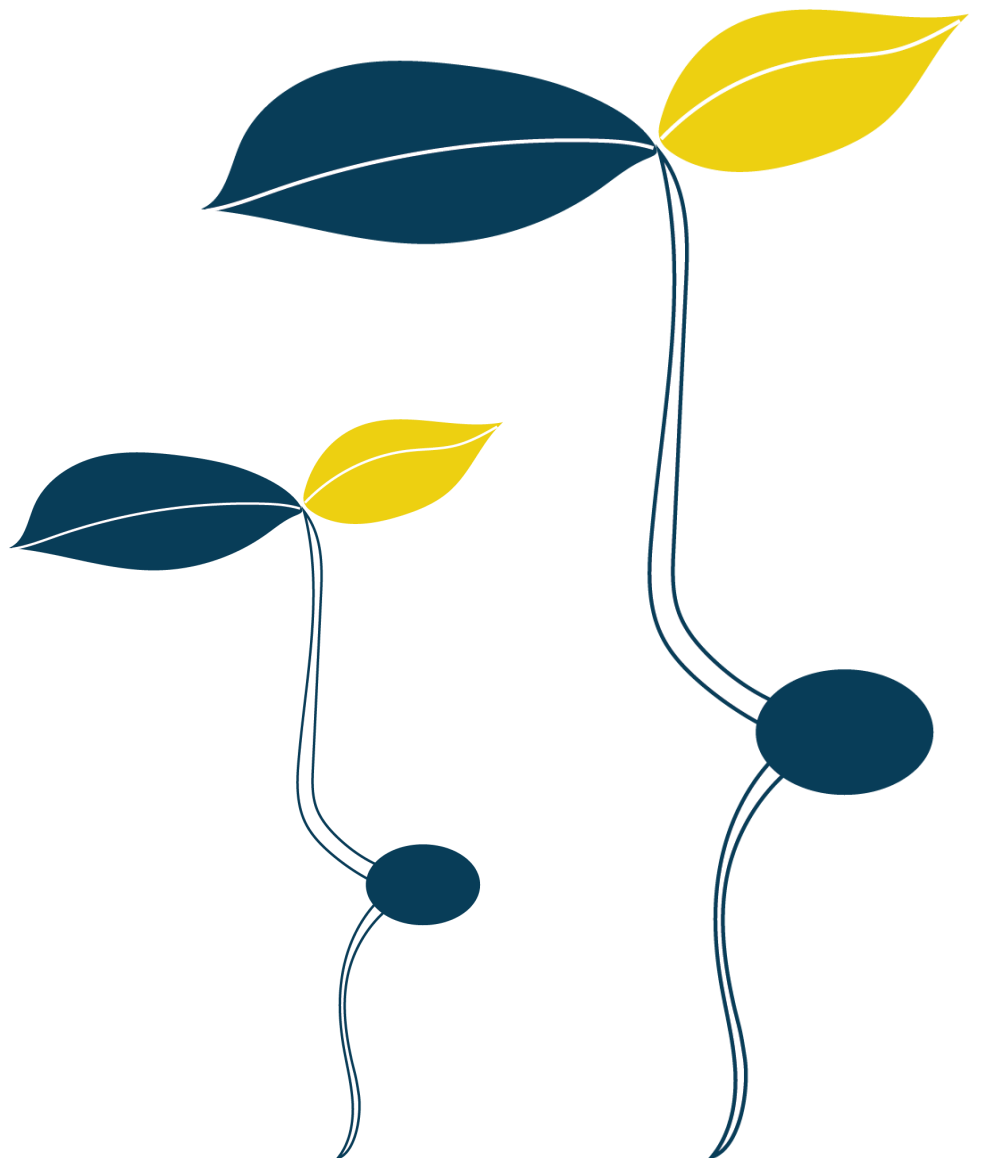


# How to support staff wellbeing from a training perspective

June 2025



# Onboarding and Mentors

A new employee in a prison is assigned a mentor during their three weeks of introduction at their local prison.

