation than a conversation
- they've felt that the concern conversation is the police's way of saying that the children are now in the police's spotlight
- they've been met by police in uniform and that's made it feel scary

QUOTES

There were two large men in uniform in the concern conversation. They said they thought I'd done bad things and asked me what I'd done. The whole world stopped. I felt very small, and not very understood.

I had a good person in the concern conversation. Before I met him, the police were just shit, and everything was just a mess. He showed me very quickly that I could trust him. He told me like: "tell me what you want me to know".

The concern conversation was pretty unnecessary. They forced me to be there. When they force me, it's like a lecture I have to sit and listen to.

I didn't know why they wanted to talk to me in a concern conversation. After we'd spoken, they sent a report of concern to the child welfare services. When I asked them why they did it, they said they had to.

When I explained my side she said it didn't make sense based on what she'd heard from others. When she didn't believe me, I didn't want to talk to her anymore.

Aren't told enough

25% have received enough information before, during or after the concern conversation

Summarised experiences

Before the concern conversation

What children could be given too little information about:

- what a concern conversation actually is
- why they were going to the police
- what would happen when they were there
- who was going to be there
- what the police was going to ask them about
- what the purpose of the concern conversation was
- what rights they have in a concern conversation

What it could be like for children when they were given little information:

- they've guessed at reasons why they're having a concern conversation, which could be worse than the actual reason why
- they've felt more unsafe
- it's felt like the police have all the power

What it could be like for children when parents were given information before them:

- they've lost trust in the police before the concern conversation
- the police haven't given them information directly, only through parents
- they've been met with consequences and it's become worse at home

During the concern conversation

What children could be given too little information about:

- what the purpose of the concern conversation is
- what the police can help with
- what will happen with what they say
- that the police can open a case if children tell them something criminal they or others have done during the conversation
- which other adults may be told what they say

What it could be like for children when they were given too little information:

- they've become unsure of what the police want with the things they ask about
- they've been afraid that something worse would happen if they said anything
- they've thought that the police have suspected them of something
- they've chosen not to say a lot
- they've gotten angry with the police because they didn't get enough information
- they've had a concern conversation without knowing they were having one
- they've found out afterwards that the conversation with the police was meant to be a concern conversation
- they've felt tricked by the police

After the concern conversation

What children could be given too little information about:

- what will happen next
- what the police think of them afterwards

What it could be like for children when they were given too little information:

- they've become afraid that they've been labelled by the police
- they've become afraid that the police will keep an eye on them from then on

QUOTES

I was 13 years old when I had my first concern conversation. I didn't know it was a concern conversation until afterwards. I thought I was in an interrogation.

I was afraid of what would happen after the concern conversation. They didn't tell me anything.

I was at home, then my mother came and said we were going to a concern conversation. I didn't know anything about what a concern conversation was or why I was going there. I was shaking all the way there.

It's scary to come there without knowing anything about why or what it's about. I thought I was going to prison.

After I was there I found out that I could have brought an adult, by then it was too late. The only thing I knew before I got there was that I was going there.

They called my mother first and said I was going to a concern conversation. They don't know what happens when they call home to the parents. Maybe we get beaten?

Often unsafe with parents

24% have felt safe when parents have been there during the concern conversation

Summarised experiences

What it could be like for children when parents have been there during the concern conversation:

- it's felt as if the police and their parents have teamed up against them
- they've had it worse at home, and their parents have become angry with them after the concern conversation
- they've received punishment or consequences at home
- they've been afraid of what it would be like at home afterwards
- it's been embarrassing when parents have been there
- they've had a good relationship with their parents, but it still hasn't always felt safe that the parents were there during the concern conversation
- there have been things that have happened at home that have been the reason why they've done criminal things. It's been almost impossible to talk honestly with the police. Then the police didn't get the information they needed to stop crimes
- they've felt that the adults have been out to get them, and haven't dared to let either the police or parents know things after the concern conversation, even if something bad has happened in their life that they've needed help with

QUOTES

It's easy for the police to get parents to agree to their arguments, it becomes parents and police against me. It feels scary.

After the concern conversation, mum and dad became stricter. They started fighting, so then I started trying to trick them too.

Dad was there during the concern conversation. I don't say anything in front of dad, he beats me every day. If I'd told the police that, my father would've beat me to death.

I couldn't speak honestly because my mum was there. I didn't want to worry her even more.

I had to bring Dad, even though it was embarrassing and scary.



They ask a lot about people the children know

23% haven't experienced that the police have asked a lot about people they know during the concern conversation

Summarised experiences

What it could be like for children when the police asked about people the children know:

- they've lost trust in the police when the focus has been on this
- they've been afraid of what might happen if they tell the police something about others
- they've had some trust in the police, but lost it when the police asked questions about others
- it's become difficult to say anything honestly to the police when they've experienced that the police have asked them to snitch on their friends
- the police have said that they'll get lighter sentences or consequences if they give information about people they know
- the police have said that they'll be punished or receive consequences if they don't tell
- they've been afraid of destroying their friendships, or being excluded from a community
- they've been afraid of what might happen if it comes out that they've said something about someone else
- the police have wanted information about someone the children have been afraid of. The children have been afraid of what might happen if they say something about them, and that it could be dangerous for the child if it comes out that the child has talked about others
- when the police have asked a lot about people the children know, it hasn't seemed like they've wanted to help. When the police have been more concerned with others than with the child, it's felt like the police have used the child as a source of information

QUOTES

They have tried to get me to name people they think have been involved. I don't think they realise that I could get into big trouble if I do.

Every time they talk to me they try to pressure me into saying things about people I hang out with whom I love.

My whole body stiffens when they ask if I can snitch. It's not nice to ask me that, because I end up in more trouble.

They just want answers about who I hang out with. They're constantly trying to get me to talk about others even though I never say anything.

He wanted to talk about what friends I have and what they do. I was annoyed on the inside. I can't talk to him in a safe way then. I don't feel like he wants to help me, but that he wants me to help them name them.

During the concern conversation they were most interested in getting to the people who'd sold to me instead of talking with me. I had to choose between the police and my friends.

They rarely ask about the reason why

24% haven't been asked about the reason why they've committed crimes during the concern conversation

Summarised experiences

How the police could ask too little about the reason why:

- the police haven't asked about the reason why at all
- the police have asked why they did it, but in a way that has made it feel like the police didn't really want to understand
- the police have focused on actions, and talked about consequences

What it could be like for children:

- when the police haven't asked about the reason why in a way that makes it possible to answer honestly, many have lost faith that the police wants to help them
- it's felt like the police have decided in advance what the reason why criminal things have happened is, and that they don't need to know from the child
- when the police have been scolding instead of asking about the reason why, it's made them give less fucks
- when the police have asked about the reason, it's felt more like a question they could tick off on a list, rather than really wanting to know what it was about

QUOTES

If the police had asked how things were at home, they might have met me with more understanding, because they treated me a bit like I was a spoiled kid who took things for granted.

They asked why, but not in a way where it was possible to say it honestly.

They just sat there and said that what I was doing was wrong, that I just had to do something else. It goes straight in and straight out. It was scoldings I had heard a thousand times before from other adults. No adults had asked me why I did it.

