

# IF I WAS YOUR CHILD

about coercion in residential childcare institutions



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# IF I WAS YOUR CHILD

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## **Imagine if one of us was your child**

Imagine that one of us could have been your child, your niece, nephew or grandchild. Perhaps we have experienced more pain than your children. Our parents, aunts, grandparents or uncles should have provided safety. They should have hugged us and told us they loved us. They should have been proud when we rode our bike without support wheels for the first time. They should have comforted us on sad nights. Instead, they lay high on the couch, yelled at us, forgot to pick us up. They could beat us, lock us in rooms or abuse us.

Inside our bodies there have been many painful feelings. Many of us haven't been able to talk about these feelings. Instead, we have found ways to cope with everyday life and to survive. We have survived by showing anger, by self-harming or by abusing drugs. We have had to find a "language" to tell how things have felt.

Think about how you would meet your child when they are in pain. Would you comfort them, talk warmly or cry a little with the child? Don't you think it's about the same things? We think it most often is, because it's about being in a lot of pain. None of us want to be mean, scare you or make you afraid. Still, the consequence can be physical restraint, short term isolation or restricted freedom of movement.

We hope that you read this with your heart, in order to take in. We do not want to provoke, hurt or close hearts. We share from the bottom of our hearts because we want you to know, and perhaps be able to think differently than you have done before.

We have a wish that you, with the power to change, take this in. With a lot of courage and desire to make our lives better. We also want you, as Minister for Children, to receive this wisely. We hope that you, as the highest leader, use the knowledge we give you here. So that young people can live in institutions that feel safer for us.

Dear all of you, we know you can be scared of us. We know that you at institutions can feel uneasiness, doubt and despair. We know you want us to get better, but can struggle with understanding. Most of you have been taught and are still being taught to use coercion. We know you learn techniques and ways to use force. At the same time, we know that you have meant well, even if it doesn't feel well.

We know that many institutions work hard to not use coercion. We know that the vast majority of people who work in the Child Protection System want to do good. We will therefore give advice on how you can stop us in safe ways. Don't lose hope before you get to the advice we have to give.

**From young people in institutions**

## About the participants

55 young people have participated in the qualitative survey.

These are boys and girls from all over the country.

All participants have experienced physical restraint in a residential childcare institution.

35 out of 55 have experienced short term isolation.

42 out of 55 have experienced restricted freedom of movement.

22 of the young people are living in a residential childcare institution now.

Most are living there or have lived there recently.

52 out of 55 are under 20 years old. The youngest are 14 years old.

Most have lived in several residential childcare institutions.

Four out of five said that earlier in their lives they had experienced use of coercion, violence or abuse in their own family.

Many have not told the Child Protection System about this.

Some have not told anyone in the public sector about this.

## How the answers are collected

The answers have been collected through one-to-one conversations, on the phone and in sessions. The young people themselves have chosen in which way they want to answer. All the young people were spoken with twice, many more than twice.

These are the questions they were asked:

What type(s) of coercion has been used?

How have you experienced coercion?

Has coercion helped you in any way?

Has coercion affected your life in a residential childcare institution or afterwards?

If so, how?

Have you been stopped from doing something very painful or dangerous, in a way that felt safe?

In situations where physical restraint, short term isolation or restricted freedom of movement are now used, do you have any advice for how these situations should be met/solved?

Do you have experience and advice on protocols for coercive measures?

## Dear young people

Dear wise, nice and good young people who have taken part in sessions or been interviewed. A huge thank you to you. Thank you for the valuable experiences and advice from each of you. Thank you for being so unbelievably brave and sharing from deep within your hearts.

Without you, this important knowledge would not have come to light. You have done something important for Norway and for many children and young people in residential childcare institutions. We are super grateful, and humble.

## Dear Norwegian authorities

Coercion has been used in residential childcare institutions for years. Frameworks and guidelines have been created, training programmes and initiatives have been initiated. But this has been done without fundamentally including the experiences and advice from children and young people about how coercion is experienced and what it does to them.

Now 55 young people have given important knowledge to Norway about what coercion does to them in their lives in residential childcare institutions, afterwards and what advice they have on how to deal with it wisely.

Now the questions for you are:

How can this knowledge change laws and guidelines? How can it find a place in education and training programmes?

Knowledge from children has to fundamentally be included when the Child Protection System is going to be developed. We hope that it will now become a reality and that the vital knowledge young people have about the use of coercion in residential childcare institutions will be taken seriously.

**Sincerely, Changefactory**

# When coercion is used

## Summarised knowledge

55 young people have shared experiences from the use of coercion. A main answer is that physical restraint, short term isolation and restricted freedom of movement are most often used when a young person is in a lot of pain and shows it through self-harm, frustration, anger or suicidal thoughts. Coercion is also used when a young person wants to leave or the institution thinks they want to run away.

Most of the young people also answer that physical restraint, short term isolation or restricted freedom of movement has been used as a consequence or punishment for actions they take. These are often actions they take in situations where they feel unsafe, scared, misunderstood or very upset. The young people then feel that the institutions punish or give consequences for feeling fearful or other bad feelings.

Many of the young people feel that the adults think the young people are mean or dangerous. They don't understand that it always starts with something that triggers or hurts. The vast majority of those who participated also answered that anger, aggression or other expressions of pain never happen unprovoked.

## Quotes

At the institution I quite often felt unsafe and threatened. Then the solution was that I wanted to run away to my home. I also missed my mother and grandmother very much. Then came the fear and claustrophobia. The only thing I managed to do was to kick and punch. Then they physically restrained me or they locked me in for short term isolation.

I have experienced coercion over 100 times in the last two years. They used it most often when I wanted to hurt myself. They didn't try anything else first, at least nothing that helped. It has to help me if they're going to say that they had tried everything. They didn't ask me what I thought would help either. But in the papers they wrote that they had tried everything.

I have been physically restrained because I have kicked doors, walls or tried to run away. Occasionally I have threatened or kicked staff. I have

also been restrained when I have not handed in make-up or drinking glasses. And when I didn't hand in my phone at night. They often used coercion as a consequence or punishment.

One team used a lot of coercion. The other team showed more care. But most of them still used a lot of unnecessary coercion. I don't know how they were taught, it seemed like they had learned much more about using coercion than meeting me as a person who was in pain.

They used the most coercion during the periods when I was restless a lot. When there was head banging, self-harm, running out of the house or running away. And generally just anything that might seem like restlessness. Both when I had a very difficult time and when I refused to go back to the institution, because it was unsafe there. What way is that to meet a person who is in pain?

I have lived in several institutions with different young people and know that it is the adults' attitudes that are most decisive for how much coercion is used. When the adults explain it, it sounds like it's a mix of young people living in the house who lead to coercion. But it's not like that. Almost everything is about how the adults meet us.

Where adults may think that young people are difficult or dangerous, coercion becomes much easier. Alarms are going off in their heads. I notice it easily. They plan for me to be a "shitkid", and provoke it.

I have lived in institutions where I know they see me as difficult almost as soon as I walk in the door. They must have read my papers. They are probably not that interested in who I am inside and it shows. It doesn't take long before they call for more people. They know I can act out and that it has happened before that I have been violent. How then can I find the strength to be anything other than that?

If they talk about me as difficult or dangerous, it is almost impossible to try to convince them that I am a good person. I just can't take it and it hurts so much when they don't believe me and just continue with the headlines that other adults have told them. It should probably be your job as child protection workers, to find the good person in me and in all other young people. Instead, they create regimes that point to the opposite in me and judge me quickly.

They use words, looks and actions that clearly show me that I am dangerous. I have experienced it in many institutions and I don't think many adults have any idea how deeply it hits and what it does to us. 9

# How coercion is experienced

## How restricted freedom of movement feels

### Summarised knowledge

Four out of five young people who took part in the qualitative survey have experienced restricted freedom of movement by an adult following them. A recurring answer is that this has been experienced as painful in different ways. It has left them quiet, scared, desperate and confused. Most answered that it felt like the adults wanted to punish them or use force. Most often this has happened in situations where there was something else they needed. Most people say that being followed has made them feel worse inside.

