

Office of the Senior Practitioner

What people with disabilities think about
restraint and seclusion – Plain English

What is restraint and seclusion?

Everybody has the right to move around freely. But sometimes people hurt themselves, hurt other people, or break things on purpose. These ways of behaving are called using ‘behaviours of concern’. Other people might want to stop the person from doing these things. Stopping people from doing things is called a ‘restraint’.

There are two different types of restraint:

- tablets or a medicine drink to change somebody’s behaviour, and
- things like straps and belts that stop people moving.

There is another way of stopping people from doing things. It is called seclusion. Seclusion is locking people in a room or a place where they can’t get out.

*Supporting people
to achieve dignity
without restraints*

A Victorian
Government
initiative



Lots of people with disabilities in Victoria have been restrained or secluded.

- Some people have been made to take tablets that change their behaviour.
- Some people have been held down by support staff.
- Some people have been locked in their house or had their cupboards locked.
- Some people have seen these things happen to their friends and housemates.

The Office of the Senior Practitioner wanted to know what people with disabilities thought about restraint and seclusion. They asked some people to do a special project on what they thought. Four people at RMIT University did the project. Two of the people had a disability. The four people will be called the researchers.

The researchers asked the University for permission to do the research. This permission is called ethics. It is a way of making sure that nobody gets hurt doing research.

What did the researchers do?

On the main research day the researchers invited 21 people with disabilities to come and talk about their experiences. The people had lunch and the researchers got people into 3 groups. The people watched some videos and talked about what they thought about the videos. The researchers tape-recorded what people said (they got everyone's permission first).

There were 4 videos of people pretending to be restrained and secluded:

- 1) A man was locked in his house and the staff wouldn't unlock the door.
- 2) A man's fridge was locked. He got upset and staff punished him saying "You won't be allowed to watch the footy now!"
- 3) A woman tried to drink something dangerous. Her staff stopped her by grabbing her arm. They made her take tablets to calm her down.
- 4) A man hit his house-mate, and then a few staff ran in and pushed him to the ground.

The researchers made sure that everybody felt okay after talking about the videos. Some people felt upset, and the researchers tried to help them. The researchers called some people a week later to make sure they were feeling okay.

What did the people with disabilities say about restraint and seclusion?

The people had lots of different things to say about the videos that they watched.

Some people thought it was okay to lock doors, make people take tablets, and hold people down. They thought that staff did it to keep people safe.

Some people thought that the people in the videos were being bad. One person said “that person asking to go out is being difficult.” One person talked about the video of the staff holding a person down. They said “that’s [their] job. What can they do?”

But some people thought that it was NOT okay to lock doors, make people take tablets, and hold people down. One person said “makes you angry at staff. Staff should give you a choice.”

Some of the people with disabilities said that they had been restrained. Some said they had seen other people use behaviours of concern, and seen other people restrained.

Some people complained when things happened to them. But lots of people didn’t complain; they thought they would get in trouble. Some people thought there was nothing they could do about it.

Lots of people did not know that they had rights. They did not know that there are things that can be done about restraint and seclusion.

What did the researchers say in the end?

The researchers learned a lot about what people with disabilities think about restraint and seclusion. A lot of the things that they learned were very worrying.

A lot of people did not know what their rights were. Some did not know how to complain. Some people did not feel like they could complain. Lots of people thought it would make no difference if they complained. A lot of people thought it was okay to restrain people; they thought it kept people safe.

But a lot of researchers and people say that there should be no restraint. They say this because restraining people means taking people's rights away; it does not make people safer.

What did the researchers say needs to happen to make things better?

The researchers had some ideas that might make things better for people with disabilities.

- People with disabilities should always feel safe
- There are lots of problems when there are not enough staff around. People need to have more staff that they know so they can feel safe.
- People with disabilities should be able to say what they think about their services. They should be able to say what they think of their staff. People with disabilities could visit other services and report on what sort of job people are doing. This is called evaluation.
- People with disabilities need choices: where they live, who they live with, who their support staff are, and how much help they need to live their lives.
- People need to be able to make choices, even tricky choices.
- People with disabilities should have personal plans. They should have good goals and support to reach their goals.
- People with disabilities need to know their rights.
- There needs to be more self-advocacy.
- People with disabilities need to be able to complain. They need to be able to use their telephone to talk to family, friends or advocates about their worries

- Staff need to know more about rights and restraint: they need to know when it is not okay to use restraint; they need to know what to do instead of using restraint.
- People need to get to know people in their community. People in the community can help people feel safer.
- Everybody needs people who will listen to them and understand them.
- Everyone needs to think about better ways to help people who get upset and angry. They need to think about helping people without using restraint and seclusion.

The researchers also said that it is important to help people who have been restrained. Being restrained can make people feel sad for a long time. Those people might need help to cope with what has happened to them.

One person said “Want to be safe. Don’t feel safe. Something should be done to stop that.” Lots of things need to change to help people with disabilities live their lives safely and without restraint.

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