The police had a theory about why things were the way they were. They blamed my family. That was totally wrong. They said I had it bad at home. I didn't. They went after the wrong reason because they didn't ask me, and didn't believe what I said.

I haven't been able to talk about how it is with anyone. Because I didn't trust anyone there. They just wanted to tell me that I couldn't be like so and so. But no one talked to me about what I needed for there to be less of it.

It felt like they were just out to get us, not find out why it happened.

They've asked a bit about why that was nice.

Feel like criminals

22% haven't felt like criminals after the concern conversation

Summarised experiences

How children could feel like criminals after the concern conversation:

- they've felt that the police have decided that the children are bad and that they'll commit crimes in the future
- when the police have been angry, had stern voices and worn uniforms, children have felt that the police have seen them as criminals and mean
- they've experienced that the police have monitored them after the concern conversation and kept an eye on what they've done
- they've been stopped in the street by police who've checked who they've been with and what they've had in their pockets

QUOTES

It only got worse after the concern conversation. They treated me like a criminal and I started to believe it. Then I kind of became a criminal in the end.

I stopped caring. I thought "now I'm in the system, then I can't become anything anyway, so I'm not gonna give a single fuck".

I thought I was going to be seen as a criminal forever. I was stressing about what was going to happen with my life, and what people were going to think of me. Then lots became uncertain in life.

When they say I'm a criminal, I walk around thinking that I am.

I felt I was treated like a grown man with a long history with the police. They said they'd heard a lot about me. Then I thought there was no going back.

I was in a room with police in uniform, then I felt like a criminal.

ADVICE FROM CHILDREN

Show that you want to help

Show that you really care about how we are and how things are going for us. Then it's easier to speak honestly, because it doesn't look like you're out to get us. We know you care when you ask in a kind voice how we are, use kind words about us, and tell us that you care about us.

Try to find the solutions together with us, throughout the process. When you show us that you need us for the solutions to be right, we'll trust the solutions. We can feel that you really want to help us then.

Keep us in focus from start to finish

During the concern conversation you have to focus on us and how we feel, from start to finish. Don't ask us to snitch or gossip about others. The people you ask us to talk about may be people we love or fear.

When you're worried about us and are going to carry out a concern conversation, you have to remember that it's us you're there for, and us you're going to help. When you ask about others, it can feel like you're trying to use us, rather than help us.

When you ask us to snitch, you can put us in difficult situations, and we lose trust that you want to help us. It can feel like you're making it worse and more difficult for us, and then it'll be hard to believe that you want to help.

Remember that we aren't mean

Remember that we aren't mean or want to commit crimes. Show us that you know we're not mean by the way you talk with us. When you talk about us as people of value, who are kind, and who don't want to commit crimes, we notice that you know that we aren't bad. Remind us as often as you can that you know there's a reason why. Also say often that you want to help us have it better in our lives.

Ask us why, in a safe way

When you're concerned about us, you must try to find out why we're doing what you're concerned about. If our friends do illegal things and that's why you're worried, you need to find out why we chose those friends. If we've done drugs, ask us why we've done it. Then we can feel that you want to help us and not punish us. Remember that there's always a reason why.

Make the conversation feel safe

Call us and get to know us a little bit over the phone before we meet you. Tell us something about yourselves, and speak in a kind voice. When we meet you at the actual concern conversation, it's also nice if we spend some time getting to know each other first. Then you can gain some of our trust. Tell us something about yourself, an animal you like, a thing you love, or something that makes you the person you are.

During the concern conversation, it's also nice if you can wear normal, civilian clothes. Then it becomes less scary and less serious, and it becomes easier to talk normally.

It may be safer to have the concern conversation somewhere else than the police station. Ask us where we most want to talk. When we talk somewhere that feels safe, it's easier to talk about important things the police need to know.

Work to make it feel safe for us when we're in a concern conversation.

In order to make it feel safe, you have to ensure that it's our choice whether we bring parents with us or not. To ensure that it is indeed our choice, ask us without parents present if we would prefer to speak alone or with parents there. Say that we're the ones who choose. Give us the opportunity to have another adult we trust with us if we want that instead.

During the conversation, show that you're on our team and want us to feel good in our lives and inside ourselves. Be yourself and show that you care. We know you care when you ask in a kind voice how we are, use kind words and avoid talking badly about the people we're friends with or others we love.



THIS IS GOOD PRACTICE FOR SAFE CONCERN CONVERSATIONS

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have procedural rights. This also applies to children who have committed crimes. Here are descriptions of how concern conversations must be carried out, in order to build on knowledge from children and better secure children's procedural rights.

It follows from the UN Children's Committee's general comment no. 24 section 56 that; Parents or legal guardians should be present throughout the proceedings. However, the judge or competent authority may decide to limit, restrict or exclude their presence in the proceedings, at the request of the child or of his or her legal or other appropriate assistant or because it isn't in the child's best interests.

Although the general comment above addresses the legal process, it shows the importance of ensuring that the child is heard before parents are involved. The comment allows for the best interest of the child to be used as a reason for parents not to be present when children are in contact with the authorities.

BEFORE THE CONCERN CONVERSATION

- the police contact the child before they contact the parents, to give the child information about the concern conversation
- the police give the information in a text message, so that the child can go back and look at the information if the child forgets something
- the police use words the child understands when they give information
- the police know that some children think the police aren't safe and therefore ask if the child instead wants an adult from the youth outreach service or someone else who can't give a punishment, to carry out the concern conversation

Cooperate with the children

- the adult explains that the child can choose to speak alone, with parents or with someone else the child feels safe with
- the adult and the child agree on where and when the concern conversation should take place
- the adult who'll carry out the concern conversation gives the child enough information about:
 - why the child is having a concern conversation
 - what will happen during the concern conversation
 - that the police want to help the child
 - what they can help with
 - who the child can talk to
 - who'll get to know what the child says
 - what they have been told about the child and the topic for the concern conversation
- the adult finds out together with the child what the parents get to know and when they get to know it
- the adult remembers that the child also needs to receive information even if the parents have received the information

Make it feel safe

- the adult gets to know the child a little on the phone before the conversation
- the adult tells a little about themselves, in a kind voice
- the adult asks in advance what the child wants