Some say that restricted freedom of movement has left them socially excluded and that they have lost important friends. Many say that it is perceived as an easy solution. Instead of working hard and in ways that allow the adults to gain trust and be able to reach into what is difficult or hurts, the adults take control when they are around the young people.

### Quotes

When I moved to an institution, I was scared and unsure. That's why I started running away. I was constantly watched and followed. The staff always accompanied me to school. They sat in the corner, to watch me. If I was to meet friends, I could always see the institution car a little way off on the road. I had no privacy anymore.

Being followed made me quiet and I was constantly afraid. It felt like I was living in a prison. Was I really that dangerous? I started thinking that and cut out everyone I cared about. I didn't want to hurt anyone. The fact that they had to follow me made me believe that I was capable of hurting others. I felt like they looked at me like a psychopath or something.

Restricted freedom of movement destroys a lot socially. I lost my good friends, who would want to hang out with someone who has someone following them everywhere? I was very upset about it and constantly tried to make life miserable for him. So everything just gets worse. I got into situations with even more punishment and coercion. Inside I was just incredibly sad. And I just felt worse and worse all the time.

Restricted freedom of movement is a superficial lazy tactic. I think it is strange that the Child Protection System does not understand this. Grown people are chasing you. When I was desperate, they pretended like nothing was happening, they didn't react. When it hurt inside, they pretended it was nothing. No one tried to understand. Is that really allowed? Being followed is one of the worst things I have ever experienced.

Before I was moved they said I was going to a place that would help me. They would do everything to make me feel better. But when the first thing that met me was two guard dogs that were supposed to go around and follow me, you lose faith that anyone wishes you well.

It felt like I was being punished. I think they did it to show who was boss. When I was met with force from the start, I wanted to show them that I had power. I acted out and became very rude. Fortunately, there was an adult there who understood something, and he managed to explain it to the others. After a couple of days, they stopped following me.

They always followed me, for months. If I was going to be alone for a bit, I had to go to an isolation room. It started after serious self-harm and attempted suicide. I was given the choice between being followed at an institution and admission. But people do not get better from being watched over like a dangerous animal.

There were many conflicts because of the following. Lots of shouting and arguing. It became like cat and mouse and it only made life more difficult. And as soon as I got the chance, I could start hurting myself. I became desperate.

Restricted freedom of movement had to mean we were dangerous or mean. It made me feel a lot of shame. I think everyone would, if they were being followed.

Being followed is one of the worst things I have experienced in my entire life. And I have experienced a lot of pain, in the family and from other adults. It came as a shock to me that they were doing things like that in a residential childcare institution. Followed me and held me on the ground. They did it after I had been in so much pain. I needed something completely different. And when the emotions made me start to harm myself, they responded with coercion. Why is this even called child protection?

# How short term isolation and physical restraint feels

## Summarised knowledge

All the young people who participated have experienced physical restraint. Three out of five have experienced short term isolation. Most have answered that they experienced the isolation or the restraint as a form of punishment, after something they have said or done. Very few say that the situations where they have been isolated or restrained have been situations where there has been a threat to life or a serious threat to health.

A recurring answer from many is that the adults have restrained them tight. One in three say that they have experienced rough or brutal handling from employees. They tell of arms that have been broken backwards, that they have been thrown across the floor or into rooms, knees that have been pressed against their necks, experiences where several men have held a young person or sat on a young person. A recurring answer is that coercion is experienced as very degrading.

Most respond that isolation and restraint made them feel unsafe. More than half describe that they felt helpless or powerless. Many described that they found it incomprehensible or inhumane that adults do this to young people. One in three says that the coercion made them feel dangerous and begin to see themselves as dangerous.

## Quotes

I have been put on the ground, thrown against the wall, isolated, thrown down a flight of stairs while someone held me, sat on until I couldn't breathe and until another employee had to remove the person sitting on me. I walked around terrified, even though I was tough on the outside. All this has happened in what is called child protection.

Physical restraint has felt very painful. Being held down by two or three adults was in particular excruciatingly painful. It hurt both my body and my heart. No one should be allowed to do that to young people.

The adults who almost always restrain are the ones who I notice like me the least. There can be three or four of them and they're holding me down on the ground and being so tough. Someone puts their knee hard on my neck so I can't breathe. Sometimes they twist my arm so hard it breaks a little. It feels like it's just before the arm breaks off.

Coercion was used when I refused to get out of the car or if I did not want to come out of school because I wanted to stay there longer. Coercion was used in many situations that have nothing to do with life or health. It has hurt me a lot.

You feel so helpless when two adults hold you down. You just do more, because you just want to get away from there. So then the situation easily becomes worse. You feel very unsafe. They say that the coercion is to calm me down, but it works quite the opposite. Maybe they think I'll be calm, but it's only on the outside so that they will let go. Inside I feel broken.

When they hold me down and lock me in, I feel small, helpless and dangerous. I'm 160 (cm) and in pain, why would they do this?

# How protocols for coercive measures feel

## Summarised knowledge

Most of the young people were unsure of what was meant by protocol for coercive measures. What was written down was just from the incident itself, but most often the main reason why they had become upset or angry had happened prior. Most often something had happened with the staff at the institution itself, feelings after, for example, a phone conversation with someone in the family or after recent experiences with friends. These were often things the young people had not gotten to talk about. When a report was written without any of this being included, the report was superficial.

Many of the young people also experienced that the adults had exaggerated the incidents to ensure that they would not be caught for having used coercion illegally. The adults underreported for how long and how hard the use of coercion had been.

Another main answer was that the young people felt that their side of what had happened was not being presented. They were not asked to describe their experience of the coercion. Then it became difficult for them to say anything, because there were several adults who used coercion together, and they felt that they had the power.

# What coercion does to young people

## Brings back memories from childhood

### Summarised knowledge

Many of the young people, between half and three quarters, have previously experienced parents or family who have used coercion, violence or have committed abuse. Most of them have not told the residential childcare institution about this. Some of them have not told anyone in the public sector about it. All the young people have experienced neglect in various forms. These experiences are stuck in the bodies. Using coercion brings back many memories of their childhood.

### Quotes

I was very scared, but at the same time very angry because I had said that men following me feels very difficult. The reason why it is difficult with men is that throughout my upbringing I was subjected to violence and abuse by my father, but I had not told them that.

The truth is that I am very quickly triggered by being alone with men after many experiences growing up. I struggle a lot with flashbacks. The institution knows I'm afraid of men, but still they send males on the night shift after me.

It felt so painful because they said they would act as a home for me. At the same time, they held me down and used short term isolation. I was used to being locked in the basement and being subjected to force when I did something wrong from my childhood. So then the idea that this was the way a home should be, completely stuck with me. Now I have just turned 18 and am afraid that it is too late to learn and gain trust in adults.

When someone takes physical power over me, it's as if their face "fades" away. They are no longer an employee at the institution, but they become the three men who abused me when I was a child. I get scared, it feels like they are abusing me. Then I get desperate and try to get away, until I calm down because I just have to let the abuse finish. My institution did not know that I was a victim of sexual abuse.

A third main answer was that the young people were almost never successful in their complaints. The coercion was justified in a way that made it difficult for the young people to explain to the County Governor how they experienced it. Many of the young people had tried to complain. For most, it took a long time before they received an answer. Some had received an answer - and a few had been successful in their complaint. Others had given up on complaining.

Some of the young people experienced that if they refused to sign the protocol for coercive measures, this had consequences. They could not receive weekly allowance or they were not allowed to go out at an agreed upon time. Some had experienced being rewarded for signing it.

