

**WriteAPrisoner.com's**

**SELF-HELP GUIDE FOR INMATES**

**Flourishing Through Adversity**



WriteAPrisoner.com's  
SELF-HELP GUIDE FOR INMATES

Flourishing Through Adversity

Adam Lovell

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## Author's Note

When I launched WriteAPrisoner.com in 2000 my goal was to help inmates maintain positive relationships with friends and family on the outside. After receiving countless requests for information and advice, the site introduced its first self-help guide, BACK TO WORK. That led to the creation of 15 documents that have since been shared with thousands of inmates.

This book has been largely compiled based on the feedback we have received from the prison community. If you would like to share your feedback or success story, please address your letter to:

WriteAPrisoner.com  
Self-help Feedback  
P.O. Box 10  
Edgewater, FL 32132

Wishing you all the best to get your life on track for a bright future!  
-- Adam Lovell



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# Chapter 1

## GOING TO PRISON

### For Individuals Facing Incarceration

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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 on the outside 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.

**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>

## **ADVICE FROM INMATES**

We asked the following question to some of our members, and we want to share their advice with you here. We asked, "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 intension 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.*

### **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 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.

**"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 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

**"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

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.

### **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! 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.*

### **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 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*

**"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

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## Chapter 2

# VISITING PRISON

### For Individuals Visiting Loved Ones Behind Bars

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Visiting a loved one behind bars can be challenging. Prisons do not have the most inviting atmospheres, and seeing a loved one inside can be hard. Even so, staying in contact with an incarcerated loved one can be essential to their well-being and their progress. Correspondence and phone calls help, but you should never miss the opportunity to visit when you can. We have put this section together to help give you some information on visiting a prisoner.

**TIP 1:** Be sure that the inmate knows you are coming, and be sure you have completed all necessary paperwork to be on the approved visitor's list. You cannot just show up at a prison and expect to visit someone.

**Any visit reduced the risk of recidivism by 13% for felony reconvictions and 25% for technical violation revocations.**

Data based on a 2011 study by the Minnesota Department of Corrections titled "The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism"

**TIP 2:** Call the prison one hour before you leave to verify that visitation has not been canceled for any reason. A lockdown of the prison will typically suspend all visitations for that day, and we have heard many stories of people visiting the prison only to be turned away through no fault of their own. Hopefully one day prisons will

come up with an alert system for this type of thing, but until they do, call ahead.

**TIP 3:** First off, try to find information about the specific institution that you are visiting. Rules do vary from institution to institution. You can search for a specific facility using WriteAPrisoner.com's Prisoner Locator at <http://writeaprisoner.com/prisoner-inmate-locator>. It is good to know all rules before you show up. In most cases, the inmate will be able to give the specifics to you as well.

**TIP 4:** Print the directions to and from the prison, and try to arrive slightly early instead of slightly late. Even if you arrive early, there are often events that slow things down. For instance, if inmates are being transferred you will be asked to wait for security reasons. Always comply and be patient.

**TIP 5:** Avoid altercations with other visitors, guards and inmates. This could have an adverse impact on the inmate. Focus on the person that you came to see. Otherwise, you may be asked to leave, and you may be permanently banned from visiting again.

**TIP 6:** Be mindful of what you wear. Do not wear clothing with metal in or on it or excessive amounts of jewelry. You will most likely have to pass through a metal detector. Bring nothing in that you don't need. Prison is much like clearing airport security in that the less you have on you, the fewer holdups and problems you will have. Wear freshly laundered clothes. Some prisons will randomly scan clothing for drug residue, and in some instances brand new (unwashed) clothing will trigger the scanning device because of the chemicals used to treat new clothing. If that happens, you will be sent home, and you may be temporarily banned from visiting. So, if you buy a new article of clothing to wear, be sure to launder it first. Bring some cash (change and single bills) to buy food and drink for you and the person you are visiting. Visiting rooms typically have many vending machines, and this will be your only food source. You cannot leave for lunch and return; plan to eat in the visiting room. Most prisons require you to bring your

money in a see-through plastic pouch or Ziploc bag. Take only your ignition key in with you if you drive. Most prisons do not allow you to bring in more than one key. If you are taking an infant and need diapers and bottles, check ahead to see how this is handled at the prison. Take a valid government-issued ID (e.g., driver's license). Do not joke inappropriately with guards or other visitors (e.g., jokes about breaking someone out).

**TIP 7:** If you are thinking about smuggling something into the prison, think again. If you are caught (and many are), you will likely be charged with a crime, and you will most likely be banned from ever visiting that inmate again. In addition, the inmate is likely to be charged with another crime, and you may extend the length of his incarceration. Visitors to prisons are subject to search.

**TIP 8:** Inmates often suffer from depression, and your regular visits can have a lasting positive impact on them. Make a mental list of positive things to discuss with the inmate. Time can sometimes drag during a prison visit, and the best thing you can bring is a lot of love and good conversation to pass the time in a positive way. The last thing that you ever want is to fight with a loved one while he or she is locked up. You will both regret it. If the conversation takes a turn for the worse, be the better person, and remember why you're there - to show them that they're loved and to give them hope. Most visiting rooms offer photo opportunities for a small fee. Inmates often like to have a photo to remember the visit, so if you can afford this in your budget, try to plan on it.