DURING THE CONCERN CONVERSATION

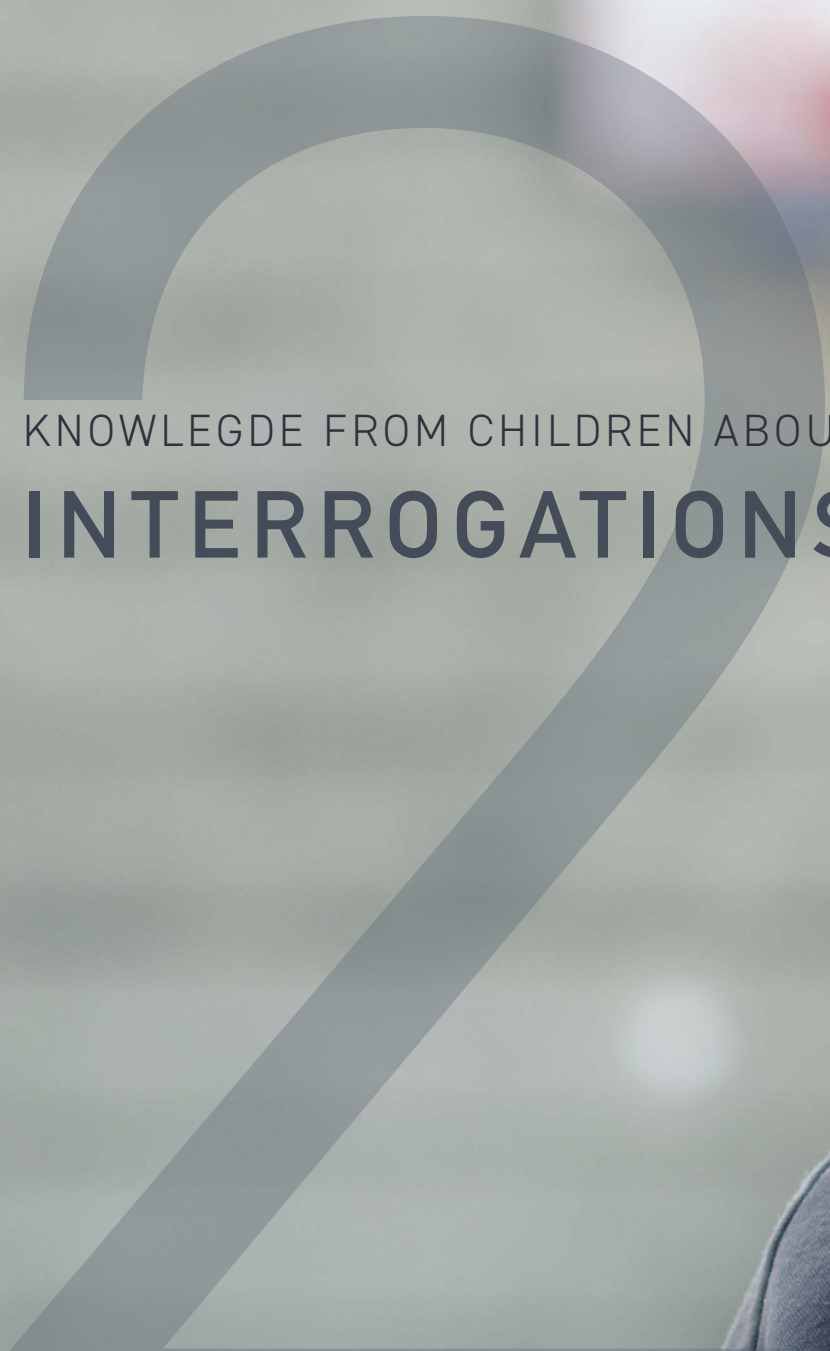
- the adult who'll carry out the concern conversation knows that uniforms can be scary for children, and therefore comes in normal clothes
- the adult re-explains the information the child has received previously, and gives the child enough information about:
 - what rights the child has
 - who the adult carrying out the concern conversation is
 - what the purpose of the concern conversation is
 - who gets to know what the child says
 - what can happen if the child tells about crimes the child has committed or about others
- as far as possible, the adult also has to:
 - be completely sure that the child understands what the information means, and what it means in that particular child's life
 - ask the child if there's anything that's difficult to understand and say that it's perfectly okay if so
 - tell the child that, at any time during the concern conversation, they can ask if there's anything they're wondering about
- the adult talks a little bit about themselves, to get to know each other a little bit
 - about an animal the adult likes or something the adult likes to do
 - something else the adult likes or is important to them

Understand that there's a reason why

- the adult tells the child that they know that no child is bad or wants to do criminal things, and that they know that there's a reason when the child commits crimes
- the adult asks why criminal things happen and about the reason why they committed crime
- the adult focuses on how the child can feel better, and not so much on what has happened
- the adult doesn't ask the child to gossip or snitch on others
- the adult uses kind words and avoids saying bad things about the people the child is friends with or loves
- the adult and the child talk together about what can be useful help for the child, so that the child feels better inside and stops committing crime
- the adult and the child make a solution for what will happen next

AFTER THE CONCERN CONVERSATION

- the adult and the child decide together which adults will get to know what has been said during the concern conversation
- the adult who carried out the concern conversation, gives the child enough information about:
 - what happens after the concern conversation
 - what the police thinks about the child now
 - what may happen going forward
 - who can give the child information after the concern conversation, if the child wants it
- the adult cooperates with the child about what kind of contact they should have going forward
- the adult continues to give the child information about what happens next
- the child is given the phone number of a person the child can call if they have questions about anything
- the child helps to decide how the contact will be going forward, and what the adult can say or do if they meet the child outside



KNOWLEDGE FROM CHILDREN ABOUT
INTERROGATIONS



INTERROGATIONS

93% of the children in the survey have been in an interrogation
25% of these had a defence lawyer
42% were told about their rights

Before a suspect is examined, he shall be informed of the nature of the case, and that he is not obliged to make a statement. If he is willing to make a statement, he shall be encouraged to tell the truth. The provisions of section 92 shall apply correspondingly. If the suspect is under 18 years of age, his guardian should normally be given an opportunity to be present during the examination and to express his views. (Norwegian Criminal Procedure Act § 232)

Every child has the right to be informed promptly and directly (or where appropriate through his or her parent or guardian) of the charges brought against him or her. Promptly means as soon as possible after the first contact of the child with the justice system. Notification of parents should not be neglected on the grounds of convenience or resources. Children who are diverted at the charge stage need to understand their legal options, and legal safeguards should be fully respected. (UN Children's Committee General Comment No. 24 paragraph 47)

Random whether interrogations feel safe

9% have felt interrogations were safe

Summarised experiences

Why children could feel interrogations were safe:

- the police have met them with respect, and cared about the reason why they did something criminal
- the police have spoken to them in a kind way
- they've felt that the police wanted to help them
- it's been safe to bring parents

Why children could feel interrogations weren't safe:

- it's been scary with a formal interrogation room with audio recording
- they haven't been allowed to choose whether their parents would be there during the interrogation, and may then have felt it wasn't safe to have their parents with them
- they have earlier experiences with police who've made it unsafe
- the police may have threatened to give them severe punishments like prison or fines
- the adults felt harsh, and it's felt as if they've already made up their minds
- they've felt like criminals when they've had to appear at the police station, because the interrogation has felt like a form of punishment
- they've been afraid that parents would be disappointed or angry
- they've been afraid that after the interrogation their parents would call them mean names, yell at them, grab them hard or hit them

QUOTES

They want the whole, full truth, but they won't get it because there's punishment in the end anyway.

They were kind to me. They didn't speak in a mean or angry way to me, but pretty normally. In interrogations they can't speak in a mean way, I think most people just understand that.

I had an interrogation on the spot. It was scary. I stood with two police officers right in my face. People stood around and stared.

If an angry and grumpy person has the interrogation, I also get angry and triggered. It's hard not to reply in a rude way - and then I'm the one who becomes the problem.

How can I tell them that I do drugs to avoid feeling the knot in my stomach? The knot comes from home and my dad is sitting in the room.

For me it's good to have my parents with me, mum and dad are the safest for me.

After the interrogation I didn't go home, I slept at an older friend's place. I was too scared to go home to my parents after they'd been with me in the interrogation.

