



If you have recently been sentenced and will soon find yourself in prison, we have put together this section of advice to help you and your family prepare for this difficult time. The stress that you are facing as you think about going to prison may prevent you from focusing on much else. Therefore, we have tried to identify some priorities that you should focus on instead. Taking care of certain responsibilities now can lessen certain sources of stress for you and your loved ones. We hope this helps.

STEP 1 Get your credit cards and bank accounts in order. Are you married? Does your spouse, partner, or parent have access to these accounts? Because you have to be physically present to set up bank accounts, it's virtually impossible to set up joint accounts once you are in prison. Also be advised that some states will seek to take your assets if you are able to pay for incarceration.

STEP 2 Prepare legal documents. It is not our goal to scare you, but prisons can be dangerous places. You may not have access to the resources that you have access to now. Get your estate documents in order before you enter prison. These may include a Living Will, Power of Attorney, etc. Ideally, find a qualified professional in your area to talk to.

STEP 3 Research the prison. Find the prison where you will be incarcerated using our site at <http://www.writeaprisoner.com>, and familiarize yourself with prison rules. Share these with family and friends who may write or visit you. Knowing what is and isn't allowed can make this period less trying on everyone involved.

STEP 4 Schedule an appointment with your doctor. While medical care does exist in prisons, it is strongly recommended that you seek a checkup out here to detect any possible problems before you go inside. If you have any medical conditions, you will have a chance to give this information to prison medical professionals upon arrival.

STEP 5 Once you're in prison, be mindful of other prisoners. Initially, stay in open areas where staff can clearly see you at all times. Unfortunately, newer inmates are often the targets of theft and violence. It will take time to acclimate to prison life.

STEP 6 Don't lose touch once you're inside. Depression can hit hardest when you first get to prison. Make a plan now with your family and friends on how you're going to keep in touch. Letters are more affordable, but visits are most important. It may be hard financially or because of driving distance to have regular visits, but try to put together a practical plan to see your loved ones, especially at the very beginning of your sentence.

Additional Resource! Our Parenting from Prison Self-help Guide is filled with information to help parents foster a relationship with their children during incarceration.

In this country, newborn black males have a greater than a 1 in 4 chance of going to prison during their lifetimes, while Hispanic males have a 1 in 6 chance, and white males have a 1 in 23 chance of serving time.

Source: <http://www.bjs.gov>

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SEND A SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE TO*:

WriteAPrisoner.com
Parenting from Prison Self-help
P.O. Box 10
Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

* Prison staff or pen-pals can also print this guide at
<http://www.writeaprisoner.com/self-help>

ADVICE FROM INMATES

We asked the following question to some of our members, and we want to share their advice with you now: If you could have had just one piece of advice to prepare you for life in prison, what would it be? The information below describes actual prison life. These comments were received directly from the inmates with the intention of offering firsthand advice to those who will soon find themselves incarcerated. Some language may be offensive to some people. Please do not read it if you are easily offended. It is provided for educational purposes only, not for shock purposes or to sensationalize a tragic situation.

From an inmate in Amarillo, Texas:

"When you are incarcerated the most important thing to do is to never show fear. In this place fear is like meat that everybody would quickly feed on. So even if you are afraid, do not show it. Once the convicts see you are scared or weak then they will surely want to try you. And always stand your ground when someone tries to test you by confrontation. This is not the free world where you can walk away from a fight. Second, mind your own business. Whatever you see or hear that doesn't concern you, then it's not your business. And watch how you talk when you're having a conversation with another convict. A wrong word said that's disrespectful could mean a fist to your mouth. So always try to show respect. And if you are a snitch, then you're open game 'cause any convicts at any time might put a piece of steel in you. The same goes for people who have sex cases, especially to a child. So if you're not a snitch nor a sex case and do the things mentioned above then you should do all right. – V.T.

From an inmate in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania:

"In preparation for incarceration, much depends on the length of your sentence and your financial and marital status. A man on his own – best advice: Prepare for financial stability. If it is a long sentence, sell off a car, stereo system or other items. Set up an account to draw from to survive your time of incarceration. If married, with or without children, realize life goes on for everyone, the clock never stops and those out there who may love you have a life to live. Do not make demands of others! Be tolerant and understanding and they will likely do the same. Last: Be smart and prepare physically, get in shape, prepare for the unexpected. People will judge on appearances and you never get a second chance to make your first impression." – B.V.



What I would tell someone going to prison: When you can, in times of silence, re-evaluate your whole life, what led you to the very day you're forced to leave your loved ones, work toward an education. Your gut feelings are always right, go with them. If you're not strong it's time to start building yourself up physically and mentally. Know that for being depressed you can't change the past. Take things one step, one day, one smile, one silent tear, one struggle at a time. Write your kids every week and say a prayer every night! - J.C.