### Quotes

The coercion protocols must have been written by those who restrained me. At the first institution, I was always allowed to suggest things that should be changed in what they had written. Where I live now, I get them the next day - finished. They exaggerate the events so that the County Governor will see that there was a basis for coercion, even though there was not.

One threw me to the ground and sat on my chest, it felt like I couldn't breathe. They wrote afterwards that they had tried to calm me down, but in the end had to lay me down on the ground calmly and hold me until I had calmed down.

They have presented it as if they were the victim. That they were scared. They have said that it has looked as though I've wanted to do something serious. But they cannot know what I intended to do.

It has never felt like what I experienced was important. The adults write first to "protect" themselves. And when there is little elaboration in the protocol, it's a bit difficult to know what to write, I think.

I have zero idea how those protocols were made. But I had to sign something afterwards. If I refused, I was punished by not getting a weekly allowance or being allowed to go out.



Doesn't the Child Protection System know that many of us in institutions have grown up with violence and abuse? Or do they pretend they don't know? Or do they not take it seriously? They take over the care, and then they send us to someone who uses force over us just like our parents did. It's hard to believe that this is still legal.

## Lose trust in adults

### Summarised knowledge

Almost all the young people say that when adults take force over them, they lose trust in the adults. They talk about how difficult it is to keep trusting someone who has grabbed you hard, sat on top of you and held you on the floor or the ground, twisted your hands behind your back to get you to lie down, followed you around the house, taken you to a room where you were isolated or kept you in a room by using force.

Many explained that they wish adults who believe it is right that the Child Protection System can use this type of coercion when there is no threat to life, first have to feel this type of coercion on their bodies themselves. The adults have to feel this several times, also with force, in order to know whether they still believe that this has a place in a Child Protection System that can be called justifiable.

The use of different forms of coercion has meant that many of the young people have closed themselves off from adults. Many describe that they do not think the adults understand that the use of coercion easily causes the young people to close themselves off from the child protection workers at the institution. It is difficult to speak honestly with the adults afterwards. This has meant that many of the young people have not been given good help. They have not been able to honestly come up with what they wanted help with.

### Quotes

The fact that it often took so little before I was restrained has made me feel small and scared in situations on the bus, in an open space or in a room with lots of people. How can I know some of the people there will not take power over me?

All the restraint just made me angrier and has made me hate most men. Fortunately, that doesn't apply to everyone. One of the people who worked at the institution was very kind. The fact that he was there now and then, and never restrained me, meant that not all hope for me to be able to trust men is lost.

I feel they often abuse their power. I am a 15-year-old boy and they are between 35 and 50 or 60. I black out because I get so mad at them. This has confirmed that I cannot trust adults. I didn't dare say anything to them, because then they might punish me for that too. So then I never got to tell them anything important.

The coercion has been one of the worst things I have experienced in my life. I have lost even more hope to get help and the scepticism to adults has exploded. All I think about when I'm subjected to coercion is that I want to die.

Life at the institution has made me terrified of women. I am quickly triggered and I freak out easily. When I get scared, I self-harm a lot. It hurts so much to have so little trust.

I quickly became very unsure of the people who worked at the institution. So much coercion had been used on me in psychiatry, so when the Child Protection System began doing it as well, I felt that there was no one left to trust.

You cannot talk about something hurtful to an adult who has used coercion on you. In a way, it is a human being who uses violence.

## Makes the time after institution more difficult

### Summarised knowledge

Some of the young people described the use of coercion in the Child Protection System as a short-sighted and easy solution. Adults use coercion in situations where they themselves become anxious or afraid. Some adults use coercion when they get irritated, angry and are unable to face the situation wisely. When society allows them to do this and the use of physical restraint, short term isolation and restricted freedom of movement is even defended as part of good practice, what are young people learning about adults and about society? What kind of hope do they get for the rest of their lives?

Some of the young people also questioned whether the adults fully understood that using coercion is not a lasting solution. When young people are in institutions where the use of coercion happens regularly, what is the idea going forwards? The young people eventually turn 18. When they learn that those assigned to watch over them can use physical coercion, what do they learn? Several answered that this had taken away their faith in people and in the point of living.

### Quotes

Coercion becomes superficial, it becomes like punishment. It is too flimsy of a solution. It is lazy child protection to use coercion on children. It doesn't fix the problem at all, but only creates bigger problems, like us wanting to run away or use drugs.

For me, it has felt quite painful that they push it this far. That they cannot use other ways to figure things out. It has caused me to lose trust and faith in adults. And it sticks with me and that is quite a high price. Those instances at the institution made big changes inside me and they will stay there. Really short-sighted stuff.

I lost a lot of respect when they use coercion in other situations than when lives are at stake. And it very rarely is. With me it never has been. Still, the use of coercion has left a mark on me for life.

I could be put on the ground after vandalism or violence against an employee. The only thing that sticks with me is that if there is an employee I didn't like before, I remember him and want to take revenge later. So a lot of bad and not a lot of good comes out of this.

## See themselves as sick and dangerous

### Summarised knowledge

Many of the young people explain how being followed, isolated or restrained causes them to change their view of themselves. They have begun to see themselves as sick, someone who can hurt themselves or someone who can hurt others. For some, it has created thoughts in them that they are a criminal, a monster, or at least someone who is very dangerous.

Many tell concretely how being held hard, put on the ground, followed or forced into an isolation room in situations where they are in a lot of pain, feels very degrading. It can feel like they are worthless, so adults can do that sort of thing. Repeated use of coercion and force has affected their minds, and when the feeling of being of little worth has grown, this has become very serious.

### Quotes

Restricted freedom of movement makes me feel different. As a very dangerous human they have to take complete control over. But what kind of idea is this? Do they want to turn me into a monster? Or do they want to push me to do something very bad? Inside me it hurt so much that I escaped into drugs.

I have been locked in a room where I do not have the opportunity to harm myself or others. I never really wanted to hurt myself. But when you become an institution child, you kind of have to live up to the thing that you hurt yourself when you're in pain.

Coercion means that you are clearly labelled as an institution child. After the first time, I felt that I had to be like the others there. I had to do a lot of shit, run away. It felt like we were seen as impossible no matter what. So we might as well behave really badly.

Coercion has been absolutely awful. They take control in situations when I feel scared and small, in ways that really hurt. I get broken inside. It's as if they don't think I'm someone they can talk to about the pain. When I'm faced with that view, it's much easier to continue with stupid actions. They've given up on me anyway. Then I do too.

When they use coercion, I think that I want to die. I get thoughts that it is me who is so horrible that I deserve to be grabbed like my parents did when they wanted to punish me. The signal from the Child Protection System is that you do that with dangerous people.

When they follow me, it feels like they have zero trust. They look at me like I'm crazy. I am taken power over and reduced to nothing, and given no chance to show that I can do better. When it's all over, everything is ruined. Pieces inside me are broken.

When they restrain me, it explodes inside me and goes completely black. I will become a monster. I want to beat them all up and break their heads. Because to use that type of coercion, you cross a line and all the defences inside me react. They have to get a reaction to it.

I had restricted freedom of movement. The only option was to run away. I am dangerous, they say. Then I started thinking like that. It hurt to be watched over.

# Life after the institution

## Reactions afterwards

### Summarised knowledge

Almost all the young people tell about after-effects after the use of coercion in an institution: Fear of loud noises, nausea from smells associated with the use of coercion, fear of looks similar to those of employees, fear of cold and ironic voices similar to the voices of employees who have used coercion, being afraid of people who resemble those who have used coercion at the institution.

Many of the young people have been subjected to violence and abuse growing up. For many, these are stories that have not been told. When staff at institutions restrain them, isolate them, restrict their freedom of movement or use other types of "frames", the young people tell of different reactions. Some get "flashbacks" from events in their childhood, some tell of their body "freezing" and that then they only do what others ask them to do. Others have violent counter-reactions and tell how that pain from previous experiences can rage through their body. This can make them rude, aggressive or very violent.

