

How to Deal with Strip Searches

INSIDE KNOWLEDGE | FREE SUPPORT RESOURCE | LOU MYX

Strip searches are one of the most distressing parts of entering custody. They feel invasive, humiliating, and often traumatic—especially for survivors of assault. This sheet is here to help you understand the process, manage your reaction, and come out of it with your dignity intact.

What to Expect During a Strip Search

You'll be taken into a private room by two officers of the same legal gender as you.

You will be asked to remove clothing in stages—not all at once.

You may be asked to bend forward, open your mouth, run fingers through your hair, lift breasts or genital area, and squat. Not every search includes all of these steps.

Officers must not touch you, unless explicitly authorised (e.g. for safety or evidence).

You are entitled to dignity, even if you don't feel it in the moment.

How to Cope in the Moment

Breathe deeply and slowly—inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4.

Stare at a fixed point on the wall. Anchor your vision.

Repeat a silent mantra like: 'This will pass' or 'I'm still me'.

Disassociate gently if needed: imagine you're somewhere safe, like under a blanket or on a beach.

Remind yourself: This is a procedure. You're still in control of your mind.

Aftercare: What to Do Once It's Over

Talk to someone if you feel shaken—ask for a Listener, chaplain, or nurse.

Write about the experience if you can—it can help reframe your power.

Cry if you need to. It's not weakness. It's a release.

If anything felt illegal or abusive, you can file a complaint once you've grounded yourself.

Do something calming: wash your face, lie down, hold a cup of tea—reclaim your body's rhythm.

Personal experience and general support only. Prison rules, entitlements, procedures and available services vary and may change. Check current arrangements with the relevant prison or official guidance before relying on practical details.