-From an inmate in Pollock, LA



From a female inmate in Columbia, South Carolina:

"First thing is, don't let time do you. You want to be doing the time. What I mean by that is – accept what has happened, take time to mourn losing your freedom. Then get a grip on your life. Even if it's a short time or long. Get to know the real you. Face the things you couldn't before. Find God; make a strong relationship with Him. Get as much positive that you can, then plan for your future. Last, but not least, find how to love yourself." – D.G.

From an inmate in Aberdeen, Washington:

"Work hard to keep friendships and relationships strong. Your deepest connections will be tested – some will fail. My daughter was 2 months old when I came to prison. She's in high school now. We have a great bond, but it took a lot of work. Stay proactive in your ties to society. Prison can rob you of your character, or build upon it. Family support is crucial – do everything you can to help them help you through this. This is hard time for them too. 'Defeat doesn't finish a man – quit does. A man is not finished when he's defeated. He's finished when he quits.' ~ Richard M. Nixon (1913 – 1994)" – E.O.

From an inmate in Cumberland, Maryland:

"My advice for new people going to prison would be, that this is a university of life. Here you come to learn and experience good and bad things, about prison and you can get an A or F. Here you don't have your mom or dad to look over you, you are alone in darkness. Here you learn to be a real man or a real puppet. Here you learn to be responsible and respectful to others and achieve many goals if you go after them, if (you) don't you are the one who loses at the end. My best advice is to go to school and get your GED if you don't have any or some type of vocational trade that will help you even more on the outside world. Use the time, don't let the time use you. About friends: That are of good nature so that they can help you to have a good and positive attitude in a positive mode and stay away from people who don't have a good and positive attitude, and once again don't be a puppet. This is very important: 1) Continue to be a good example, doing something different isn't easy and you may need to help reinforce this new way of life. 2) Keep the standards high; it takes hard work and dedication to sincerely change. 3) Never stop believing in yourself. But, what you must never forget is that the power of influence (depending on how it is used) is the most beneficial or dangerous energy available to

man. Man will destroy his opportunity (to include others), becoming a puppet of his environment and a slave to his circumstance. Be a smart person and go get that A in this university of life and be a better person, be a better man." - R.D.

From an inmate in Tennessee Colony, Texas:

"In here you survive by playing a role, acting the part for the benefit of indifferent eyes, hiding what you really are from the contamination of this very sick world. In this place nothing is gentle. Kindness is weakness in this place and to be weak is to invite hurt. Being in prison is like living in a fish bowl where you can't even sit on a toilet without an audience. It's easier to describe what prison is not like; it's not like a country club; it's not like a dungeon, a cave, or a torture chamber. It's probably not as bad as you think it is, yet, it may be far worse. This leads up to my favorite inaccuracy, "Prison is what you make it". And in a very narrow sense, that is true, although you probably can't make it into a vacation, no matter how hard you try. Another handy stand-by is: "Prison is a learning experience". That's also true; however the same could be said for a heart attack. Prison is lonely. Prison is hearing a song on the radio that transports you to the exact time, place and feeling of when she last said, "I love you." You could sooner be transported to Hell, a first cousin of prison, than to be ambushed by memories in such a manner. Any hunger, terror, depravity, injustice or humiliation that may be connected with prison, most certainly takes a back seat to the isolation and loneliness involved. Most everything can be handled except the loneliness. Serving time in prison is a very worrisome task. Prison is loneliness that sinks its teeth into the souls of men. It is an emptiness that leaves a sick feeling inside and smothers the hearts of the hardest men in prison. It is memories that come in the night and its cry is like the scream of a trumpet. It is frustration, distress and indifference. It is men who hope when hope seems slim. Prison is a meeting in the visiting room to see the worried look on the face of a mother who studies the face of her son. Prison is the feeling that tears a man apart when waiting for that special letter or visit and it never comes. It is the anguish that dwells inside the men when their best friends turn their backs and loved ones abandon them because being in prison is something they don't understand. Important thing is to try to learn the wisdom that is presented by the opportunity the mistake presents. Life deals us all different hands. The test of a man's merit is how he plays the hand. You cannot take a bad man and make him good; however, you can take a good man, in spite of his bad choices, and make him better. There comes a time when men need to grow up, face themselves and learn the true dignity of manhood. There will, however be those who complain when change starts to take place in a positive direction. That's when they need to remember what I've said about prison: 'You had to have been there.'" - A.J.



If I could give someone just one piece of advice to prepare for the BOP (Federal Bureau of Prisons) it would be for him or her to read a book called, 'Busted By The Feds'. It is a book of a lot of valuable information for such matters, put together by a team of lawyers out of the Arizona area." - R.O.