Aren't told enough

19% have received enough information before, during or after interrogations

Summarised experiences

Before interrogations

What children could receive too little information about:

- what an interrogation is
- why they're going to one
- who'll be present during the interrogation
- that they can bring an adult they trust with them
- how what is said in the interrogation may affect their lives in the future
- that they can bring a lawyer with them and the benefits of doing so

What it could like be for children:

- they've been afraid of what was going to happen in their lives
- they've hurt inside when they haven't been told what's going to happen
- they've been worried about the interrogation and have then taken drugs or done something bad to themselves or others

At the police station and during interrogations

What children could receive too little information about:

- why they're there, what will happen, who the adults are
- what rights they have during interrogation or what they mean
- what the recording will be used for and who can hear it afterwards
- that someone is sitting on the other side of the mirror wall
- that the interrogation has been recorded

After interrogations

What children could receive too little information about:

- when they'd get an answer to whether the police think they're guilty or not
- what kind of punishment they can get
- how the interrogation or any punishment may affect their lives
- who they can talk to if they have questions

What it could be like for children:

- they've been afraid that their future is ruined
- they've been afraid that they've disappointed people
- they've been afraid of what will happen and have then taken drugs, locked themselves in or injured themselves
- they've thought that there's no point in stopping crime

QUOTES

They came unexpectedly and picked me up, everything was just stress and chaos. I still don't know why I was taken in for interrogation.

I didn't know anything before the interrogation. I got angry and there was chaos inside me when I didn't get to know anything. When the interrogation first started, I was given a booklet with a charge.

I decided to get high every day before the interrogation because I was terrified of what was going to happen.

I've never been told my rights. No one has said that I can say no in the interrogation. I thought I had to answer everything.

I wasn't told my rights. When they said they expected me to tell the truth, I thought alright, you can expect whatever you want. But I didn't dare to tell the truth.

For three months, the most important thing for me was to get to the mailbox before my parents. I didn't know what was going to happen next in my life. Was I going to get ten years in prison or something?

From the time the interrogation was finished until I received my punishment, I was just worried and stressed. Many months passed. I didn't know anything, just sat in ignorance.

Don't always get a defence lawyer

25% have had a defence lawyer present during interrogations

Summarised experiences

Why children haven't had a defence lawyer with them during interrogations at the police station:

- they haven't been given enough information about it
- they haven't been told that they have the right to have a defence lawyer present during interrogations
- they've been afraid of saying anything wrong, because they didn't have a defence lawyer
- they haven't been told until after the interrogation that they have the right to have a defence lawyer present
- they've been told that they have the right to have a lawyer present, but didn't get any help to bring one when they asked for it
- they've had a defence lawyer present during the interrogation. It was either because the police had offered it to them, they knew about this right themselves, or because their parents made sure they got one

QUOTES

They say we can bring a defence lawyer. I asked to get it once but didn't get it.

If I'd brought it with me, I would have felt that I was more guilty, but I really should have had a defence lawyer with me.

My policeman said it wasn't a lawyer case so I didn't get a defence lawyer.

At first they didn't say anything about it. Afterwards he said we should have gotten a defence lawyer.

I didn't find out that I had the right to have a lawyer until I was in the interrogation. When we sat down they said you have the right to a lawyer and stuff, but by then we were already in the interrogation. It was pointless then.

They'd summoned me for interrogation, but I didn't have a lawyer. Dad thought that a lawyer should at least know about this and called a lawyer who joined the interrogation.



Feel they're being pressured to talk

19% haven't felt pressured to speak during interrogations

Summarised experiences

How children could feel that the police pressured them to talk:

- they've experienced that the police said things that felt hurtful
- they've experienced that the police threatened them with severe punishments
- they've experienced that the police don't believe what they say, and became afraid to say something wrong
- they've felt that the right they have not to explain themselves or say anything to the police during interrogations, hasn't seemed real. They've known that they can face harsher punishments, prison, fines and other consequences if they don't explain themselves
- they've felt the police were aggressive and therefore felt pressured to speak
- they've felt that the police are trying to trick them into answering something they didn't want to. The police have asked the same question using slightly different words
- they've thought that they always have to be on guard, and be careful with what they say, because the police want to arrest them
- they've found it impossible to speak honestly, because it's being decided whether they're guilty and whether they should be punished. It's impossible to talk honestly about the reasons why crime happens then

QUOTES

I sat in the interrogation room for almost 3 hours without being allowed to go out. Finally I spoke, to get out.

When I didn't answer, he asked the same question in different ways and said I'd have to go to prison or be fined if I didn't answer.

The only right I've been told about is that I have the right to remain silent, but they say I'll be fined or imprisoned if I don't answer since I'm over 15. It doesn't feel like I can't say anything then.

It felt like she'd found her answers beforehand. My opinions didn't mean anything.

I wasn't sure so I just said I'm not sure, really. Then he said "so you're saying you're guilty?". He tried to force the words into my mouth.

The police have tried to pressure me into saying things I didn't want to say. They've tried to get me to name people they think have been involved. They say I'll receive less punishment if I say them.

Rarely ask about the reason why

24% have been asked about the reason why they've committed crime during interrogations

Summarised experiences

How the police could ask too little about the reason why:

- the police haven't asked about the reason why crime has happened
- the police have mostly asked about the act itself - who was involved, who did what and where it happened
- they've been asked about the reason behind it, but not asked in a way that made it possible for them to answer honestly

What it could be like for children:

- they thought that the police didn't care about the reason why crime happened
- they've felt that the purpose of the interrogation was to punish them
- they've felt that the police used strict voices and harsh body language and therefore didn't tell
- they've been asked about the reason why, but have been afraid to tell, because they haven't known what would happen
- they thought that the police needed to know the reason, in order to be able to give them useful help to stop, but were still unable to tell

QUOTES

The police never asked about the reason why it started, they just explained the consequences.

They never asked me, so they didn't get to know how I was doing. If they knew that I didn't have it so easy already, they might have met me with more understanding.

They asked why, but not in a way where it was possible to say it honestly

They ask very little about feelings and how I feel. They put more pressure on the consequences. Then I get scared and can't tell.

No one asked why. I think maybe they didn't want to know. They should know where it started in order to know how to end it. I can't just say it when they don't ask.

They were pretty strict, so I wasn't able to tell them why.

Life gets worse after interrogations

21% haven't gotten it worse in life after interrogations

Summarised experiences

What life could be like for children after interrogation:

- they've thought that others now see them as bad and criminal forever
- they've been hurt and have started doing more bad things, both to themselves and to others
- they've thought that their life is ruined
- they've had a lot of bad feelings from their experiences in the interrogations, and were afraid of what was going to happen afterwards
- they've felt that there's no hope
- they've become so afraid of the police that they've hardly dared to go outside
- they've thought that now they've lost the chance to feel better inside themselves

QUOTES

They talk to me as if I can handle anything in the world, but I'm a child even though I'm 17. Yes, I'm tough on the outside but I cried after the interrogation, I was broken.

I started getting high after the interrogation, because I didn't know anything about what was going to happen. I thought that I would be punished anyway, so I might as well do drugs.

Immediately after the interrogation, I felt like a criminal because of the way they looked at me and spoke to me during the interrogation.

