

## MAINTAINING A PRISON RELATIONSHIP

### Strengthening Your Relationship During Incarceration



We are not a dating organization. We are, however, an organization that understands the tremendous benefits of helping couples remain happy and healthy - even through prison walls. Maintaining a relationship while incarcerated presents a unique challenge. Miles and walls separate you, but positive communication can help bridge those gaps. In this guide we're going to offer some suggestions for helping you and your spouse/partner maintain a healthy, loving relationship. Research indicates that both male and female inmates who maintain strong romantic partners are better able to cope while in prison, have fewer disciplinary complications while incarcerated, and are less likely to recidivate after being released from prison.

**STEP 1 Be there on special occasions.** Of course, we know you can't be there physically, but your presence and love can be felt through a card, letter, or phone call. Never miss an occasion! Travel costs are often a challenge, and because of this, you may choose to make contact with a card or letter. If you're artistic, try making your own card for special occasions. Birthdays, Mother's/Father's Days, religious holidays, graduations, etc. are all important, and you should monitor these dates and participate in the most meaningful way possible.

**STEP 2 Try to plan activities together.** Read the same book together, watch the same show, or try to take up the same hobby if possible. It will give you something to share as a couple in spite of your physical separation. It also provides meaningful conversation topics for letters and visits.

“ *And ever has it been known that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation.*

– Khalil Gibran

**STEP 3 Have a plan!** As a couple, you need to have goals. Financially, physically, educationally – so get on it! Try not to put unrealistic expectations on your mate, but do create and work a realistic plan for your lives together. Perhaps focusing on weight loss, education, or financial planning will allow you an opportunity to build your lives together. The old saying, “Plan your work, then work your

plan” has helped many people focus on priorities. Be sure to monitor progress and celebrate achievements. There is no harm in adjusting goals (lower or higher) as you work your plan.

*Additional Resource! Our Credit Repair & Finances Self-help guide can help with financial planning, budgeting, rebuilding & maintain credit while incarcerated and more.*

SEND A SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE 1

WriteAPrisoner.com  
Credit Repair & Finances 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>

Get your  
FREE COPY

**STEP 4 Be aware of scheduling, and respect it.** If you know your spouse has class on Tuesday nights from 5-7, don't call at 7:15 just as s/he is walking in the door. Knowing your spouse's schedule can prevent frustration on both fronts.

**STEP 5 Visiting day helps!** If your spouse can't come to you, try video visits if available/affordable. If not, try to talk as often as you can afford. Studies on visitation show us this act helps keep couples on the right path. If you really feel the need to communicate but can't reach the other person, that's the perfect time to sit down and write a letter.

**STEP 6** When you talk on the phone, try to have a recent picture of your partner in hand. It can help to see the faces of our loved ones when we are separated. It's a small measure, but it can improve your relationship and help you stay focused on your life outside of prison. It is also something that you can both do. If possible, hold a photo in your hand while talking. And smile while you talk. Research shows that the act of smiling, even if the other person can't see you, has a significant positive impact on the tone and effects of the conversation.

**STEP 7** Have a list of topics planned before you make your call. Prioritize, so if there is a specific topic that is important and needs to be discussed, you get it done first. List positive topics. Make notes to remember to ask about ongoing topics (class, books read, etc.).

**STEP 8** Conjugal visits are becoming more rare these days, but the benefits to families and marriages are profound. From case studies, we know that this increases your chances of returning to the world with a lower chance of recidivating. Check to see if this is an option in your prison. If so, try to make it happen as soon and as often as possible. In the facilities where this practice remains, an exemplary record is required, so stay on the straight and narrow.

**STEP 9** Avoid the topics that create negative feelings, such as fights, gambling, substance abuse, and all of the other drama that comes with being incarcerated. This will allow you to keep things in your life that do matter, like visits, phone calls, mailing privileges, etc. We know this is often easier said than done, but quite simply, one path brings the good and one path brings the bad. We want to see you stay on track, and so does your partner. Take deep breaths when problems arise, and focus on what really matters – your life outside of these walls.

**STEP 10** Be honest! Don't lie about getting in trouble, coping with anxiety, or any other aspect of your life inside of prison. If you are to preserve and grow your relationship, honesty is as important behind prison walls as it is outside of them - maybe even more so.

It is important to remember that your spouse's life goes on, too. Try not to put unrealistic expectations on your better half. They cannot be your attorney, accountant, or spiritual leader. Be aware of their struggles as well. Discuss them, and offer suggestions on how you can both resolve them while working together. Remember, you are still a team. One of the more common complaints we hear from spouses on the outside is that their incarcerated partner often expects too much of them. While the incarcerated partner is often eager to get things done, the partner outside of prison is usually having a hard time just getting through each day. Keep things practical but moving forward. Operating as a team, you will not only survive but thrive.

**“Prison-specific research indicates that both male and female inmates who maintain strong family ties, including romantic partners, are better able to cope while in prison, have fewer disciplinary problems while incarcerated, and are less likely to recidivate after release from prison.”**

-Based on findings by Howser, J.; Grossman, J.; Macdonald, D. (1983). "Impact of family reunion program on institutional discipline". *Journal of Offender Counseling*

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

Disclaimer: WriteAPrisoner.com makes no claims to be experts on the material above and cannot be held liable as a result of any action you take based on this information. This document is an informational guide and is not intended as legal advice. It is recommended that you research all content yourself and consult a professional if you have questions. Use of this document implies consent to our Terms of Service: <http://www.writeaprisoner.com/terms>