Some of the young people say that when staff at an institution used coercion, it was worse for them than the experiences from when parents or siblings did it. It was because these were people in the Child Protection System who they thought would help.

Several young people explain that they are now getting treatment to process the injuries they have suffered after being subjected to coercion. Most of those who took part in the qualitative survey have not been helped to talk about and process the experiences from the use of coercion. They talked about how they struggle with the after-effects in different ways.

### Quotes

Sometimes situations arise that I have forgotten. Then it lies like trauma inside my body and can be triggered by just a sound, smell or feeling. Other things also trigger, for example the perfume that the person who often put me on the ground used. If I smell it, I just "disappear", I "fade out".

I moved out of the institution to a place far away. Still, I get scared of cars that look like the ones the institution had. I don't dare to go out alone in the dark, I feel like someone is following me. My whole body hurts just thinking about it now.

I have so much trauma due to short term isolation and coercion. After being followed over time, I get really scared when I see someone following me, even though I know they're probably out walking and just going the same way.

The use of coercion has meant that I cannot cope with authority figures at all. Several of the teachers behave as if they have power over me, and then I can black out.. That's how coercion interferes with school as well.

I can quickly become uneasy if people I don't know very well touch me or if they raise their arm in a sudden movement. I walk around a lot and feel tense. I also don't want to go to the doctor or the dentist, because I'm unsure of the adults who work there.

In 98 percent of the cases, coercion felt like an assault and something traumatic. It has not been very effective and it was almost always done unnecessarily brutal.

Have become afraid of the police, the Child Protection System and psychiatry because of the brutality. Life has become so cumbersome, because I get so scared in many situations that I later realise are harmless. If I'm playing with my boyfriend and he lays on top of me, I panic. I'm always prepared for someone to put me on the ground for no reason.

When they used so much coercion, I learned that you might as well give up everything. When someone is following you 24/7, you don't know what to do next. To think that the state does this.

I have nightmares where I'm awake but can't move! I stay awake because I'm afraid to sleep! And I have become afraid of men. I had four men holding me so tightly that I couldn't move.

The coercion felt like abuse! My control disappears when they throw me around! I am afraid of grown men and startle at loud noises.

If something happens suddenly, I freak out very easily. I can black out quickly, have flashbacks and then my whole body hurts.

I got shoulder problems because they broke my hands behind my back. Now when someone touches near my shoulders I can have severe flashbacks.

Perhaps the worst thing after all the restraint and following is that if someone just naturally holds my arm or strokes me, I freak out. It's so terribly stuck in me.

For a child who has previously been abused, being restrained, locked up or followed is very dramatic. The episode from when I was five years old is stuck in my body. When a man later in life lies on top of you and holds you tight, you feel the same feelings. And the same fear. They cause what happened to go on "repeat" in the body, time after time.

The doctors now say I have PTSD, it comes from the use of coercion. I can have panic attacks on the subway, it feels like it locks me in between two stations, I can't get out. Then the feeling comes from the use of coercion in school and institutions. When the body feels those feelings, it perceives it as a dangerous situation. Then the anxiety is triggered, the heart beats violently, you really feel the feeling of fear.

I can't go to concerts anymore. If I'm standing in line at a night club, the feelings can come. A dangerous situation is triggered, in a completely normal situation. It can mean that you don't go to work, that you don't do things, that you resort to drugs. Use of coercion can cause disability.

## **Lose boundaries over their own body**

### **Summarised knowledge**

Many of the young people have experiences of adults in their childhood breaking down the boundaries of what others can do to their bodies. The use of short term isolation, restricted freedom of movement and physical restraint in an institution has meant that boundaries have once again been crossed. This helps to destroy even more boundaries to be able to say no or to walk away when they experience something painful or bad.

Adults in the Child Protection System have to protect children from what is harmful to them, at the same time they are made to do actions that do not respect children's boundaries. Many young people say that this helps to reinforce the feelings of not being worth anything, and that others therefore can take power over their bodies and step over boundaries that are very unclear inside them. Physical restraint, short term isolation and restricted freedom of movement in a residential childcare institution have reinforced what they have learned earlier in life, that they deserve that others use coercion or sexually abuse them. It makes them seek out people who take physical power over their bodies.

### **Quotes**

The fact that they used coercion in the Child Protection System taught me that my body and my life were not something I could decide over. At the same time, it made the thoughts I had that all adults were mean and all men were abusers even stronger.

I had no boundaries for myself and sought out the destructive and painful, to check the boundaries of the institution. It affected my self-esteem, I lost respect for myself and my own boundaries.

I learned growing up that when someone took physical power over my body, they said it was a way of showing love. Then you get into a support system that you think is the rescue, then they do the same with reasons like they're protecting you and showing care. Then something happened in my head, and I knew I wasn't worth anything.

I look for people who are controlling and abusive, that's what my head and body have taught me is right. Never learned that I own my body.

When adults say they do it to take care of me, my head makes the connection that being subjected to coercion is the same as being taken care of. I have exposed myself to painful things that resemble coercion in order to experience care. Now I know that it is not caring, but stepping over others, put into a system.

The use of coercion in the different institutions has shown me that I am not in control of my body. They said it was best if I lay completely still and didn't struggle, while they held me. I don't know if child protection workers understand that at the same time they taught me that I should accept others taking power over my body. My boundaries have been broken down so much that trying to say no to someone who wants my body just makes me feel guilty.

# Safe residential childcare institutions

There are a lot of discussions in Norway about what constitutes safety in an institution. A clear answer from the young people in the qualitative survey is that they do not believe that adults have understood or been curious enough about what is considered safe for young people.

Another clear answer has been that in order for young people to get help with what they are struggling with, it has to first feel safe for them to live in the institution. When it feels safe inside the young people, it becomes safe around the young people and then also safer for the adults. It also makes it much easier to stop the young people in a safe way.

What does it take to feel safe in an institution? Here are some key pieces of advice from young people. This is summarised advice from qualitative surveys Changefactory has carried out in the period 2008-2018. The advice has also come up as the main answer in this qualitative survey.

## Adults who show warmth

### Warm, kind words

In order for the institution to feel safe for the young people who live there, they ask to be met by adults who feel warm. This means that they use kind words about and with the young people, both in conversations, in meetings and when there are activities. The words are important because they have power. They can create closeness between adults and the young people in the institution, but they can also create distance. All young people need to hear that they are valuable and important to the adults and that the adults wish them well.

### Warm body language

For the institution to feel safe, the young people ask to be met by adults who look at them with warm eyes and who have warmth in their voice. Warm body language is also important, like showing engagement with hand gestures, hugging, stroking hands or shoulders. Many young people have described that adults with "heat lasers" in their eyes feel safe and that it is safe with adults who have genuine, warm smiles.

### Warm boundary setting

In order for young people to feel safe, adults can set boundaries in ways that do not create fear and anxiety, but nevertheless are clear and safe. In order for adults to be able to set boundaries, the young people first have to know that the adults are kind at heart, and wish them well. If not, it can quickly become scary. Young people need to understand the boundaries set by adults. Without it, it can become scary inside the young people. When the adults first show kindness, they can more easily set boundaries - also then to show the young people that they care about them.

### All young people need warmth

For some young people, warmth is very unfamiliar. Young people clearly say that adults must NEVER stop giving warmth anyway. Adults have to melt "the layers of ice", in front of many young people's hearts. This ice has to be melted after becoming thicker and thicker as protection against a lot of pain that has happened earlier in life. It has to be melted, so that life can feel safer. Safety can contribute to young people wanting or being able to tell what is most important to adults at the institution, so that the institution can provide good and useful help.