**"A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out."**

-Walter Winchell

**TIP 9:** WriteAPrisoner.com features a "Share a Ride" link on each inmate's profile on our site. This section is designed to help you find people visiting the same prison so that you can carpool. You will need to register to use this service, but there is never any fee.

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## Chapter 3

# MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH

## A Guide to Staying in Shape While in Prison

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The benefits of maintaining your health while in prison are substantial. It keeps you mentally healthier, reduces the need for medical care, and reassures family and friends to know that you're taking good care of yourself. You will live a longer, happier and healthier life if you take some steps toward improving your body now. There is also a tremendous benefit to society when not only inmates, but all people, take better care of themselves, in that it reduces the burden on taxpayers for health care costs. Taking care of yourself is a win for you, your loved ones, and even society. Here's what we suggest.

**"It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."**

-Mahatma Gandhi

### HEALTH TIPS

While we realize that your diet, movements, and more can be restricted, try to follow these tips as best you can. Some institutions will provide more options than others.

- When possible, use healthy oils, such as olive oil and canola oil, in your diet.
- Try to include fresh fruits and/or vegetables in your meals. Wash thoroughly to rinse any lingering pesticides or other chemicals.



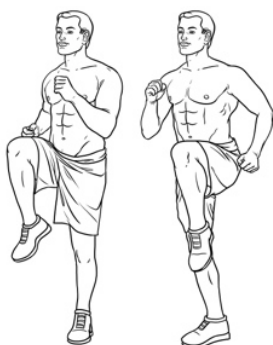
- Avoid processed foods, soda, and high fructose foods.
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep. Lack of sufficient sleep has been associated with many ailments. Calm yourself before bed and allow ample time to fall asleep. Some good news is working out actually promotes better sleep.
- Stay positive and focus on the good! Depression has a physical as well as a mental impact on your body.
- Try to eat healthy proteins and carbohydrates in each meal. Poultry, fish, beans, and nuts are a good source of protein. Whole grains such as brown rice, whole wheat bread, and whole grain pasta are excellent sources of carbohydrates.
- Stay active within your institution. Look for a job that gives you the most personal reward, attend classes, and engage your mind by playing challenging mental games, such as chess, with other inmates.
- If you have access to purchase them, you may want to consider taking a multivitamin and mineral complex daily. These should be taken with a full glass of water in the morning.

Some inmates are already in amazing physical shape. This part of the guide probably is not for them. However, it is a great starter guide for someone looking to get in shape.

## **WORKOUT GUIDE**

All workouts need to start with a warm-up. Warming up gets blood circulating to our muscles, which helps prevent injury. When you train cold muscles, you also have a limited range of motion, limited energy, and limited endurance. Warming up also helps us begin to release endorphins and gets us ready for a good workout! After a good warm-up, you're ready for the workout. This workout is for beginners. It can be done with no equipment and is based on a seven-day routine.

## WARM-UPS



<b>WARM-UP 1</b> <b>Run in Place</b>	Do this for about 2-3 minutes.
<b>WARM-UP 2</b> <b>Bodyweight Squats</b>	Squat shallow and keep your bodyweight on your back heels. Do three sets of 10-15 repetitions.
<b>WARM-UP 3</b> <b>Cross Toe Touches</b>	Standing, touch the toes of your foot with the opposite hand, slightly squatting each time that you reach downward. Do three sets of 15 touches to each foot (30 total per set).
<b>WARM-UP 4</b> <b>Front Kicks</b>	Keeping your kicking leg in the back, kick it forward while keeping your midsection tight. Don't kick hard. This is about warming up your body, not breaking boards. Do 10-15 repetitions with each leg for 3 sets.
<b>WARM-UP 5</b> <b>Arm Circles</b>	Standing erect, hold your arms out to your side. Spin them forward for 30 repetitions. Now switch the rotation and spin them backward for 30 repetitions.

## DAY 1

### Push-ups:

#### 3-5 sets of 5-20 repetitions

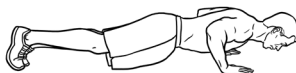
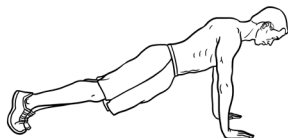
Everyone knows what a push-up looks like, but not everyone knows how to do a push-up properly. As with any exercise, form is crucial.

Place your hands slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Your feet should be positioned wherever they are most comfortable. For some, this means feet are together; for others feet are slightly apart.

Keep your body as straight as possible.

Your head should be looking slightly forward, not facedown; this helps keep

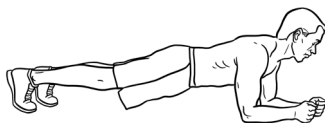
your body inline. With your arms straight, core and gluteal muscles engaged, lower your body toward the ground until your elbows are 90 degrees or smaller. Be sure to keep your elbows close to your body. Once your arms are 90 degrees or lower, pause for a moment and then push back up.