-From an inmate in Butner, NC



From an inmate in Ashland, Kentucky:

"My advice to anyone being recently incarcerated is to apply yourself to the best of your ability. A lot of our young men have the tendency to continue the same behavior that they displayed on the streets inside the prison walls, thus limiting themselves from further growth and development and learning from their situation. It takes one to do a self-evaluation of themselves, and a process of elimination to find out what's important and what's not, and then ask themselves, "Will my current behavior be of any benefit to me or my family in the future?" I found out upon this analysis of myself that my prior behavior and actions would not do myself or my family any good at all. I also found that what's important is being an asset to your family, friends, society, and most importantly yourself. It takes a person who genuinely wants to change their current self in order to get real results that you can be proud of. Half-hearted attempts at self-improvement will only bring forth half-hearted results. It takes being patient and honest with yourself about the areas that need change and improvement in your life in order to be a productive individual that we all should strive to be. Define all your weaknesses and improve the good qualities that you found you possessed all along. When you start programming, take the programs seriously to get the best part out of it. It's a Bible verse - I Corinthians Chapter 13: Verse 11, it says: 'When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, and thought as a child; But when I became a man I put away childish things.' This is to say that childish or immature ways of acting and thinking will get us nowhere. So we must apply ourselves in order to become the Men that we should and are supposed to be. Prison is a stumbling block, but who says you can't use that same stumbling block as a Stepping Stone to get to where you want to be in life? Use your time wisely by applying yourself. Don't become a statistic, become a Positive Example of Change." - J.L.

From an inmate in Somerset, Pennsylvania:

"Here is the best advice I could possibly give. 1) Don't gamble and get stuck owing anyone! 2) Stay away from the punks! (homos) 3) Always mind your own business! 4) Take as many programs as possible. 5) Always pick the right crowd to hang with. The wrong crowd will take you down the wrong path with them. 6) Try to learn a professional trade while wasting time in prison; try to walk out of prison a better man than you were. 7) NO DRUGS! Hope this helped you some." - T.C.



Be your own person. Do not fall prey to those who will try to manipulate you into believing that their way is the best way; even though you made a mistake that has cost you a prison sentence, you are still an adult and you know what is right. You do not need an inmate to make you complete. Use this time to acquire legal knowledge and legal skills to become a better person and a more productive citizen. Be your own person. Make these days count. -T.M.

- From an inmate in Greenwood, SC



will become someone's bitch. Stick it out; this is where you will find out – yourself; what you're truly made of, believe me. Don't let jail, camp or prison kill you. Let it heal you! And if you truly have family, friends, who say they love you, this is when you will know the truth about them as well, especially wife, husband, children, brothers, sisters, etc. I'm not an inmate, I'm a convict. I don't give a rat's ass what you did to get in here, but others might want to know if you are a snitch, a bitch or a cop! Be careful how you carry yourself. Always respect everyone and everybody. Don't borrow what you can't pay back. So again, if you do have people who love you, you will receive visits, pictures, letters, make phone calls... and have money on your account always. Keep yourself up! That means a lot – showers, haircuts, clean clothes, don't let yourself go. Work out; lose weight if you are a fat ass. After all, you have the time. There are lots of things to do to better yourself and your situation, believe that! P. S. If you are a person like me, who found out that family and friends were not who I thought they were, it's okay! We have WriteAPrisoner.com. They will hook us up with new friends and family, believe that..." - J.F.

From an inmate in Newark, New Jersey:

"1) The best thing to do is mind your own business. 2) When you take a shower wash your head first to get the soap out of your eyes so you can watch what goes on. 3) Never allow anyone to get over on you. If you have to fight do so fast. 4) When going to the mess hall look around for your own kind and TRY to sit with them. 5) If you do drugs, you're already in trouble. 6) Work on a job to keep busy. 7) Find your kind to hang out with. 8) Never tell anyone your personal life; officers as well. 9) Go to church and let God be your judge, no one else. These are just 9 things to live by. I hope this helps out." - T.M.

From an inmate in Lompoc, California:

"To: All those who will be joining all of us! We sat, where you sit... My advice for you men and women: A quiet person can go a long ways, but when the times comes, and it will for you to ask a few questions concerning your new mailing address, how to order commissary or canteen, what are the hours to pick up your laundry, look for a person with a good attitude. How do you find this person? You must sit down and watch, listen to all those around you. After all, even if you don't want to accept it right away, this is your new home away from home. It is what it is! You will notice this person who answers questions. He or she will be there – trust me. I'm one of those people and there are plenty of good people in here. Stay alert! And no matter how much you cry or pretend to get sick, they still are not going to release you – plus that will only reveal your weakness, then you

Success story or suggestion? We want to know what worked for you so we can share it with other inmates.
 If you have a suggestion to make about this resource, please do so at:
 Self-help Suggestion - P.O. Box 10 - Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

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