### All adults can, if they really want to

Although there are many adults who are not perceived as particularly warm, most young people believe that all adults have warmth inside and therefore can find it. Adults can be warm in all encounters with young people, regardless of how often or how long they are together. Knowing that adults are warm and safe is mainly about attitude and the way adults meet young people.

Many young people have not believed that any adult can care about them. Meeting young people with warmth can help change the view young people have of adults. It can help to give young people hope and start to feel that there is something good about them. Warmth can make young people start to believe that life can get better.

## In to what hurts

### Behind behaviour

In order for young people to feel safe, they need adults who understand that when they feel pain, it can appear as self-harm, struggling with food, restlessness, bullying others, crime, drugs, fear or anger. This is an expression of pain, but not the problem itself. Often these expressions are called behaviour or diagnoses. These then become labels on young people's expressions of pain and are given a lot of focus when the Child Protection System and mental health care are going to help. Measures for behaviour or treatment for diagnoses have covered over bad feelings and trauma. It has been easy for the bad to disappear, in analyses and discussions about behaviour or diagnoses. This means that far too many of the young people "shut out" adults. For many young people, this has hurt and been dangerous.

### In to what hurts

At heart, no young person wants to be mean or do bad things to others or themselves. This may still have become a habit and a bad habit, because the bad feelings take control. Adults therefore have to clearly show young people that they always understand that there is something behind the behaviour. They have to work hard so that the young people feel it is safe enough for the pain to be told in words or in other healthy ways. Adults have to clearly signal that words are serious enough and are taken very seriously.

If many of the adults manage to make it safe enough for the young people to talk about painful and difficult feelings, it can become very safe to live in the institution. The adults can agree on something that they can stand for as an adult group and together they can practise being safe, warm adults. The adults can also facilitate so that young people can talk about what hurts to the person or adult they feel most safe with. This will be very helpful, many of the young people say. This requires generous and wise adults who understand that it has to be this way to ensure that young people can talk safely.

## Get to know each other and get information

### Adults talk about themselves

In order to feel safe in the institution, young people need the adults to tell them about themselves. It has to be done with each one of the young people and in natural situations. The adults can talk about interests, their family and what they like. They can also talk about what is important to them in order to feel good, about what makes them happy and what makes them sad.

### Information about adults working

An overview with names of who will be working and when they will be there is easily visible at the institution. Whenever possible, the adults speak directly to each young person and tell them who will be there. Adults remember as best they can to let the young people know that substitutes are coming. If someone is coming to visit or if someone who is working leaves the house, we let the young people know.

### Information about future plans

Adults talk openly with young people about future plans. Knowing what will happen can provide safety. For some it is unusual that nice things can happen and some need something to look forward to. This can not become an excuse so that adults at the institution can be flexible and impulsive. Young people have to learn to tolerate change of plans - that provides safety as well.

## Safe framework

### Few common rules

At home in families, there are usually no written rules. Many written rules presented to the young people in an institution easily give the feeling of being different. It easily creates conflicts and can create unsafety. A main answer from the young people is that there need to be only a few common rules. This will also make the transition out of the institution easier.

### Individual frameworks for each young person

Apart from the common rules, the framework is created in the closest possible collaboration with each individual young person - about bedtime, driving, money spending, contact with friends. Young people have different days and have different needs. Some need more firm boundaries, some don't. The fact that adults have individual agreements with each young person is carefully explained so that everyone understands that it is more fair than unfair. Adults say that people are different and have different starting points, so it is fair to meet them differently.

## Plan for hurting

### **Made with someone the young person feels safe with**

The institution asks the young person which adult at the institution the young person feels safe talking to and how they want to be met when they show frustration, despair, drug cravings, fear or anger. That the young people themselves can choose will make it safer to express something fundamental about this. The adults ask how the young people want adults to meet these feelings, and possibly how they can stop bad or hurtful things that is about to happen.

### **Explains to different adults**

The young person and the adult can write down together how the young person wants to be met - as a plan to meet hurt. Perhaps this will vary from adult to adult. If the young person wishes, the adult the young person trusts and the young person together can explain this humbly to the other adults. Alternatively, the young person can ask the adult to explain it alone. After a situation where the plan has been used, the adults can talk to the young person about how it felt. If necessary, the plan is adjusted.

Part 6:

## Advice for how to stop us Stop us safely

### **Summarised knowledge**

All the young people answered that deep down they wanted to be stopped from doing bad or dangerous things. But they had to be stopped in ways that felt safe for them. Many answered that it is important that they are stopped in ways that, to the least extent possible, cause them to lose self-worth and take away trust they have in adults.

Most of the young people said that they carry bad experiences from growing up. Many have only told about some of what they have experienced, some have not described these experiences to anyone. Carrying bad experiences can make them feel uneasy, unsafe and other bad feelings. When a young person commits hurtful or dangerous acts against themselves or others, painful feelings are often an important reason. Some of the young people have lost hope and faith in being able to get better.

More than half of the young people have, in individual situations, experienced being stopped in safe ways from doing bad, hurtful or dangerous things to themselves or others. This has been done when they have wanted to injure themselves, use drugs or do something hurtful or dangerous to others. It has most often been institution employees who they have had extra trust in, who have stopped them. For some of the young people, this has saved their lives. For most, it has been very important to build trust in adults.

Characteristics of the descriptions of adults who have stopped young people safely:

They understand that the young person did not mean to do anything bad or dangerous.

They understand that the young person did not want to hurt, disappoint or harm anyone.

They understand that something was difficult or painful for the young person.

They stop the actions with warmth, humility and respect.

Many of the young people explained that when life hurts so much that they do bad or dangerous things, it is incomprehensible to them that Norway has a Child Protection System where the adults use coercion.

## Quotes

Most people there restrained me tightly when they tried to stop me from doing something. But there were two who worked at the institution that I knew would stop me in a good way. They gave hugs and they could stroke my back or my hair until I calmed down. Eventually I felt completely safe with them.

In one of the places I lived, there was a lady who sat down next to me and spoke calmly to me when I was desperate. The others felt more insensitive, perhaps because they were unsure. She hugged me and showed me that what I felt also affected her. There were just too few of the people who worked there who did anything like that. But that's how it should be done!

Once I was sitting in the window and wanted to jump out, one of the people who worked there came and held me. It was more like getting a hug. I felt he did it out of care and not to use coercion. It felt completely different. One of the others who was at work said it was coercion and that they therefore had to write a report. I think it was stupid, for me it didn't feel like coercion.

One of the employees held me close to her, in a "hugging position", instead of down on the floor. She spoke calmly and told me that she thought this was going to be okay and that she was not disappointed or angry. She said she knew I had something to hurt myself with, but that she also knew it was because I was in pain. Therefore, she would rather comfort, she said. When I was with her, instead of hurting myself, I usually ended up crying and giving up the tool.

Once there was a very nice employee there. He showed me that he cared. He spoke calmly. He said he would watch over me and that I wasn't allowed to hurt myself. It made such a difference. I hope that everyone who has to stop young people do it like that.

## Advice for stopping us safely

### Remember that we often are in pain

In a scary or dangerous situation, remember that we often are in pain. Often we are afraid or desperate and want to protect ourselves. We can also have habits after having to protect ourselves a lot. Then it is important to remember that we have been through a lot. And based on that, try to understand why we do such drastic things. We think this can help you not to be so scared.

## Talk to us and say that you understand that we are hurting

It is good if you explain that you understand that we are hurting now. That you know that is why we do what we do. Make it clear that you understand that self-harm, breaking things or anger are signs. At the same time, you can say that you do not think what is happening now will help us in the future. And that you think we can find other ways to get the bad stuff out. Feel free to use examples from when you yourself have done something bad. The fact that you, as an adult, talk about yourself can help many of us.