### Front Planks:

#### 3-5 sets of 1 minute each

Planks are a deceptively simple exercise that strengthen your core, lower back, and shoulders. To do a proper plank, start with your body in a push-up position and your elbows bent 90 degrees so you are resting on your forearms. Keep your elbows directly below your shoulders and your body in a straight line. Hold this position for one minute. To intensify the exercise, widen your stance and brace yourself with your hands, in full push-up position, instead of your forearms.



## **Bent-Knee Sit-up / Crunches:**

### **3-5 sets of 15-60**

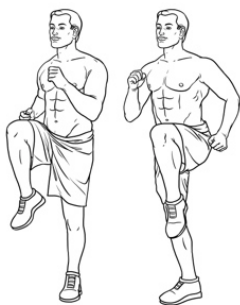
Crunches are a great exercise not only for building strong abdominal muscles but also for improving balance. Start by lying flat on your back, knees bent and your feet hip-width apart on the floor. Place your thumbs behind your ears and fingers resting lightly on either side of your head. Contrary to popular belief, you should not lock your fingers behind your head. Pushing the small of your back into the floor and engaging your abdominal muscles, tilt your chin slightly toward your chest so that your head, neck and shoulder blades roll off the floor. Hold this position for a moment before lowering back down.



## **Run in Place:**

### **5-15 minutes**

Running in place is a fantastic way to burn calories and lose weight. Start by lifting your feet only an inch or so off the ground. Let your arms swing naturally, as if you were distance running. The more you move your body the more calories you will burn. As you get comfortable, lift your knees higher and increase your speed. This will elevate your heart rate and intensify your workout. Maintain the intensity as long as you can, allowing for slower, recovery periods when needed. Run in place for at least five minutes.



## **DAY 2**

Rest day. It's important to incorporate days off into your workout routine to allow your body to recover. While you're resting, your body

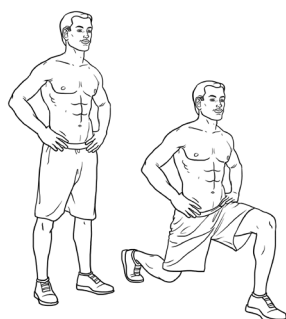
begins to rebuild muscle fibers that are broken down during the workout. It also helps your muscles adapt to the stress of the workout, which helps to avoid injury and build strength over time. This is a good day to do something fun and stimulating, such as playing basketball or chess, or doing some reading. It's also a good opportunity to improve your state of mind with meditation.

## DAY 3

### Forward Lunge:

#### 3-5 sets of 10-15 repetitions per leg

Forward lunges will work your quads, glutes, & hamstrings while improving your balance. To do a forward lunge, begin standing tall, shoulders back, with your feet about 6-inches apart and your core muscles engaged. Step forward with one leg about two feet, lowering your body so your front leg is parallel to the floor. Focus on driving your hips downward while keeping your shoulders back and your back straight. Pause for a moment before pushing back and returning to standing position. Repeat with other leg to complete one set.



### Bodyweight Squats (warm-ups don't count):

#### 3-5 sets of 20-30 repetitions

Bodyweight Squats are a great way to tone your lower body. To begin, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. You can extend your arms straight out in front of you, place them behind your head, or cross your arms and place your hands on your shoulders. Slowly bend your knees while keeping your feet flat on the floor, sitting back with your

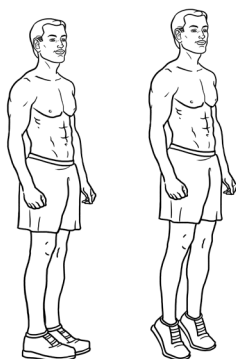


hips. Be sure to keep your chest out, your back as straight as possible, and your gaze straight ahead. When your thighs are parallel to the floor, return to standing position to complete one rep.

### **Calf Raises:**

#### **3-5 sets of 10-15 repetitions**

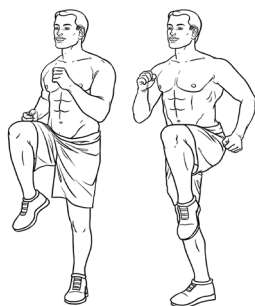
If you have something to stand on, such as the edge of a step, you can do this exercise there. Place the balls of your feet on the edge with your heels hanging off. Otherwise, standing directly on the floor will still give you a good calf workout. From a standing position, engage your core muscles and tuck your tail bone. Keeping your legs straight and your knees in place, slowly rise up to the balls of your feet. Hold briefly then come back down.



### **Run in Place:**

#### **5-15 minutes**

Running in place is a fantastic way to burn calories and lose weight. Start by lifting your feet only an inch or so off the ground. Let your arms swing naturally, as if you were distance running. The more you move your body the more calories you will burn. As you get comfortable, lift your knees higher and increase your speed. This will elevate your heart rate and intensify your workout. Maintain the intensity as long as you can, allowing for slower, recovery periods when needed. Run in place for at least five minutes.