I was very stressed after the interrogation about what was going to happen. I imagined that my life was very ruined.

I began to believe the things they said in the interrogation. I began to believe that I was just someone who did bad things, that I was a criminal, that there was no hope.

ADVICE FROM CHILDREN

Meet us in a safe way

When we feel that the person we meet in interrogation wants to understand, it's easier to tell what's happened and the reasons why it happened. Therefore, meet us with as much openness and curiosity as you can muster. Ask us with a non-judgmental look about what's happened and why.

Say that you need to know from us in order to understand. Talk to us as if we were completely normal people. Believe in what we say as much as you can. Also remember that we aren't mean and that we can be carrying a lot of pain. Tell us that it will be alright in the end and that our lives aren't over.

Focus on why

Tell us that you know there's a reason why crime happens and that you would like to know. Tell us you need to find out why it's happening so you can help stop it.

Remind us that you understand that we do the best we can based on how we feel inside. Try to find the real reason why bad actions happen. Without that you can't know how to stop it. Focus more on the reason, than on the details of what happened.

Let us choose who'll be there

In order for us to feel safe enough to speak as honestly as possible about what happened and why it happened, let us choose who'll be in the room during the interrogation. Only we know which people we feel safe with. Let us choose whether parents should be there or not. It could be crucial for what we're able to tell. If we don't feel safe with our parents, it's good if we can bring someone else with us who we feel safer with. That can make it a lot easier to explain.

Give us a defence lawyer

All children must be allowed to bring a defence lawyer. If we have to ask for a defence lawyer, many of us won't dare to ask for one. It has to be the police's job to ensure that all children have a defence lawyer. Before the interrogation, tell us thoroughly, and with words we understand, the advantages of having a lawyer. Assure us that we aren't any more guilty if we bring one. Ask us if there's anything we have questions about. Remind us that no question is stupid.

Give us the option to opt out of having a defence lawyer. If we don't want to bring a defence lawyer the first time you ask, ask us again before the interrogation. Please explain the benefits to us one more time.

they beat
me at
home, I
can't
be there



THIS IS GOOD PRACTICE FOR SAFE AND HELPFUL INTERROGATIONS

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have procedural rights, which also apply to children who have committed crimes. Here are descriptions of how interrogation must be done in order to build on knowledge from children and better secure children's procedural rights.

In the UN Children's Committee's general comment no. 24 section 48, the committee states that; *Authorities should ensure that the child understands the charges, options and processes. Providing the child with an official document is insufficient and an oral explanation is necessary. Although children should be assisted in understanding any document by a parent or appropriate adult, authorities should not leave the explanation of the charges to such persons.*

The committee shows how important it is that children receive information about the accusations against the child. It isn't always enough to only give children this information in writing, they also need this orally to actually understand the charges and the process further.

BEFORE THE INTERROGATION

Before the interrogation, the police contact the child before they contact the parents. They contact the child over the phone or by text to give them information about:

- why the child is going in for an interrogation
- what will happen in the interrogation
- who will be in the interrogation
- that the child has the right to bring a lawyer to the interrogation
- what other rights the child has, verbally and in writing
- that the interrogation is recorded and why it's recorded
- what the child says in interrogation can be used for

The police have to remember to:

- use words the child understands
- explain the information completely honestly
- don't refrain from saying anything because the police thinks the child isn't old enough or that it's best for the child not to know
- check with the child whether it's okay to inform parents or other adults that the child is going in for an interrogation and why

Cooperate with the children

- the police try to find a time for the interrogation that suits both the police and the child
- the child is told that the interrogation can be in a different place than the police station, the police mentions some alternatives
- the police ask the child how the interrogation can be done in a safe way
- the police send the child an explanation of their rights over text
- the child is given the opportunity to bring a defence lawyer with them to the interrogation
- the police explain thoroughly and in words the child understands, the advantages of having a lawyer present during the interrogation
- if the child doesn't want a lawyer the first time, the police ask again a few days before the interrogation
- the child is given the opportunity to bring someone the child is safe with to the interrogation, regardless of whether the child wants to bring a defence lawyer or not
- the police let the child choose whether or not the parents will be there. They know that it can be decisive for whether the child is able to talk honestly

DURING THE INTERROGATION

- the police repeat what the child needs to know before the interrogation
- during the interrogation, the police provide good and enough information about
 - what the purpose of the interrogation is
 - what rights the child has
 - who the adults in the interrogation are
 - that the interrogation is recorded
 - who will get to know what the child has said
 - what could happen if the child tells about crime
 - what could happen if the child says something about someone else
- during the interrogation, the police wear normal clothes, they know that uniforms can make it feel unsafe for the child
- the police who interrogate are kind, calm and understanding
- when the child enters the interrogation, the police and the child get to know each other a little bit first
 - the police who carry out the interrogation say what they like, and ask the child what the child likes
 - the police show and tell the child that they want to help, and find out why the crime happened when they come in for the interrogation
- the police reminds the child that the child can ask if they become unsure or gets questions about something during the interrogation
- the police explain why they have to write things down or record audio and what it will be used for
- the child can help decide whether the interrogation is to be audio-recorded, or whether the police should write things down during the interrogation

Try to understand

- the police understand that there's a reason when the child does criminal things, and ask about the reason why the crime happened
- the police are open-minded and don't make decisions about what has happened before they talk with the child
- the police want to hear from the child and don't ask the child to snitch on others
- the police explain that they can't know, but would like to try to understand
- the police ask open-ended questions and avoid pressuring the child
- the police are honest when they don't understand or wonder about something
- the police don't exaggerate to get the child to talk

AFTER THE INTERROGATION

- after the interrogation, the child is, several times, given information that is good:
 - what's happening with the case now
 - what the punishment may be if the police decide that the child is guilty
 - who the child can get information from after the interrogation
 - who will give the child information when something new happens in the case
- the child can read through what has been written and let them know if there's anything that has been misunderstood
- the police always talk to the child first if they're considering sharing something the child has said with the child's parents or other adults
- the child gets the phone number of a person from the police who they can call or text. The person also sends the child a text message or calls if anything new happens in the case



3

KNOWLEDGE FROM CHILDREN ABOUT
PUNISHMENT

PUNISHMENT

70% of the children in the survey have received or have been sentenced to either youth follow-up, youth punishment or community service

5% of these stopped crime after the punishment

70% of the ones who have been sentenced to youth punishment or community service haven't had a defence lawyer during interrogations

"In criminal cases, the best interests principle applies to children in conflict (i.e. alleged, accused or recognised as having infringed) or in contact (as victims or witnesses) with the law, as well as children affected by the situation of their parents in conflict with the law. The Committee⁵ underlines that protecting the child's best interests means that the traditional objectives of criminal justice, such as repression or retribution, must give way to rehabilitation and restorative justice objectives, when dealing with child offenders.

(UN Children's Committee General Comment No. 14 paragraph 28)

In the UN Children's Committee's general comment no. 24 paragraph 76, the committee states that:

The Committee emphasises that the reaction to an offence should always be proportionate not only to the circumstances and the gravity of the offence, but also to the personal circumstances (age, lesser culpability, circumstances and needs, including, if appropriate, the mental health needs of the child), as well as to the various and particularly long-term needs of the society(...). Weight should be given to the child's best interests as a primary consideration as well as to the need to promote the child's reintegration into society.