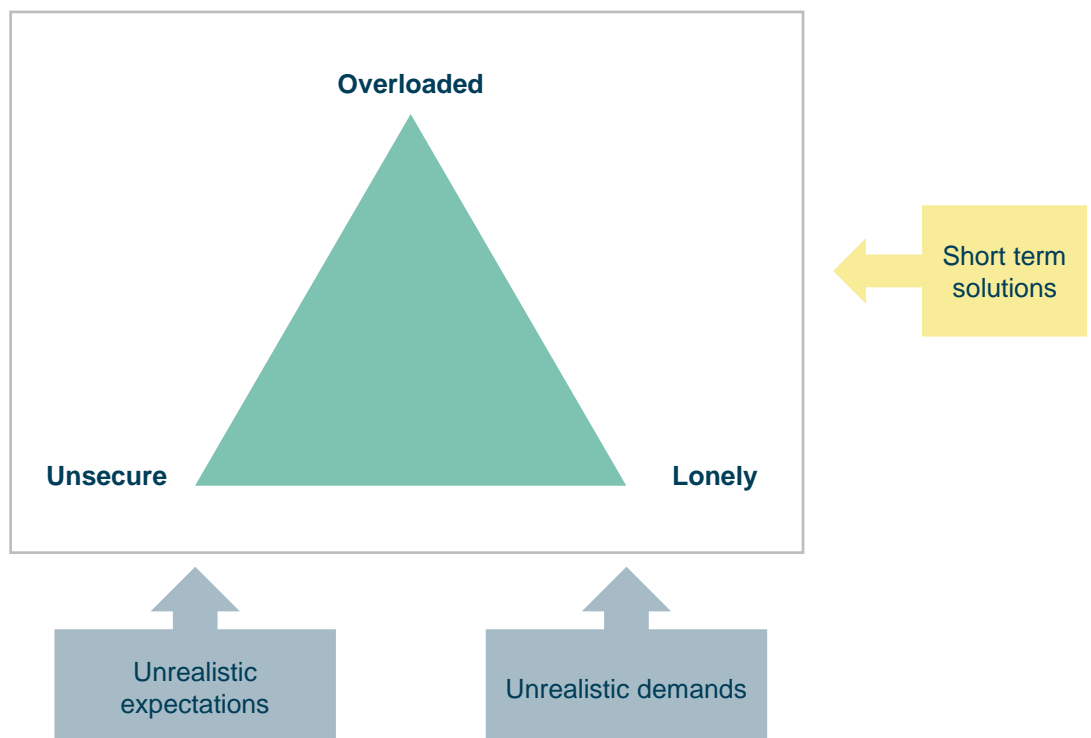
The mentors welcome, support, coach and guide the employee during the introduction and is later a natural person to go to for advice. After introduction, the employee works three to five months before attending the eight weeks of basic training for Prison Officers at the Training Academy.

Research has shown<sup>1</sup> that *the onboarding process* is essential for retaining staff; to feel welcome, have an atmosphere where it is OK to ask questions and the importance of time for reflection. “The discomforts of the new” are the stressing challenges many newly recruit experience. Overloaded by information, unsure about their competence and left alone with questions and tasks.

<sup>1</sup>“Nya professionella” - Karolinska Institutet (Petter Gustavsson, Beatrice Agrenius, Elin Frögéli och Ann Rudman).

## The discomfort of being new at work

Source: Petter Gustavsson  
“Nya professionella”



The mentors are trained by the Training Academy. The network of the prison mentors is facilitated by the Training Academy with several meetings a year. The result is a great collaboration between mentors and the Training Academy, experience sharing as well as information on different topics to strengthen skills. All this supports staff wellbeing and forms an important bridge between prisons and the Training Academy.

## Important ingredients during on-boarding

### A. Understand the challenges as a new Prison Officer

- Navigate a new role
- Learn to find your way around
- To be new – a heavy cognitive load

### B. Introduction - a vision through the whole organization

### C. To have a supporting learning environment

- “We understand what it is like to be new”
- Engage to ask questions
- “We are happy you are here; we understand that you don’t know everything, we will support you to learn and we want you to be one of us”

### D. The mentor is the hub during the on-boarding process

- Allocate resources for mentors and time
- Train mentors
- National checklists
- National material for introduction **that prepares for the up-coming staff training**

## Training

Within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, SPPS, we conduct trainings through blended learning methods; group work, role plays, integrated exercises all within an atmosphere where it is OK to guess wrong, do wrong and where we support to try again. At the Training Academy, we are ***practicing***. We want our new employees to feel comfortable during the training. In basic training, we emphasize what is called employeeship. It’s about being:

- |                               |                          |                   |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| → A supportive coworker       | → Responsible            | → Share knowledge |
| → Participatory and committed | → Dare to raise problems |                   |

We are aiming to create a **safe environment** where the students feel that we are colleagues in the same organization and that we are there to train and support them. All trainers have their working background from the prisons. We are teaching on **stress reactions** and **mental approach** as a support to feel safe at work. We expose the students to different stressful exercises and put a lot of effort in **reflections** all through the training. We make sure that our **curriculum is relevant**; that the content is what is needed to feel secure and knowledgeable in their role as Prison Officers; all this contributes to staff well-being. Since 2024, we have scenarios/ exercises at the end of the weeks, to highlight that all parts of the curriculum are connected. It is a way of summarizing the content of the week.

# Psychological first aid

At the Training Academy, we train selected Prison Officers on Psychological first aid to become moderators to take care of their colleagues after an incident. They have been nominated, most often by their colleagues.

When there is an incident in a prison, we initiate our organization for Psychological first aid. Incidents could be threat, violence, fire or traffic accidents. Psychological first aid is an alternative to our former debriefing. Psychological first aid is offered to people in severe distress after being recently exposed to a traumatic event. It ultimately contributes to reduced sick leaves, reduced mental illness among staff and increased resistance for eventually new upcoming incidents.

The purpose of the Psychological first aid is to create and maintain an environment of safety, security, trust, togetherness and hope. We do that through contact and engagement, safety, stabilizing, problem- and need-inventory as well as practical support. Social support, information around stress reactions and continued support are also a part of the Psychological first aid.