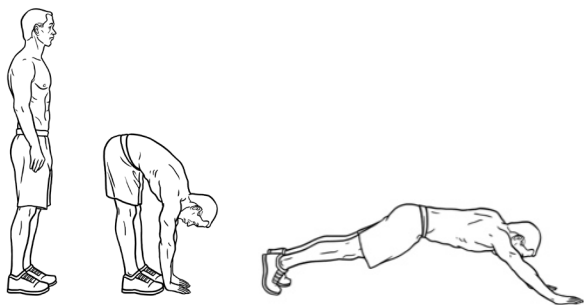


## **DAY 4**

### **Walkouts:**

#### **3-5 sets of 10 repetitions**

Walkouts are a great upper body exercise that focuses on your core. As with any core exercise, walkouts will improve balance and stability. To begin, stand with your feet hip width apart. Bend forward from your hips toward your toes and place your hands on the ground. Bend your knees slightly if needed. Walk your hands out in front of you to a push-up position.

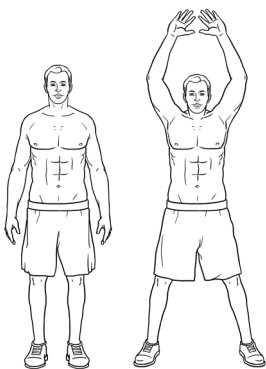


Hold the plank for a few moments, then walk your hands out a few more inches so they are in front of your head. Again, hold this position for a few moments before returning to push-up position. Remember to keep your core muscles engaged and your back straight. Then walk your hands back to your feet and return to standing position. This is one repetition.

### **Jumping Jacks:**

#### **3-5 sets of 15-20 repetitions**

Jumping jacks not only give you a great cardio workout, but they are a great all over body exercise. Most everyone is familiar with jumping jacks, but like any exercise, it's important to use good form to avoid injury. To do a proper jumping jack, start with your feet together and your hands by your side. In a single motion, jump your feet out to the side and raise your arms over your head. Be sure to land softly with your feet



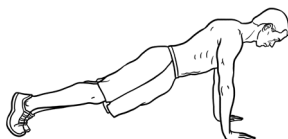
slightly turned out to avoid putting unnecessary strain on the knees. Immediately jump your feet back together and lower your arms to your side. This is one repetition.

### **Push-ups:**

#### **3-5 sets of 5-20 repetitions**

Everyone knows what a push-up looks like, but not everyone knows how to do a push-up properly. As with any exercise, form is crucial.

Place your hands slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Your feet should be positioned wherever they are most comfortable. For some, this means feet are together; for others feet are slightly apart. Keep your body as straight as possible. Your head should be looking slightly forward, not facedown; this helps keep your body inline. With your arms



straight, core and gluteal muscles engaged, lower your body toward the ground until your elbows are 90 degrees or smaller. Be sure to keep your elbows close to your body. Once your arms are 90 degrees or lower, pause for a moment and then push back up.

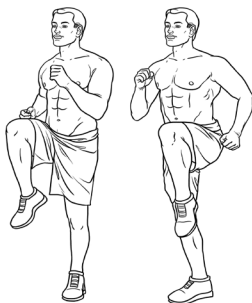


### **Run in Place:**

#### **5-15 minutes**

Running in place is a fantastic way to burn calories and lose weight.

Start by lifting your feet only an inch or so off the ground. Let your arms swing naturally, as if you were distance running. The more you move your body the more calories you will burn. As you get comfortable, lift your knees higher and increase your speed. This will elevate your heart rate and intensify your workout. Maintain the intensity as long as you can,





allowing for slower, recovery periods when needed. Run in place for at least five minutes.

## DAY 5

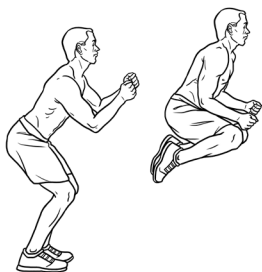
Rest Day

## DAY 6

### **Tuck Jump:**

#### **3-5 sets of 5-10 repetitions**

Jumping improves flexibility in your legs and strengthen your circulatory system. To do a tuck jump, stand with your knees slightly bent. Jump into the air as high as possible, bringing your knees toward the chest and using your arms to gain momentum. Be sure to land softly with your knees bent and your feet under your hips. The intensity of this workout depends on the speed of the exercise and how much you bring your knees to your chest.

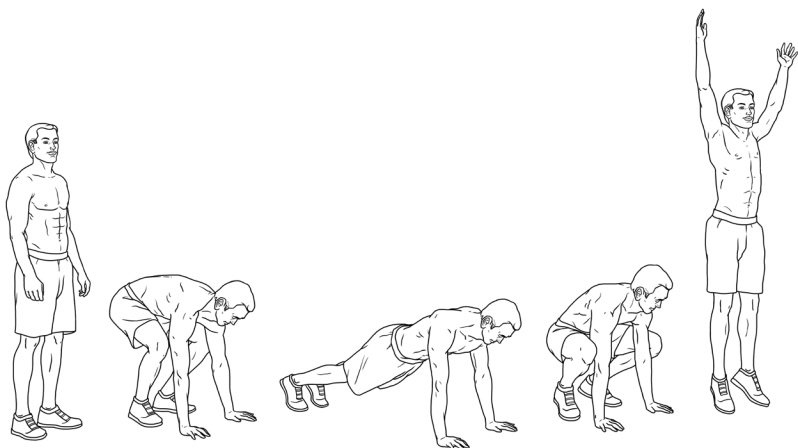


### **Burpees:**

#### **3-5 sets of 10-15 repetitions**

When you want a full body workout, burpees are one of the most effective bodyweight exercises to get the job done. Start in a standing position with your feet shoulder-width apart. Lower your body to a squat and place your hands firmly on the floor in front of you. Kick your feet back straight behind you to a push-up position. From here, lower your chest and do a push-up. Immediately after the push-up, jump your feet back to their original squatting position, and in a single motion, launch your body straight up, jumping a few inches off the floor and

raising your arms above your head.