The committee shows the importance of taking into account, among other things, the child's age and the circumstances surrounding the child's situation and needs. They also describe that the child's best interests must be the primary consideration.

Use of force

Summarised experiences

How the police could use their power against children:

- stop and frisked them on the street
- forced to the ground
- handcuffed them and taken them into a police car
- driven them home in a police car
- searched them in front of others
- spoken to people in their network and said they're no longer allowed to be around the child
- locked them in a security cell, controlled the light and surveilled what they were doing

What it could be like for children:

- use of power could feel worse than punishment. They haven't known when it would end and have felt trapped by the police wherever they've gone
- custody cells have felt scary and hurtful and felt like punishment. It hasn't felt helpful

QUOTES

When I hung out with good people, the police called their parents and said their kids shouldn't be with me. It hurt, instead they should have told me they were worried.

They follow us if we're out at night. They ask what we're going to do. We get stopped anyway.

I was 14 the first time they threw me into a custody cell. A 14-year-old shouldn't be in there.

I felt watched wherever I was. When I went to the mall with a friend, the police could call and ask me who was walking next to me in an orange sweater.

Get to know too little

Summarised experiences

What children could be given too little information about, about the process before punishment:

- what the police think and are considering
- what penalties they may receive
- why the police think that particular punishment is the one they should get
- what the purpose of the punishment is
- what type of punishment they've been given

What it could be like for children:

- they've experienced adults who've used force to show the child that they're in charge
- It's been uncomfortable to not know anything about the punishment, which is such a serious thing in their life
- they've had a lot of stomach aches

QUOTES

I don't really know if I've had youth punishment or youth follow-up. The police never really said anything. I wasn't told why they wanted me to have that punishment.

It was a policeman who told me what kind of punishment I'd received, and explained what was going to happen and so on. It was a little easier to do what they wanted then.

I think I had youth punishment, but I'm not sure.

I was terrified for months. Every time there was a knock at the door, I thought that now I'm going to be picked up and put in prison. I didn't know what the police were thinking.

I received a punishment and completed it. Still don't know why I got that particular punishment and what it was supposed to help me with.

Random whether it helps or not

Summarised experiences

Why the punishment could feel unhelpful for children:

- they haven't experienced that the punishment helped them stop committing crimes
- they haven't felt better inside after receiving a punishment

Why the punishment could feel helpful for children:

- they've met an adult who's made the punishment feel helpful
- they've experienced that an adult has focused on the reason why crime happens
- they've met adults who have worked with them to help them feel better
- they themselves have helped decide the contents of the punishment

QUOTES

No one asked me how I could do such things, or why I was so angry. They just moved the problem somewhere else when they gave me a punishment. The problem only got bigger because of it.

I met a good guy when I had my punishment. He was positive and honest. He was happy, but not annoyingly happy. If I was feeling down, he was calm, if I was happy, he joked with me. He made my life better.

I was 15 years old and was punished, the whole world came crashing down then. I gave up and just continued on the path I was already on. The time before and during the punishment didn't help me.

The punishment destroys my opportunities for later in life. It doesn't give me motivation, and then I don't stop doing stupid things. It doesn't give any opportunities to leave the community I'm in.

Punishment has only made it worse for me. It became easier to get close to others who are in worse circles than I was already in.

Drug control contracts

20% of the children in the report have had a drug control contract

5% have experienced the drug control contract as helpful

A drug control contract is an alternative to punishment for children and young people who are caught using or possessing small quantities of drugs (rusinfo.no). While under a drug control contract, the child or young person has to show up to give regular urine samples for drug screens/screenings.

Summarised experiences

Why the drug control contract could feel unhelpful for children:

- they've felt that the focus was on stopping them from doing drugs, and that this has been more important than the reasons why they did drugs
- they've found ways to cheat the test so that it doesn't come back positive, even if they have done drugs
- they've stopped using substances that make them fail the test, and started to get high on other things instead
- they've quit during the months they've been under the contract, and started doing drugs as soon as they were finished

Many of the children have found it uncomfortable to do the tests:

- they may have been asked to do it in front of adults, often without the adults talking to them about what it's felt like for them and what experiences the children have been carrying
- they may have felt that taking the tests was nasty, embarrassing or derogatory
- they may have felt the tests were so uncomfortable that it's become yet another thing they had to get high to avoid bad feelings from

QUOTES

It doesn't help to be on a drug control contract, you'll return to drugs as soon as you're done.

I have to go to those conversations. But it's just bullshit, I can't deal with it.

It's like a break, it doesn't stop you from doing drugs going forward in your life.

I go there to piss, but I'm going to get high as soon as I'm done. They don't get me off drugs with this.

I'm on a drug control contract, but I'm not getting anything out of it. I don't stop doing drugs.

I can't go there to piss. I feel scared because there's a person standing there staring at me while I pee.

It's uncomfortable as hell that someone has to stand and watch you pee once a week for 6 months.

It's impossible to go to the bathroom in front of someone, I stood for 30 minutes and I don't have a chance.

I can't go there to piss. I feel worthless.

It's absolutely horrible, very intimate, and private. There were even more emotions I had to drug away.



Youth follow-up and youth punishment

**37% of the children in the survey have had youth follow-up
4% of these stopped committing crimes after youth follow-up**

**19% of the children in the survey have had youth punishment
6% of these stopped committing crimes after a youth sentence**

Youth follow-up and youth punishment are punitive measures specially adapted to young people who need being followed up. Punitive actions are based on interdisciplinary follow-up and restorative process (konfliktraadet.no)

Youth conference

The execution of the sentence must begin with a youth conference (cf. Conflict Council Act § 24). Such a meeting consists of two parts: A restorative part where the young person who has broken the law must meet the person(s) affected by the offence, given that the person(s) concerned consents to this, and a part where the youth plan is drawn up and signed (Mellom hjelp og straff - Norlandsforskning 2019).

Summarised experiences

How children could experience youth conferences:

- they've felt unsafe or afraid before the meeting with the person they've committed a criminal offence against
- they've walked around with a bad knot in their stomach while waiting for the big meeting, and have dreaded being told off or being spoken badly about
- it's felt scary and unsafe with a lot of adults from the family and several services
- it's hurt to hear adults tell them what they aren't capable of and how they have to change
- it's felt pointless that the youth conference has focused heavily on superficial things, like school absence, good and bad friends and how often they do drugs

- it's become too difficult to say honestly why criminal things have happened. The adults have missed out on knowing what the children needed to stop doing crime then
- they've been given information about which services the adults at the meetings were from, but not about why the adults were there

QUOTES

I ended up in meetings with lots of people who said what I had to fix, it didn't help.

I can't open up properly when there's someone from the conflict council and 8-9 other people in the room. I don't feel like I have a lot to say when there are so many adults.

The guys said I should do community service instead of youth punishment. I didn't understand why until I was put in a meeting with 15 adults. I've never felt so small.

Those big meetings made me drop the punishment quickly. I would rather be in prison than sit in a room with adults who, it felt like were just out to get me.

They said I had to meet the man who owned the shop I stole from. My heart was pounding every day before that meeting.

