

## SURVIVING THE HOLE

Let me begin by explaining the following...

The hole is technically an informal name given to units where prisoners are locked down and usually in some form of isolation. Other informal names you may hear are solitary confinement, lock-up units, or lockdown units. The formal name may differ depending on what state you're in but the most common name is "Administrative Segregation" (Ad-Seg). Prisoners are sent to the hole (Ad-Seg) for disciplinary, security, or safety purposes.

SHU stands for "Security Housing Unit." And while the hole is often a temporary placement, if one is found guilty of a SHUable rule violation or deemed a security threat to the general population – maybe because he has been validated as an associate or member of a prison gang and is said to have a high influence among other prisoners – one will be sent to the SHU. Other names you might hear of SHU-type facilities are "management unit" or "control unit." However, program and concept-wise, all lock-up units are similar in nature.

### A bit of perspective:

When you're in prison, going to the hole is kind of like going to the county jail; whereas going to the SHU would be like going to prison. What I mean by that is, when you are free, on the streets, and you are accused or suspected of a crime, you are sent to the county jail while you fight your case. If you are convicted and the crime carries prison time, you will then be sent to prison. Well, when you're in prison, on a general population yard, that is prison's equivalence to being free. However, if you are accused or suspected of a "crime" (rule violation) while in prison, the Correctional Officers will arrest you and lock you up in the hole – where you will lose most of your privileges/freedom – while you wait to have your crime (rule violation) heard by a judge (Senior Hearing Officer). If you are convicted (found guilty) and the crime (rule violation) is SHUable, you will go to the SHU.

However, for the purpose of this chapter, I am going to use the common, generic name "the hole" to refer to any unit with a lockdown/isolation concept.

The concept:

Prison's concept, in general, is to punish its prisoners by depriving them of freedom. The hole, however, takes punishment to another level, as its concept is sensory deprivation – to deprive prisoners of their five basic senses: sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. The idea of prison's administration is that, if they cannot break of control you by prison alone, where all of your rights as a free human being are stripped from you, they will break and control you by putting you in the hole, often for long periods of time, and strip you of all basic human senses. However, whether they are successful or not is often up to you....

How/why does this pertain to you?



Well, if you are doing a stretch in prison, odds are you will at some time end up in the hole for one reason or another. After all, it's not very difficult to find yourself in the hole, as some prisons will send you there for something as simple as a fistfight, which, in some prisons are a daily occurrence.

#### The experience:

While in the hole, with the exception of three showers and a few hours of yard a week (in most places), you will spend all your time locked down in your cell. You will have little or no contact with other prisoners – with the exception of your celly, if you have one, as some holes are single cell – and you will also have very little or no contact with the outside world, as prisoners in the hole are typically not allowed to use the phone, and only allowed two 1-hour, no-contact visits per week.

You will also have very little property – even less than the already little amount you are allowed in general population. Regardless of your reason for being in the hold, whether you killed somebody on the yard, you're under investigation for selling drugs, or you're there because you feel your life is in danger and you've requested protection, all prisoners are treated the same.

Personally, I don't necessarily mind being in the hole. I would rather be in general population because I have more access to things and can maintain my relationships better with people on the outside, as I have access to contact visits and phone calls; however, I have done a lot of time in the hole (SHU, Ad-Seg, etc.), so I have learned how to take advantage of the situation. Being in the hole allows me to escape the daily distractions that occur in the general population and focus on my work, which is what I like to do anyway. In fact, while I write/work-on this very chapter of "Surviving Prison," I am actually in CCI SHU, in Tehachapi, CA.

However, not everybody is able to survive the hole as well as others. The lack of human interaction (except for one's celly, if he has one, which can actually become a problem because of *too* much time together); the lack of contact with family and friends on the outside (which often leads to a loss of relationships); the feeling of being trapped in a cell for most of every day; the sometimes dead quietness, yet sometimes loud chaoticness: the constant hunger; the strip searches that take place every time one comes out the cell; etc., is often just too much for even a strong man to handle. Such a situation often leads to frustration, depression, and hopelessness.

If you find yourself in this situation there are things you can do to help yourself cope a little easier. In concept, this entire book will help you survive your time in the hole, but you should "up" the concepts to a more intense level, as doing time in the hole is much more intense (especially mentally) than doing time in the general population. In order to maintain your composure you must learn to exercise extreme discipline and you must learn to survive on even less than you do in general population, oftentimes in even animal-like conditions.