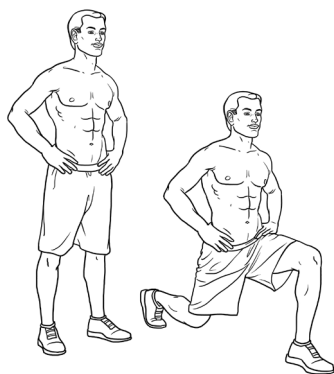


This is one rep. Burpees can be exhausting, especially for beginners. If you find yourself needing a little extra help, eliminate the jump between repetitions or try walking your feet back to the squatting position after the push-up.

### **Forward Lunge:**

#### **3-5 sets of 10-15 repetitions each leg**

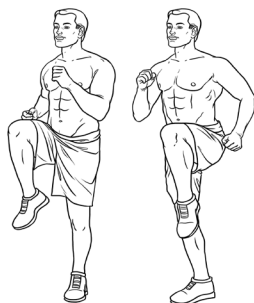
Forward lunges work your quads, glutes, and hamstrings while improving your balance. Begin standing tall, shoulders back, with your feet about 6-inches apart and your core muscles engaged. Step forward with one leg about two feet, lowering your body so your front leg is parallel to the floor. Focus on driving your hips downward while keeping your shoulders back and your back straight. Pause before pushing back and returning to standing position. Repeat with the other leg to complete one rep.



## **Run in Place:**

### **5-15 minutes**

Running in place is a fantastic way to burn calories and lose weight. Start by lifting your feet only an inch or so off the ground. Let your arms swing naturally, as if you were distance running. The more you move your body the more calories you will burn. As you get comfortable, lift your knees higher and increase your speed. This will elevate your heart rate and intensify your workout. Maintain the intensity as long as you can, allowing for slower, recovery periods when needed. Run in place for at least five minutes.



## **DAY 7**

Rest day.

Congratulations! Your workout week is complete! Repeat this routine each week. Over time you will notice these exercises get easier. As you progress, add more sets and repetitions and/or increase speed in cardiovascular exercises. This will help maintain a level of intensity and ensure a good full body workout.

### **Workout Tips**

- In the beginning, working out can make the best of us a little self-conscious. It may be hard to find privacy in prison, but initially working out in your cell may be easier for you than working out in the gym or on the yard for instance.
- Workouts are meant to be intense, but you do not want

to push yourself to failure. You should always have another repetition or two in you when you are done.

- Each repetition you do should be absolutely perfect. That might not be a request any of us can meet, but you should be working your absolute hardest to make each repetition as perfect as possible.

Whether or not you have any pre-existing medical problems, you should always speak to your doctor before beginning a new workout routine.

- Stretching can also help with your overall health and mental wellbeing. Stretching can improve muscle tone, reduce cramping and increase elasticity. Multiple stretching exercises should be used to gain the full effects of stretching. It is critical that you always use excellent form when stretching or performing any of the exercises above. Slow, controlled movements are essential.
- You want to keep a good pace between each set. Keeping your heart rate elevated and avoiding resting periods which last too long helps improve cardiovascular health and accelerates fat burn.
- Listen to your body to avoid injury. If something doesn't feel right, back off. Never push through pain. Stop training and consult a doctor. Not listening to our bodies is one of the most common ways we get hurt.
- Stay hydrated during your workout. Dehydrated muscles can get hurt much easier. When we workout, we perspire and lose water. It is essential that you stay hydrated.
- Keep track of your progress in a workout log. This will help you set new goals.
- Try to keep your workouts between 30-40 minutes.

More time than that working out can be wasted time.  
Your best results will be achieved in that 30-40 minute window.

Working out in your cell can be disruptive to cellmates. Grunting and sweating are common elements of a workout. If you have a cellmate, keep this in mind when working out. Better yet, invite him or her to join you in the workout!

**“Physical activity can improve health. People who are physically active tend to live longer and have lower risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and some cancers. “**

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/facts.htm>

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## Chapter 4

# STRESS REDUCTION & ANGER MANAGEMENT

### Improving Your State of Mind

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The world can be a busy and stressful place. People can be rude, things don't go as we planned, and there is always one more thing coming our way before we are able to finally check out and have some "me" time. In prison, that can be much harder to get. Our state of mind is everything. It can be what prevents you from getting drawn into substance abuse, gambling, fights, and other activities that jeopardize your release and limit your privileges during incarceration. Keeping your mind and mission elevated is difficult. Even the strongest of us sometimes succumb to pressures and lose our cool. In this guide, we give you some solid planning as to how you can gain control over the only thing we truly have control of – ourselves. So, give this guide a try, and escape the pressures of the prison world by focusing on your own mental wellbeing.