Youth follow-up

Summarised experiences

How children could experience youth follow-up:

- it hasn't felt very helpful
- it focused a lot on what children have done, and hasn't contributed to them stopping committing crime
- they've experienced it as use of force when the children have had to choose between accepting youth follow-up or receiving a worse punishment
- they've experienced that the youth follow-up doesn't focus on what they actually needed help with and have experienced the plan as the adults' plan for them, not as their own plan
- they've experienced youth follow-up as helpful, it's helped them commit less crimes
- they've met adults who've understood that there's a reason why children commit crimes, and who've been able to help them with the reason why the criminal acts happen

QUOTES

They decided who I was going to hang out with and what I was going to do. They talked a lot about the consequences if I broke it. Youth follow-up feels like coercion even though I said yes.

Youth follow-up made me stop making death threats, but I became cold and said bad words, and had temper tantrums. I started hurting myself instead.

It was safe, because we had a good relationship. I knew he had faith in me. It was okay that he was strict then.

I don't like anyone coming and deciding for me. They take power over the life of a young person who's been taken power over a lot already.

It felt like the plan was set up for me to fail. I can't get up every day at 9 o'clock when I don't dare to sleep at night.

Youth punishment

Summarised experiences

How children could experience youth punishment:

- they've experienced the threat during the youth punishment that the sentence may be tightened or that they might receive a more severe sentence. It's destroyed the execution of the plan and has given them the feeling that the adults have given up on them
- they've felt more lonely, felt more hurt inside and then things have gotten worse in their lives
- they've felt that the contents of the youth punishment were random and not adapted to them
- they've lost faith in the plan when it has contained things the adults have said they have to do, instead of goals that they themselves want to achieve. It has, for example, included a curfew, duty to be at school and rules about who they can hang out with
- they've met adults who have understood that there's a reason why they commit crimes, who have been kind, who haven't given up and who have then been able to help them with what hurts inside
- they've experienced that the youth punishment has caused them to be kept out of normal youth communities and prevented them from taking part in social activities

QUOTES

We have problems and do bad things. The crap piles up.

We need to feel better inside ourselves, but they mostly talk about the bad things we do.

The social worker at school never gave up on me. When I couldn't get up to go to school, he came and drove me. I really felt that he wanted me to be able to do it.

If I have to continue having conversations with the police 1-2 times a month for another 8 months, then I would rather have done community service.

My friends were going to eat, I wasn't allowed to be in that area. You feel like you've lost your life.

Every day I'm terrified of what will happen next. Am I going to go to prison, is my future ruined? Started doing drugs to stop thinking about this any more.

I have three cards on me: green, yellow, and red. When the conflict council gives a red card, they finish. Then I go back to court. It feels like they think it's a football game they're refereeing, but this is my life.

Community service

14% of the children in the survey have had community service

0% stopped committing crimes after community service

A community sentence is imposed by the court and can run from 30 to 420 hours. The probation office in charge of implementing the sentence will then carry out an intake with the offender and establish the contents in the sentence. This may consist of (a part with) unpaid work and other activities that are deemed to be important for preventing re-offending for the individual offender (domstol.no).

Summarised experiences

How children could experience community service:

- they've been told that community service is for making amends. It's been hurtful to hear that they have to make amends for having done something bad against society, when they're hurting themselves
- they've felt that they've been given tasks that have been of little use, like painting and mowing the grass. They waste away their youthhood, without life moving forward
- they've had to watch documentaries or attend courses, and the pain inside them wasn't dealt with or processed.
- they've met a counsellor in the correctional service who has worked to find something that the children really believe is helpful for them to feel better

QUOTES

Picking up trash doesn't help. A lot of the punishment for people under 18 should be to talk to someone who wants to help you.

Community service works to scare, but it doesn't really help, I don't get anything out of it.

I was told that I've cost society so much that I had to give back.

It's like taking away the games console from a gambling addict for a period of time. When they get the console back, they start playing again. Punishment is such a short-term solution.

If they put children to do community service, they don't understand why children commit crimes. I feel like I'm being punished because I'm hurting.

It makes no sense that community service is supposed to help us stop doing crime. And if that's not the purpose, why do children have to go through it then?

The reason I was violent is still there, how am I then supposed to quit?



ADVICE FROM CHILDREN

Give us useful help, not punishment

When the reaction is called punishment, we often push it away. It can also take away our opportunity to get help. It can feel like we aren't wanted in society. Children and youth who commit crimes need help, not punishment. The help must be adapted and built on what feels safe and helpful for each of us. It must have as its goal that we should feel better and that the crimes will stop.

Give help for the reason why we use drugs

Instead of a drug control contract, we have to get help for the reason why we use drugs. The police can help us find a person we trust, who we can find solutions with. It could be a good idea for this to be someone who isn't in the police, and who can't punish us. Then it can be easier to say honestly why we do drugs, and how much we're struggling with it. That person has to work to find out why we do drugs and what we need to stop. The help has to be created together with us for us to have faith in the solutions.

Cooperate with us about solutions

We ask you to cooperate with us when it's decided what the punishment should be. When we have a say in deciding the contents and the aim is to make us feel better inside, it feels less like being taken power over. Then it's easier to carry out the punishment. If what we suggest isn't possible, explain to us why and try to find another solution, or meet us in the middle. Focus less on what we've done, and more on how we're going to feel better inside. Tell us what we're good at, and nice things about us, rather than reminding us of bad things we've done.

Make a solution for after

Before the sentence is over, it would be nice if we could make a plan together on how to continue working to thrive in our lives. When the punishment is over, you have to arrange for us to continue talking to an adult we trust. Even if we're done with the sentence, we often still have bad feelings and experiences inside us that we need to talk about. If we get to continue to talk with an adult we trust, we could also avoid life suddenly becoming empty and start hurting more again.

THIS IS GOOD PRACTICE FOR SAFE AND HELPFUL PUNISHMENT

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have procedural rights, which also applies to children who have committed crimes. Here comes descriptions of how punishment must be done to build on knowledge from children and better ensure children's procedural rights.

BEFORE CHILDREN RECEIVE A PUNISHMENT

- before punishment is decided, the child is given enough information about
 - what rights the child has
 - what kind of options the child has and what they mean
 - what punishment you think the child should have and why
 - how long you think the child should have the punishment
 - what the punishment may mean in the life of the child
 - how you think the punishment is supposed to help the child feel better
 - who'll be told what punishment the child is given
 - what the child can do if the child disagrees with the punishment
- the police use words the child understands and give honest information
- information isn't withheld from the child, even if adults think that the child isn't old enough or that the parents have received this information
- when the child is given information about something that's being decided, the child is given this in good time before anything is decided, preferably a couple of weeks before

Share information with parents in a safe way

- the police know that the child has to be the first to be given the information. They call or text the child saying what the child needs to know, before potentially giving information to parents or other adults
- if the police are thinking of sharing information with parents or other adults, they always give the child information about it. The child gets to say what the child thinks about this in a safe way and the police takes it into account before deciding whether it's in the best interest of the child that this information is shared

Understands that there's a reason why

- the adults know that there's always a reason why inside children when they do criminal things. The adults know that the child needs help, not punishment, to stop doing crime
- for the help to be useful and the crime to stop, the adults try to get to the root of why the child does crime