Here are some things that I incorporate into my strategy when doing time in the hole, and I suggest you try to incorporate them into your strategy as well. You will notice that many of my



suggestions appear elsewhere in this book, but for the specific purpose of surviving the hole I have listed them here for you...

Use your time wisely:

It is very important that you take advantage of your time in the hole, and, like in any situation, turn what is perceived as a negative into a positive. Don't just go to the hole and sleep. Instead, set goals for yourself, come up with a plan, and execute it. While in the hole is a perfect time to focus on your legal case, the book you've wanted to write, or study the subject(s) you've wanted to learn about. You are going to have a lot of time on your hands. However, time is valuable; use yours wisely and you will prosper.

Stay busy:

You are only using your time wisely if you are constantly busy. You should have no time to just sit around aimlessly. You will notice that a lot of prisoners who break under the pressure of being in the hole are the same ones who just lay around and/or talk out of their doors and/or in their vents all day. They are ambitionless and do nothing but sulk in their reality, allowing it to eat away at their sanity. Staying busy will help you mentally escape your environment, which is key to surviving one as hellish as the hole.

Reflect: organize your thoughts:

Use this down-time to get your thoughts in order. Reflect on the situation(s) that lead up to you being placed in the hole, what you may have done wrong, and how you can improve your strategy upon being released (if you're lucky enough to be released).

Furthermore, you should also use this time to reflect on your life as a *whole*, and how you can improve *yourself* from this point forward. Look deep into who you are as a man, decide exactly who and what it is you want to be, and *how* you can become the best *you*.

Correspond/Communicate:

If you were never into letter writing before, I suggest you learn to get in to it now, because it is extremely important to have regular correspondence with you family and friends on the outside. You being in prison is hard on your relationships, but you being in the hole is much, much harder. You must do all you can to maintain your relationships on the outside.

Furthermore, maintaining contact, communication, and support from your family and friends is extremely important in regards to your survival. Such correspondence will provide you with hope, and hope will help you push forward. I suggest that you also use this time to reach out and try to connect with other forms of outside support such as pen pals, network organizations, etc., so that you are in as much contact as possible with people in the *free* world.

*Note:* If you plan on doing something that you *know* is going to land you in the hole, I suggest you mini-write all your addresses and kiester them – wrap them in plastic and stick them up your



asshole. You want to make sure that you can always maintain contact/communication with your people/resources.

#### Express yourself:

Being in isolation can limit the ways you are able to express yourself – both emotionally and creatively – but it still can and *should* be done. Keeping a written journal about your experience, writing down your personal ideas/philosophies, writing poetry and/or song lyrics is a good way to express yourself emotionally. Writing things such as magazine articles, plays, short stories and/or books is a great way to express yourself creatively; as is drawing.

Create a way to express yourself both emotionally and creatively. Doing so will help you release built-up emotion as well as give you something to focus on. Use your imagination and creativity to escape the boundaries of your cell's four walls.

#### Read:

Read as much as you can while in the hole. Reading will not only provide you with great knowledge, but also take you to another place mentally.

I suggest that you read books that are educational and relevant to your studies, but I also suggest that you read newspapers and magazines that will keep you up-to-date with news and interests that you have in the *free* world. You must never accept nor get used to prison. Keeping a piece of your thoughts focused on the *free* world will help you do so, as it will remind you that something much greater than your immediate environment exists.

#### Exercise:

Being cramped in a cell all day is unhealthy, so it is very important that you exercise regularly. Develop an exercise program and follow it. Try to stretch and use your muscles, as close to as much as you would if you were *not* in the hole.

Furthermore, exercising provides a way for you to release unwanted energy and stress. Not only is exercising good for your body physically, but mentally, too. While exercising is a great time to block out your environment, get your thoughts in order, and even meditate.

Lastly, even though you will have very little or no contact with other prisoners, you must keep yourself combat-ready at all times. You never know when your door will “accidentally” open along with the door of a prisoner with whom you are at war with. Believe me, it happens; *always* be prepared for it.

#### Meditate:

It is very, very important that you take time out of each day – at least 15-30 minutes – to meditate. Meditating will allow you to release a lot of physical and mental stress. Study various meditation techniques and use the ones you feel work the best for you.