**STEP 1: Get your body in motion.** Physical activity relieves stress and melts away anger, tension, and frustration. You may want to play ball, go to the gym, or run. Whatever options are available to you to get yourself in motion, do it, and do it frequently. Your greatest benefits will come from doing more than 30 minutes of physical activity consistently. However, don't just jump into this if you are not already active. Start small and build up to it. When you are in motion, stay focused on the activity itself. This is a time to enjoy, not dwell on things

out of your control. There are no bars around your mind. Get lost in physical activity!

**STEP 2: Avoid (as best you can) things and people that bring you down.** Prisons have many mentally ill people, angry people, and worse. Avoid the problem people to the best of your ability. Do not hang around with people who act like they have nothing to lose. They usually don't and will contribute nothing positive to your mental wellbeing or future. Instead, focus on surrounding yourself with other positive people. Yes, they exist in prison. If you are reading this, you are likely one of them, or at least aspire to be. So, keep a watchful eye for others, and seek to make them part of your social circle.

If you do find yourself engaged in a confrontational situation with another inmate, do not allow yourself to become worked up. While it is natural to become defensive, it is intelligent to slow down, take a deep breath, and use logic to diffuse the situation. If logic will not solve the other person's issue, then use your own logic to move past the situation without allowing it to become physical.

**STEP 3: Stay connected.** Write, call, and visit with friends and family as often as possible. There is a proven correlation between your contact with the outside world and your improved state of mind. Keep the contact positive. If you have to talk about something unpleasant, do so without getting angry or upset. State your position and move forward onto more positive conversation. Always end all contact on a high note. This not only benefits you, it benefits the person on the other end.

**STEP 4: Make time for what makes you happy.** Do you like to read? Make time for it each day. Do you like playing chess with your friends? Invite them to play each day. By focusing on positive activities, your brain works to produce hormones that elevate your mood. If you are unable to make time for this each day, make time for it as often as you can. Some is always better than none!

**STEP 5: Find someone to talk to, and talk to them!** Whether it is a counselor, pen-pal, fellow inmate, find someone you can vent to, laugh with, and even cry with. Do not bottle your emotions up. As strong as you think you are, you do more harm than good by not venting. We understand the risks associated with appearing weak in prison. This is why we encourage you to find someone you can confide in. It is essential to your wellbeing.

**STEP 6: Pets do wonders for us!** Yes, we said pets. There are many programs coming to prisons to foster abandoned animals, train service dogs, etc. Sign up and live longer. People with pets live longer than those without. You would never think that after owning a cat and having to clean its litter every day, but the fact remains that having a furbearing dependent has a positive effect on our mental health. If this option is or becomes available at your institution, you will typically need an exemplary record to participate.

**STEP 7: Stay focused on the present!** Those living in the past are living with regret. Those living in the future are living with anxiety. Those living in the now are truly living. While we strongly encourage you to be extremely prepared for your future, we also strongly encourage you to do your best to focus on today and do your best to enjoy the passing of time. Working toward a positive future is still very much living in the moment.

**STEP 8: Check to see if your institution has any group meetings and attend them.** These meetings will give you the opportunity to work on many of the steps in this guide, and they will also help provide a positive social support system inside of prison. Voluntary groups are often preferred by inmates over mandated groups. This is because inmates come to the voluntary groups on their own accord. However, sign up for whatever group is available.

**STEP 9: Meditate!** Meditation builds a strong mind just as working out builds a strong body.



## How to meditate:

- 1) Select a time of day to meditate. We recommend mornings if possible. Your mind tends to be more relaxed in the morning. However, night meditating is better than no meditating. If that's all that available, do it.
- 2) Select a location to meditate. This is often a bigger challenge in prison. Try to find a safe and quiet place where you will be able to focus. The perfect location is available to almost no one. Find the best place for you.
- 3) Select a posture. Initially, you may want to use a wall to help keep your back straight. In time, you may want to abandon the wall support. Sit up as tall as you are able to make yourself. Rest your hands on your lap and allow the rest of your body to fully relax.
- 4) Breathe through your nose. Deep controlled relaxing breaths. While you do this, focus on the top of your skull. Allow tension to melt away from the top of your body to the bottom of your body. Neglect no part of your body, eventually making it all the way to your toes.

## Benefits to meditation:

- Improved circulation
- Reduced respiratory rate
- Reduced anxiety
- Feelings of well-being
- Lowered heart rate
- Reduced perspiration
- Reduced stress
- Deeper sense of relaxation

**“Participating in an eight-week mindfulness meditation program appears to make measurable changes in brain regions associated with memory, sense of self, empathy, and stress.”**

Source: <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/01/eight-weeks-to-a-better-brain/>

### **Tips for successful reduction of anxiety and anger:**

- Avoid sugar and caffeine.
- Avoid alcohol
- Never smoke. If you do, quit immediately.
- Sleep. Easier said than done in prison, but rest is essential. We all miss a good night's rest here and there, but do your best to get the best sleep possible.
- Eat healthy. Healthy food not only keeps our hearts and lungs healthy, it keeps our brains sharp and happy.