Cooperates with the children

- the adults know that the help must be adapted to each child and therefore can't be the same for all children
- the adults know that they must work together in a way that the child feels is safe in order to find the right help for each individual
- the adults ask what the child needs help with in order to stop crime. Together with the child, they find out what they like to do, and what they feel is good or important to fill their days with. They ask what the child's dreams are and help create goals to achieve them
- the adults focus on the good things children do and tell them that they have faith in them
- if the adults decide that they can't go for any of the child's solutions, they try to include some of what the child has wanted into what is to be decided. They understand that it can help for this to become a solution that children can live well with

WHEN CHILDREN HAVE RECEIVED A PUNISHMENT

- the adults repeat the information and provide additional information about
 - what kind of punishment the child has been given
 - why the child has been given this exact punishment
 - how the adults want to help them stop doing crime
 - what happens if the child doesn't do what the child is supposed to do
 - how the punishment can affect their life going forward
 - which adults the child will meet while completing the punishment
 - where and who the child can speak with if something isn't okay
 - what will happen when the sentence ends
- the adults know that it's their responsibility that the child understands what the information means for that particular child, and work to ensure this by explaining the information to the child in sufficient detail and several times
- the adults know that the information can be difficult to understand, and remember to say that it's perfectly okay and that they want to help if the child doesn't understand everything

Plans the enforcement

- the child is invited to talk about which adults in their life they trust, so that the child and the adult can think together about whether any of them can help in carrying out the punishment
- one or more of these people are invited to contribute, as part-time work or as a volunteer. It could be a school social worker, a coach, a teacher, someone in the youth outreach service, a mental health worker, someone in the child welfare service or the police
- the adults tell about the various services, what they can help with and why the adult thinks it might be a good idea to contact them. The child and the adult decide together whether any more services should be contacted. No adults are contacted without the child having said what they think about it first

- if adults from other services are going to help, the adult makes a deal with the child about how, what will be shared, and when the services are going to be contacted
- the meetings about the child include few adults and are with adults the child feels safe with. Each individual child has a say in deciding who can attend the meetings

AFTER THE PUNISHMENT

After the punishment, the child is given good and enough information about

- what the police think about the child
- what will happen next
- what opportunities the child has for getting help
- which of the adults the child can keep in touch with if the child wishes
- who the child can get information from after the punishment is over
- what can happen if the child does something criminal again

The information is repeated if necessary for the child. An adult the child feels safe with keeps the child up to date on what happens after the sentence:

- the child has a say in deciding how the contact with the adults who were involved in the enforcement should be, and what they can say and do if they meet the child outside
- the child is told what they can do if they're hurting again and the crime then continues

MORE
ABOUT
NOT MEAN



More about this report

Implementation

From February 2021 to May 2021, researchers from Changefactory met 103 children and young people from around the country with experience from concern conversations, interrogations and punishment. The researchers met the children for group sessions and one-to-one conversations.

The children were given information about why the survey was being carried out, that what they said would be treated anonymously, that they could choose how much or little they wanted to say and what their answers would be used for. Consent was obtained in accordance with current regulations. Based on knowledge from children, the researchers spent time in the beginning of each session making it feel safe for the children to participate by spending some time getting to know each other.

“Changemethod” was used together with the semi-structured interview guide. Among other things, the children were tasked with creating a recipe for how the concern conversation, interrogation or punishment should be. They did this by designing a poster that they later showed and explained to the researchers. One-to-one conversations were conducted as in-depth interviews. The children shared good and bad experiences. Out of consideration for privacy and the individual participant, the researchers worked to ensure that the children’s history or family didn’t become the focus. The focus was on the children’s encounter with the system, and what advice the children had for the systems.

After 103 children and young people had contributed to the qualitative survey, some of them were given the opportunity to speak to the researchers once more. The aim was to go in depth on the summarised experiences and advice after the first round. The aim was also to ensure that the researchers didn’t interpret or misunderstand the material collected.

Participants in the qualitative survey

Researchers in Changefactory contacted schools, preventive police, child protection, correctional services, the conflict council, youth clubs and outreach services for children and young people around the country.

Changefactory invited children and young people with experience from concern conversations, interrogations and/or punishment. The participants are from Bergen, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Sandnes, Oslo, Drammen, Harstad, Trøndelag, Bodø, Lillestrøm and Tromsø.

Summary of the knowledge

The material collected was continuously anonymised. After completion of data collection, the anonymised material was thematically sorted into one document. Answers that were repeated from many children, in many places in the country, were systematised and summarised as the main findings in the report.

The children’s own explanations were used when the experiences and advice were summarised. The researchers who collected the knowledge systematised and counted the answers. The children’s own explanations were then used in summaries of the knowledge. This was done without interpretation or analysis from adults.

The advice highlighted in the report is summarised in the same way as the experiences. It lists what most children think adults in the system they’ve given advice to should do more of or do differently. The advice is described in words that children have used.

When both the experiences and the advice have been summarised, the report was read through by some of the participants in the qualitative survey and other young people with experience from the same system, who then provide input and feedback. The report was adjusted according to these changes.

CHANGEFACTORY

KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Why knowledge directly from children?

Children and young people have to feel that the school, kindergarten, support services, police and legal system are safe and useful for them. Children and young people all over Norway have experiences from meeting these systems and advice on how they can be the best possible. Authorities, professionals and students often lack this knowledge from children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, nationally and locally. Therefore, it must be brought in to a much greater extent and, together with other knowledge, be part of the knowledge base, in order to develop and ensure the quality of good systems for children and young people.

More than 10 years of collecting knowledge

For more than 10 years, Changefactory (CF) has systematically collected experiences and advice from children and young people about how they experience school, kindergarten, support services, the police and the legal system. In 2017, the Prime Minister opened Changefactory Knowledge Centre, to collect knowledge from children and young people about the public systems. As far as we know, there are few knowledge centres in Europe whose main purpose is to gather and disseminate knowledge directly from children and young people about the systems they are in. CF seeks collaboration with similar organisations.

Participatory and practice-oriented method

In order to collect, systematise and disseminate summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented method is used. CF has called it the Changemethod. The Changemethod has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. It greatly considers that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that help many diverse children and young people to participate. It's based closely on a participatory method used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Safety is most important

The experiences and advice are collected directly from children and young people in sessions or interviews. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as safely as possible for the children and young people who participate. The adults who facilitate are, among other things, trained by children to meet children and young people with openness and human warmth. This is based on the main findings from children about what adults have to be like, in order for children to be able to tell honestly.

Experiences and advice are summarised

Experiences and advice from the sessions are documented in transcripts and other written and visual documentation. The data is summarised and systematised. No links are made to theory. Experiences and advice that are repeated by many children and young people in many places in the country, become the main answers. We call this knowledge directly from children.

Children and young people present

The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in the qualitative surveys can also be invited, as pros, in communication and professional development. The pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

Selected publications



Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside

Advice from 101 children on how to meet children and young people who are angry and use violence



Right and certain

Advice from 130 children on how police reports, questionings and trials can be done in ways that feel safe



Wisdom about drug abuse

Advice from 58 young people on how adults can meet drug abuse in safe ways



They think they know best

Advice from 152 children on how residential childcare institutions have to be for it to feel safe living there

to you in
charge

we have
answers to
how we can
stop
doing crime