## Say that we don't deserve to be hurting so much

You can say that we don't deserve to be hurting so much. It's nice if you speak calmly and are as honest as you can. You are welcome to tell what you feel in your heart. It's good if you try to say this, even if you're scared.

## Remind us that we are good

When something feels very hurtful, it is difficult to show good sides. We believe that applies to all people. We ask you to do everything you can to remind us that we are good. It's good if you don't tell us off and don't think about punishing us. It's not a good idea to say anything instructive, it can be very triggering. You don't know what experiences we have with words like that. We ask you to hold on to the fact that this happens without us wanting it to.

## Be honest about how the situation feels to you

If you are going to get us to stop in a bad or dangerous situation, you have to be honest about how the situation feels to you. We understand that it is scary and that you may be scared. Perhaps you also feel desperation or despair. However, we ask you to be honest about your feelings. Then we can more easily remember that you are an ordinary person. You are not just an institution employee, who has to endure and accept. But a human being, who can be hurt and feel a lot of pain. But we ask you at the same time to say that you know that we are not to blame.

## It's good if you are calm and say you want to help

It's nice if you are able to be calm, speak kindly and warmly. Maybe you feel we are becoming calmer, but that is not certain. Maybe we are still desperate, angry or aggressive. We ask you to continue to talk honestly. Say you want to help us, even if you're in pain or scared. Most often, we will then be able to calm down. None of us WANT to scare or hurt others, we also feel hurt.



### **Help us to be able to speak safely**

When life hurts, we can try to disconnect and push away

Talking to an adult we trust can change this

You can be the brave adult who makes sure we get one

Someone who turns a situation around or warms yourself into our hearts

You can help by asking openly and thoroughly who it is

And by making arrangements for us to meet this person

And perhaps also so that this adult can help us further

### **Remember that if one of us were your child...**

What would you do if one of us were your child

If we struggled a lot, were sad or very angry

Wouldn't you hug us and tell us how much you cared about us?

Wouldn't you meet us with warmth and kindness?

We think most of you would

### **Why should we be met so harshly?**

But why should we, who are young people in the Child Protection System, be met harshly?

Why should we be restrained and followed?

Does anyone seriously think this is good for us?

Does anyone seriously say out loud that this is in the child's best interest?

Why shouldn't we be met with warmth and kindness?

## **Stop us from abusing drugs**

### **Summarised knowledge**

A main answer from the qualitative survey is that when young people wanted to abuse drugs, it was often because they felt that it was unsafe at the institution. Most felt unsafe with one or more of the adults there. Some also felt unsafe with the other young people there. At the same time, many carried a lot of painful feelings, from family, school or from other parts of their childhood. These feelings were rarely talked about at the institution. Few of them had told about the worst things they were carrying within them. They found that the adults rarely brought this up and did not ask in-depth.

Many of the young people experienced that adults viewed them as challenging. They knew they could be talked about as young people who tested boundaries, who challenged their surroundings and who thought about themselves a lot. Some knew that they were being talked about as

sick and that they needed treatment for this. Some knew that they were talked about as dangerous, with behaviour of acting out, anger problems or problems with drug abuse and that they needed a strict framework for this behaviour to be fixed. At the same time, the young people carried so many experiences that were not shared and feelings of injustice, grief and pain. The idea that they should be met with strict frameworks, be treated or fixed, made them lose trust in adults. Then drug abuse easily became an escape and a way of surviving this.

All the young people who had struggled with drug abuse said that in the vast majority of situations where they wanted to abuse drugs, deep down they wanted to be stopped. It wasn't the drugs they wanted the most, but they couldn't manage feeling so much pain. For some of them, drugs had become the best way to get rid of this pain. For some, abusing drugs was the only way they could get rid of this pain.

When asked how they should have been stopped, the main answer was that they had to be stopped in the safest and best way possible. The most common response to questions about what they meant by being stopped in a safe and good way was to be met with understanding and kindness and at the same time with boundaries. The boundaries had to be set with understanding and warmth at the core and the adults had to meet them with care and love.

Only a few of the young people had been stopped from abusing drugs in ways that they felt were safe. Many of the young people emphasised that they understood that in situations where they were going to abuse drugs, it could be challenging, unsafe or scary to be a patient adult. They had seen how the adults became very worried, frustrated and sometimes very scared. They talked about adults they had perceived as insecure, distant, cold, authoritarian or who did not care enough. Most often, the young people had then been met with stern words, threats of consequences or the use of various types of coercion. A few had met adults who tried to understand, and who showed humility and respect in situations where the young people were going to abuse drugs. They had met the young people with warmth and told them that they were scared. These adults were pointed to by several of the young people as "proof" that it is possible to meet them safely, also in situations where the young people want to flee to drugs. Many more adults are needed who are confident enough to meet young people in ways that feel safe, was a recurring answer.

## Quotes

At one institution, I think they had gotten some other messages from their managers. They understood things differently than I had experienced before. They tried to ask me why I did what I did. And they tried to show me love, even though I pushed them away a lot at first. They kind of didn't give up. It was the first time I had told child protection workers about what I had grown up with. It helped against drug abuse, because it helped with the feeling of being worth something.

I have met adults who meet the young people with emotion and who sit down and dare to have a deep conversation. They can tell you that they really care about you, in a way that makes it possible to believe it. You hear it in the respect and humility in their voice. These adults have understood that they should not use consequences, when what we do comes from feeling very bad feelings.

Something that can help when I run away and they're afraid I'll abuse drugs is for an adult to walk next to me and talk to me. The person can't just walk along to follow me, but speak kindly to me. They have to say that this is not something they really want to do, but that they are afraid for me and only wish me well. The person has to say that walking along is the best thing they could come up with to help.

An adult asked me what I would do if your child wanted to run away and you were afraid they would drink or abuse drugs? Would you use coercion? Would you put the child on the ground? Would you lock them in? I explained to him exactly what I know about how young people close themselves off and lose trust in adults when they use coercion. Why do we do this in residential childcare institutions then, he asked. I did not have an answer. Why would an employee ask a young person? Or is it meant the other way around?

## Advice on how to stop us from abusing drugs

### **Remember that addiction is about feeling unsafe or hurt**

You must always remember that drugs are often about escaping for a while. When a young person wants to abuse drugs, it is usually about unsafety. Bad or difficult feelings lie behind. Drugs are often a substitute for harming oneself, showing anger or desperation. It helps if you continue to think good thoughts about us.

### **Be honest about how it feels to be you**

When you're afraid that we're going to abuse drugs, be completely honest about it. Be honest about how it feels to be you right then. It is wise not to accuse, but to explain concern or fear. You can also talk about the powerlessness you feel. And how much you would like to help, so we can be free from drugs.

### **Meet us with warmth and that we are worth a lot**

Most of us who have struggled with drug abuse have felt really small. When drugs tempt us, we need adults who can provide safety and warmth. It is very good if you use warm words and a warm voice, and warm eyes, that show that you are concerned. It can feel very good if you tell us that we are worth a lot. Many of us have heard it little, rarely or never. And if we have heard it, we have not fully taken it in or believed it, but we have strongly missed it.

### **Stop us from doing drugs, in a safe way**

As a starting point, we all want to be stopped from abusing drugs. You adults must always remember this. But we have to be stopped as people who are in pain. Never stop us to punish, but to help. We have to be stopped in safe ways. What helps is honesty and human warmth. It is also that you are open, humble and want to collaborate closely.

### **It can be difficult to give up the safety**

Abusing drugs can be the only thing we can manage in some situations. It has become a familiar path that quickly becomes a habit. It is difficult to give up drugs, once you have used them. There can be a lot of sadness in giving up drugs abuse. And things can happen that make drug abuse the only solution to continue to live with the bad feelings we feel. Sometimes it can be difficult to stop us safely. But we ask you all not to give up.