**Meditation is all about the pursuit of nothingness. It's like the ultimate rest. It's better than the best sleep you've ever had. It's a quieting of the mind. It sharpens everything.**

- Hugh Jackman

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## Chapter 5

# MAINTAINING A PRISON RELATIONSHIP

## Strengthening Your Relationship During Incarceration

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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.

**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.

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

- Khalil Gibran

**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.

**“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*

**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. By operating as a team, you will not only survive, but thrive.

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## Chapter 6

# WRITING A PROFESSIONAL LETTER

## Tips & Guide to Writing a Professional Letter

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Being taken seriously by the outside world when you are incarcerated can be challenging. Perhaps the most preferred method you have to convey your message to an outside party is a letter. Writing a professional letter, however, is much different than writing a personal letter. Most people do not know how to write a professional letter. Taking the time to perfect this skill will only make the act of settling your affairs from prison (and we hope one day out of prison) much easier.

### WRITING A PROFESSIONAL LETTER

**STEP 1: Define the purpose of your letter.** Before you begin writing, it's important to have an objective in mind. Ask yourself **why** am I writing this letter, and **what** do I hope to achieve? Is your letter intended to bring about action or are you writing a letter to show appreciation? Do you need a reply, or are you writing a letter to have record of an event? Knowing where your letter is going will help get you on the right track.

**STEP 2: Brainstorm.** Keeping the objective of your letter in mind, begin writing down all of the ideas you want to include. Make a list of all of the events, ideas, and thoughts you want in your letter. It doesn't matter the order; that's what revisions are for. Having all of your ideas written in one place will not only help make sure you don't leave anything out but will also help you better communicate your objective.

**STEP 3: Write a rough draft.** Using your brainstorming ideas, write your first draft. The body of your letter should begin with a friendly greeting. From here, state all necessary facts. Events should be in chronological order, and your writing should be concise and to the point. Try to keep the body between two to three paragraphs. If possible, your letter should fit on one page. If you find it's longer, you may want to consider shortening your message. After stating all necessary points, summarize your purpose for writing and offer a suggestion on how to proceed.

**STEP 4: Revise and proofread your rough draft.** This is one of the most important steps to letter writing. Your first draft should never be your final copy. Look for ways to improve upon your writing. Ask yourself the following:

- Does my letter achieve its objective?
- Can I word sentences more clearly?
- Did I include a greeting, all necessary points, and a closing?
- Are my events listed in chronological order?
- Do I repeat myself unnecessarily?

Once your letter reads the way you would like it to, proofread your letter carefully for spelling and grammatical errors. Use spell check, if available, or a dictionary to check any words you are unsure of. If possible, allow some time to pass before proofreading your letter. This will help you catch errors more easily.

## **FORMATTING YOUR LETTER**

While it's important that your letter has purpose and direction, communicates your thoughts in concise language, and is free of spelling and grammatical errors, it's equally as important to format your letter correctly. Block style formatting is the most commonly used style for formal letter writing. As the name suggests, no indentations are used, and all text is aligned to the left.



Follow these steps to write a properly formatted block style letter:

- Your address should appear on the top left hand side of the page. Do not abbreviate 'street', 'building', etc. Type the words out in their entirety. If your inmate number and/or cell number is required when writing, you should include these in your address.
- Type the date directly below your address. It should be one line beneath the sender's address or two returns on a keyboard. The most common format for a professional letter would be as follows: March 15, 2016
- The recipient's name should appear next, one line beneath the date or two returns on a keyboard. Include his or her title (Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr., etc.). If you are writing a woman and do not know her preference, always use Ms. After the recipient's name, type his/her job title. Below the name, write the name of the company. One line below that, write the recipient's street address. On the next line, write the recipient's city, state, and zip code. If you do not know the recipient's title, contact the company to find out. Alternatively, ask a pen-pal or family member to research it for you.
- Type the body of your letter next. Place a single space in between paragraphs, and do not indent paragraphs.
- Next is your closing (one or two words followed by a comma) and printed name. "Sincerely," "Yours sincerely," "Best," "Respectfully," and "Kind regards" are all appropriate. Leave space between your closing and printed name so you are able to sign your name in this area. You should use your full name when writing your name and signing your letter.
- If you are including anything besides your letter in the envelope, add the word 'Enclosure' or 'Enclosures'

(if you are enclosing more than one item) below your printed name. List your additional enclosed item(s) here.

- Example: Enclosures – Copy of vocational certificate

## **Additional Tips**

1) If a typewriter or computer is available to you, we recommend typing your letter instead of handwriting it. Typed letters will appear more professional, and of course they're always more legible. If typing your letter is not an option, a handwritten letter is fine. Your letter should be written in blue or black ink, and the paper you use should be clean and free of wrinkles.

2) When typing your letter, you should use a simple font such as Arial or Times New Roman at no larger than 12 point size. Side, top and bottom margins should be 1 to 1 1/4 inches. One-page letters and memos should be vertically centered.

3) Save a copy of your letter for your personal records. If you do not receive a reply within an appropriate time (2-6 weeks), send your original letter again along with a cover letter politely indicating that you have not received a reply to your original letter.

4) Know when to send mail Certified. Is this a time sensitive matter? Legal matter? If so, you may wish to send the letter Certified, which will generate a return receipt from the post office for your records and help expedite the letter. However, it is much cheaper to send a second letter than it is to send a Certified one. Keep this in mind when sending mail Certified.

