



# How we find out if a service has a ‘closed culture’ and what we do about it

June 2020



Easy read version of CQC guidance for staff:  
‘Identifying and responding to closed cultures’



## About this booklet

We are the Care Quality Commission. We check services like hospitals and care homes to make sure they give good health and social care to people.

We also check that health staff follow a law called the Mental Health Act. This law helps them decide if a person with a serious mental illness needs to be kept and treated in hospital.

As part of our checks, we look at how services are protecting people's 'human rights'.

Human rights make sure people are treated fairly, with respect and in a way that gives them choice and control.



Abuse, or not having your human rights met, may happen more in services that we say have a ‘closed culture’.



A closed culture can lead to very bad abuse, like was seen at the Whorlton Hall hospital and Winterbourne View care home.



Closed cultures are more likely to happen when people are getting an illness called coronavirus.



This booklet tells you how our staff find out if a service has a closed culture and what they do about it.



# How can our staff find out if a service has a closed culture?



A closed culture can happen in any service. It is our job to find out if a service has one, or if there is a danger of it happening.



There are some warning signs that our staff can look out for. These are written below.



**1. These are the signs that people could be getting bad care because of what they are telling us or we are seeing:**



- People tell us they are getting bad care, or even being punished.



- Health and care staff do not understand the people they are caring for. Or they speak badly about them.



- People's care plans are not personal or do not seem to show their choices or decisions.



- The service does not make changes to support disabled people, or does not use communications plans for people with a learning disability, autistic people and others who may need support.



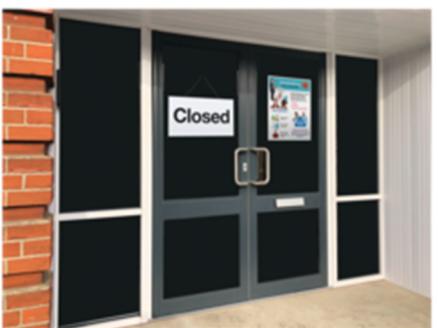
- We are told, or we see, that people using services are uncomfortable or quiet around staff.



**These are the signs that people could be getting bad care because their service is stopping them from doing things they may want to:**



- The service has rules for everyone that stops them doing something, without looking at what is best for each person.
- The service is doing new things during the coronavirus outbreak to keep people away from each other, like stopping them going out for exercise or blocking doors.
- Staff are using 'physical restraint', which means they are holding them down.





- People are being kept in a hospital for months or years, or being locked in their flat or bedroom.



**These are the signs that people could be getting bad care because of where they live:**



- The service has been changed to deal with the coronavirus outbreak. This could have an effect on people, like giving them less choice.



- There are worries about where people are staying. Mental health hospitals are not meeting people's rights set out in the Mental Health Act.



**These are the signs that people could be getting bad care because of staff:**



- Staff do not have the right training they need to care for people – for example for autistic people or people who have a learning disability or dementia.



- Lots of staff leave, which means there are always lots of new staff.



- Staff make complaints about the service, including about being bullied.



- Staff are afraid to speak out about things they think the service does badly.



**These are the signs that people could be getting bad care because of managers:**



- Staff are not given the support they need from their managers.



- Managers do not respond well to complaints – for example, from people who use services or their families. Or they may try to hide them.



- People are not protected from harm, abuse or are not treated fairly. This could be seen, for example, through an increase in complaints.



**These are the signs that people could be getting bad care because it is not being checked enough by people from outside the service:**



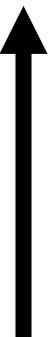
- During the coronavirus outbreak, less people are able to visit the service. This includes family, friends, social workers, health care workers and CQC staff.



- During the coronavirus outbreak, the service has not used technology well, like using tablets and mobile phones to support people to make video calls to their family and friends.



- The service does not respond well to CQC or other organisations that ask it for information.



- There are an unusual amount of complaints or incidents.



- Families do not know how their loved one is being cared for, because the service does not keep them updated well.



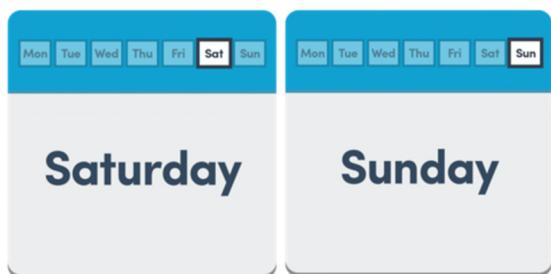
# What should we do if we have worries about closed cultures?



When we carry out our checks of services that may have a closed culture, we need to make sure we really understand people's experiences of using the service by:



- Always carrying out unannounced inspections. This means we will not tell the service beforehand that we are visiting them to make our checks.



- Carrying out our inspections in the evening or at weekends, as well as during the day.



- Making sure we always speak with people using the service in a way they can understand. When possible, we will speak with people on their own, so they do not have staff standing over them.



- Always using an 'Expert by Experience'. These are people who have used services who may find it easier to speak with people – for example because of their experiences, or by using Makaton.



## How can you help?



We are setting up a group of people who use services, their families or staff to improve the way we carry out our inspections of closed cultures. We are looking for people who use, or have used, or work in:



- Hospitals that care for autistic people or people with a learning disability.



- Mental health hospitals, where people are kept under the Mental Health Act.



- Services that use 'Deprivation of Liberty'. This is when people are stopped from doing something, for their or others' safety, through the Mental Capacity Act.



- Services, like care homes, where people live, that have 'out of area placements'. This is when people are using services that are a long way from where they lived before, and could be a long way from family, friends and others.



If you are interested in being involved in the group. Or want to know more about our work on closed cultures, please email us at:

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