### **Help us go forward after "one last time"**

Being clean for a while can be scary. We can feel that we will never have the opportunity to abuse drugs again. It can create desperation about "having to take drugs one last time". After a situation like that, we ask that you do not give consequences. We ask that you do not punish or lose hope in us. It easily closes off contact and then the need for drugs becomes greater. We ask you to help us find out the reasons for abusing drugs. And to find other ways and what we can do instead of drugs.

## Documents coercion wisely

### Summarised knowledge

What actually happens when coercion is used is not well documented. It is not written down what happened in advance. What was said and what tone was used? Coercion is often documented by the person who used the coercion themselves. Is this safe? And is it right and secure for us? What coercion does to us and what it does to trust in adults is not documented. When we move from the institution one day, who is responsible for the trauma that the use of coercion has given us? These are questions that have been repeated by many of the participants.

Many of those who have participated in the qualitative survey have also asked questions about whether the adults who decide really believe that this is a good way to do it? Before episodes of coercion, there may often have been a sharp tone and arguing. What adult would write down what they regret saying or doing after an argument with a teenager or spouse at home? Child protection workers are only human. When the person who has used coercion is the one who can report what has happened and why, everyone understands that the reports aren't necessarily completely honest. It is probably also human nature to write "as nicely as possible" about what you have done yourself, in order to avoid being caught for making mistakes in your job.

The consequences that use of coercion makes inside us are rarely revealed. The descriptions of the use of coercion, from child protection workers, follow us when we move forward in life. The consequences of use of coercion like physical force, short term isolation, searches and restricted freedom of movement follow us as well. When we have to deal with the same adult who has held us by force, locked us in, followed us or searched us, it is not recorded anywhere whether or how the trust in this adult changes. Nor is it recorded if the use of coercion creates new or more expressions of pain within us. How much we harm ourselves, how much we abuse drugs, whether it makes us struggle more with food, whether it triggers anger and aggression within us - this is not recorded. At least none of us have been asked these kinds of questions in any residential childcare institution. We do not believe that residential childcare institutions have been given the task of figuring this out.

### Quotes

When I am held down, it usually happens after it has built up for a long time. It can start with a sour comment in the morning, because I wake up with a body full of nightmares and the person who comes and wakes me up doesn't understand any of it. Throughout the day, I often walk around with all the pain inside my body. When there are adults there who don't understand any of this and just follow the book and their schedule, it can become too painful.

They have no idea what happens inside me when they restrain me. They also have no idea how important this is for what happens the next day and the next. That all this is connected and that the vicious circles and that we can get worse and worse are connected to the fact that we are met so harshly. In the end, you can be left with very little trust in any adult.

## Advice for documenting coercion wisely

### Ask the young person if they experienced it as coercion

If adults think they have stopped a young person safely and are unsure whether the young person experienced it as coercion, a person the young person trusts can ask the young person if it was experienced as coercion. If the young person did not experience it as coercion, there is no need to write a protocol. Some young people have experienced that institutions do this.

### The young person's experience has to come first

If a coercive protocol is going to be written, the young people's experience must be documented first, before the adults' thoughts or opinions. The young person has to be given the opportunity to write in the protocol together with an adult they feel safe with. One of the managers has to help write and ensure honesty. They have to ensure that the necessary reflections are made. The person who has used coercion on a young person is usually the one who has to describe what happened. If the adult and the young person have different descriptions, these two experiences have to stand separately. Whoever writes the protocol has to write humbly and warmly. In order for the young person to be able to share honest experiences of how they experienced the coercion, the adults first have to say they're sorry. It has to come from the heart and be an honest apology.

# This is what Norway can do

## Assess the risks of using coercion

Most of those who participated in the qualitative survey answered that anger, aggression, drugs or other expressions of pain usually do not come without a cause. Something triggers and it creates difficult feelings. A main answer is that most adults need to understand more of this. When actions are going to be stopped, this understanding must be the basis for what is done next. Coercion has been used in the Child Protection System for many decades, without the consequences and risks, both for the young people and society, being brought forward clearly enough. The risk is not registered either.

Until now, too little knowledge about what coercion does to young people has been part of the assessments for using coercion. The young people clearly express that this cannot continue. They ask: How can legislation and education support such brutal measures in the lives of children and young people, based on so little knowledge?

## Coercion changes the possibilities to help

### Summarised knowledge

A main answer in the qualitative survey is that young people lose trust in adults who restrain them, search them, follow them or isolate them. Many explained how the use of coercion strongly affects the opportunities the adults later have to help them. Young people may struggle to accept and respect messages from adults who have used coercion on them. When coercion is used, it can destroy all possibilities of being able to tell something very difficult or painful to the adult.

For many, the use of coercion has caused them to lose their sense of safety where they live. After the first instances where they see or experience coercion, something happens inside the young people at the same time. The adults, who they should have felt safe with, use physical force on them or on other young people. Drug abuse, crime, anger, violence or self-harm can hardly be stopped without us feeling safe where we live. If the use of coercion is part of life in the institution where we live, it has been very difficult or impossible for most people to feel better inside.

### Quotes

What do they really think? In one moment they are holding us with iron grips down on the floor or they are putting us in a room, completely alone. They do the same as my abusive father did to me when he snapped. The next moment they say they will be there for us and that we can tell them. Don't they understand better?

I couldn't feel safe there. They only restrained me once. But the one girl I lived with was often restrained. She spoke up against them, then they became irritated and it often ended in coercion. I heard the screams and you can't be safe when you live in something like that.

## Coercion is used on young people with trauma

### Summarised knowledge

Many of the young people experience that child protection workers do not know about or understand well enough that most young people in institutions carry trauma. Few of the young people have met adults who they have gained enough trust in and where there has been a framework that makes it safe enough for them to be able to tell about what is most painful. Different triggers can easily make them feel painful feelings. The feelings are expressed in expressions of pain, like anger, rudeness, aggression, drugs, self-harm, struggling with food, rejecting adults or just being quiet.

Physical force, short term isolation, searches and restricted freedom of movement is used today without those who are put to do it knowing what kind of experiences the young people carry with them. Most of the young people answered that they had not told any child protection workers about their most serious traumas. Some have told something, but very few have told the worst things. Many have not shared with child protection workers what previous episodes of coercion have done inside them either.

Employees are tasked with restraining young people until they "calm down" in a way that for some young people may remind them of sexual abuse and violence they have been subjected to in the past. The young people may have flashbacks and again experience that their boundaries for their own bodies are trampled down. Employees are given the task of isolating young people, without knowing whether they have experienced being locked in and isolated in their childhoods. Employees have to search rooms, clothes and bodies without knowing whether these experiences

trigger tumultuous experiences in the young people's lives. Employees have to track a young person's footsteps without having any idea what kind of memories this can trigger and thus without knowing what kind of pain, sorrow, anger or rage this can create inside young people.

After the use of coercion, only a few young people have had the strength or courage to talk honestly with the adults at the institution about how they really experience or have experienced the coercion. Very few of the young people in the survey had told employees at the institution about what the use of coercion does to them and how it leaves a mark on them.

### **Quotes**

Child protection workers basically learn techniques to keep children and young people on the floor. They are taught that holding people tight, searching them and putting them in cold rooms is something you should do with young people who have often had a very difficult childhood. In this way, the state has made a system where child protection workers in institutions will cause us more damage, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

Elsewhere in society, people can stop another person who is in danger of taking their own life or that of others, and it is called principle of necessity. At an institution I lived in they showed me all the extra paragraphs they had to do things to me that break my heart and make me lose all trust in adults.

I don't understand Norway's plan. Restraining and following us can work now and then, so that adults have control. But how short-sighted is this? Then we turn 18 and how unsafe will life be then? When you are met like that in the Child Protection System, it is difficult to manage life afterwards.

## **Risk assessments of coercion has to be done**

### **Summarised knowledge**

Losing safety, trust in and respect for adults because they use different types of coercion is serious. Feeling less valuable because strong adults put you on the floor very hard or follow you around is also very serious. To experience that the boundaries of your own body have been stepped on again and feeling like you might as well give up is something no one should have to experience, from adults who want to help, either. When the people who work in the Child Protection System can step over the boundaries of a young person, surely anyone can? Then the feeling of not being worth anything can take up all the space in their body. This is done at the age where young people are supposed to learn to believe in both themselves and other people.

Based on the main answers from the report, we ask that there is a risk assessment of the possibility of use of coercion in the Child Protection System. The consequences of the use of coercion have to be carefully weighed against the situations in which it can be used. The solutions cannot be, as today, that each and every one of us has to complain to the County Governor when we have experienced something that has hurt us too much or has harmed us. Many of us have not dared to complain or have given up before we started. You can also feel small when it is you against the state. Good constructive solutions are now needed, where the state takes the initiative and where the high risk that the use of coercion will destroy a young person's life is taken seriously and becomes the basis for assessments of future frameworks.

## Take research seriously

We also ask that research be taken seriously. Two reports from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) show that the use of coercion is experienced as frightening and offensive.

### **“Tvang i barneverninstitusjoner, unges perspektiver” (Coercion in residential childcare institutions, young people’s perspectives)**

(Gro Ulset og Torill Tjelflaat, 2012)

The researchers have interviewed young people about their experiences with the use of coercion. The report clearly states that coercion is experienced as frightening and offensive. The young people say in the interviews that they feel unsafe in the institutions after coercion has been used. The report also states that coercion breeds more coercion and that conflict can be prevented and the use of coercion reduced by focusing more on seeing, asking and listening to the young people.

### **“Håndtering av tvang i barneverninstitusjoner – ansattes, ledes og tilsynets perspektiver” (Handling coercion in residential childcare institutions - the perspectives of employees, managers and the inspectorate)**

(Gro Ulset og Synnøve Melheim, 2013)

The report builds on the report mentioned above. The researchers provide an insight into employees’ and managers’ understanding and attitudes towards the use of coercion. The employees at the institutions say that using coercion is unpleasant and that coercion damages and destroys relationships.

### **“Grenseløs omsorg” (Boundless care)**

(Child protective services report 2015)

In its report, the Children’s Ombudsman has spoken to children and young people in foster homes and in residential childcare and mental health care institutions, to hear about their experiences of coercion. In the interviews conducted by the Children’s Ombudsman, it is clear that young people experience coercion as frightening and offensive. The Children’s Ombudsman has also determined that the complaint system is not child-sensitive and not accessible to children.

## Take knowledge from children seriously

Legislation, regulations, guidelines, research, professional initiatives, higher education programmes and training programmes can help ensure that residential childcare institutions feel safe for children and young people - and that they can get good help there and feel better inside. We now ask that children’s knowledge be seriously included in all of this, to ensure safe and useful services for children and young people.

## The new Child Welfare Act must ensure that young people are met safely

Children and young people are now asking for a Child Welfare Act which ensures that no more children and young people are subjected to new traumas from the use of coercion. They must not be stopped from harming themselves, abusing drugs or harming others - by adults who are systematically taught to use physical force and other measures that can cause further harm.

The new Child Welfare Act must build on children’s knowledge of how to deal with young people who do dangerous or bad things to themselves or others. It must contain provisions that give child protection workers the opportunity to work in close relationships with the young people and who have a clear ambition that, as far as possible, young people are met with understanding and warmth, in a completely different way than how things are done today.

The new Child Protection Act must also ensure that all documentation of the use of coercion against children and young people must contain a risk assessment, where the young person, together with an adult they trust and have chosen themselves, after the use of coercion, is allowed to describe the incident and the background for the incident, as the young person sees it. It must also be described what coercion does to young people.

Many young people with experience from an institution know the rights regulations or parts of them. When the rights regulations have been read out at some of the gatherings in the survey, the young people explain that they better understand why adults can restrain them, follow them or isolate them, in all the situations where this is done today. A main answer is that the rights regulations provide far too easy access to use coercion. It says little about how to assess situations together with children. It says nothing about how in every situation you must first work hard to ensure that the child feels safe and that they are met with human warmth.

## **The Norwegian Board of Health Supervision and County Governors take children seriously**

Children and young people are now asking that the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision and the County Governors thoroughly familiarise themselves with what is available of knowledge about the use of restraint, short term isolation and restricted freedom of movement, where children and young people are informants. This applies to both research and summarised knowledge from children. We ask the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision to fundamentally include the knowledge from children and young people about coercion, when guides are created and when people who conduct inspections are trained.

Several of the young people have noticed that both coercion and collaboration with children have been the subject of supervision in recent years - and that is good. Furthermore, we ask that the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision also includes knowledge from children and young people, when services are going to be assessed on whether they work professionally well - or are inspired to work professionally well. Knowledge from children must be included in order to determine good criteria for supervision and to ask good questions to the informants. Children and young people must also, as a starting point, always be informants, both in municipal child protection and in the institutions, when services are going to be assessed, in supervisions or other types of review.

Whether the services are experienced as safe and useful for children and young people must always be an important starting point. We also ask that this applies when the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision and the County Governors decide on topics for training the services. Here, many good steps have been taken around the country in recent years. But many more steps must be taken so that children and young people can clearly feel that the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision and the County Governors are there to fundamentally look after and ensure that the Child Protection System is experienced as safe and useful for those it primarily is there for.

## **BFD and Bufdir include knowledge from children**

Children and young people also request that the Ministry of Children and Families (BFD) and the The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) fundamentally familiarise themselves with research and summarised knowledge from children, about the use of restraint, short term isolation and restricted freedom of movement. We ask that this knowledge be fundamentally and systematically included in professional initiatives, professional standards and professional development

The aim of moving children and young people to an institution must be for them to feel better and manage in society afterwards. In some situations they have to be stopped, just as children and young people in all families have to. But in the future they cannot be stopped in ways that are experienced as traumatic or as use of force. We ask that both the ministry and directorate fundamentally take this to heart and take it into account in the work on the new Child Welfare Act and the regulations and guidelines that will accompany it.

We also ask you to include this when training employees in the institution. The knowledge of what physical restraint, restricted freedom of movement and short term isolation does to the young people in the moment but also in life afterwards. We ask that you join us and change the training as it has been done up to now. We ask for a much greater humility when planning training for how children and young people should be met when they are struggling a lot and are in a lot of pain - and when they show this with violent expressions of pain. Young people who are about to harm themselves or others or who want to run away to abuse drugs must be stopped. But when it is going to be decided how to stop them, we ask that the knowledge from children and young people now provides new choices of how to do it.

## **The higher education programmes include children's knowledge**

The higher education programmes have a major responsibility for training future professionals who will meet children and young people in residential childcare institutions and in the municipalities. They also have an important responsibility for providing students with summarised knowledge from children.

The higher education programmes can include both research in which children and young people are informants and summarised knowledge from children in the syllabus. Then this knowledge can also be used in assignments and exams. The higher education programmes can also invite young people with experience from a residential childcare institution to convey summarised knowledge from children and to tell how coercion can be experienced. The young people can also describe what is needed for residential childcare institutions to feel safe and how they can be met safely, when they are struggling or hurting.

## **Researchers and competence centres ask children**

Norway needs more research on child protection where children and young people are fundamental informants. This especially applies to the subject of coercion. We believe it is important and perhaps crucial that young people participate and give input to the research, so that it is as accurate as possible. This applies to which questions it is wise to ask and how they can be asked so that it is safe enough and feels useful enough for those who will participate. If it is not safe enough or feels important enough, the research will gather superficial answers. When young people read research reports or other public reports about various topics in the Child Protection System, these are comments that quickly occur. Also when young people are invited to give input on research, it is crucial that this is done in ways that feel safe for those who participate.