**“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.”**

- Jiddu Krishnamurti

## Sample Letter in Block Format:

Your First and Last Name #12345-678  
Prison Name  
5 Hill Street, Cell Number  
Madison, WI 53700

March 1, 2017

Ms. Helen Jones  
President  
Jones, Jones & Jones  
123 International Lane  
Boston, MA 01234

Dear Ms. Jones:

I hope you are doing well, and I hope business is good.

This letter serves as my request for your consideration for the position of foreman at your company. While I do understand it may seem unusual having a person currently incarcerated apply for this position, I will be home on March 25, 2016, and I am confident I would be an asset to your company. I have completed several relevant education programs (certificates enclosed) during my incarceration, and I am eager to apply what I have learned. I am also enclosing a copy of my GED, my completed application, and a current resume.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you have a great week, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

John Doe

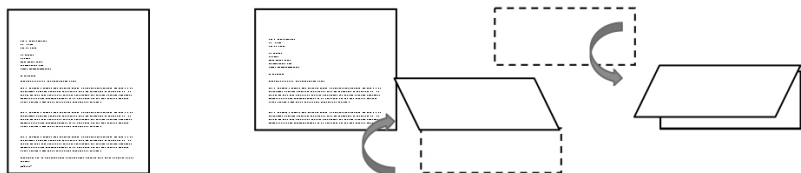
Enclosures – Copy of vocational certificates  
Copy of GED  
Application  
Resume

## INSERTING YOUR CORRESPONDENCE AND ADDRESSING YOUR ENVELOPE

The same amount of care that goes into letter writing should be taken when folding your letter and addressing your envelope. If possible, use a computer or typewriter to print your envelope, and check the recipient's name and address, as well as your return address for errors.

### If using a standard envelope

Neatly fold your letter into horizontal thirds. With the letter facing up, fold the bottom one third of the letter upward. Then fold the top of the letter down to meet the first fold.



### If using a large envelope

Do not fold your letter; insert your letter neatly into a large envelope without folding.

Place any enclosures behind your letter. Do not staple or use tape. Insert all correspondence into the envelope so when the envelope is opened, the letter is the first thing the recipient will see. The same rules apply when addressing your envelope as in your letter. Do not abbreviate street names, and address the recipient with the appropriate title.

## Sample Envelope in Block Format:

Your First and Last Name #12345-678

Prison Name

5 Hill Street, Cell Number

Madison, WI 53700

Ms. Helen Jones

President

Jones, Jones & Jones

123 International Lane

Boston, MA 01234

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## Chapter 7

# BACK TO SCHOOL

### Education Opportunities for Inmates

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Pursuing an education while you're incarcerated or upon release is highly recommended and shown to drastically reduce the risk of recidivism. If you've been putting it off, now is the time to do your homework - pun intended. But seriously, if you look into every option for higher education, you will find a way to make this dream come true. No matter what level of education you currently possess, advancing your education will improve your quality of life both in and out of prison.

Anyone can pursue an education, even while incarcerated. Research shows that continued education helps keep inmates from returning to prison. For instance, inmates who took college courses while incarcerated were four times more likely to stay out of trouble upon release. Those are great odds, so WriteAPrisoner.com has put together a step-by-step guide to help you in your quest for a better life!

#### WHILE IN PRISON

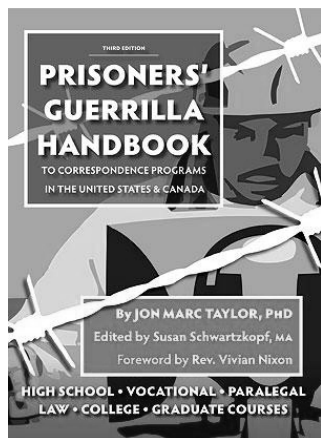
While you are still incarcerated, here are some steps you can take:

**STEP 1:** First and foremost, check with your local prison's education department. Ask what level of education they offer and see if it meets your needs. Many prisons offer only the most basic of classes, such as a high school diploma or GED equivalent. This should be your first step if you haven't already completed this. Types of classes to look for:

- Basic Literacy
- High School Equivalency/GED
- Vocational Training
- College Classes
- Correspondence Courses (see below)

**STEP 2:** Many prisons also offer vocational schools. These are hands-on classes that help you develop a trade. Unfortunately, space can often be limited in these classes. Talk to the appropriate official at your prison to see about adding your name to a list if space is short. Be sure to keep your disciplinary record clean while awaiting class. As you're undoubtedly aware, this can have an impact on your status at the prison and your likelihood of being accepted into a vocational program.

**STEP 3:** Fewer than half of all prisons offer college/postsecondary courses, which is why it's important to research correspondence courses. Once you're familiar with the educational opportunities your prison does offer, make the most of them. If your prison can't help, ask a friend or family member to purchase this helpful guide on obtaining an education while in prison:



***Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs In the United States and Canada: High School, Vocational, Paralegal and College Courses***

by Jon Marc Taylor, Audenreed Press.  
This book offers detailed descriptions of 212 programs. It is only available through: Prison Legal News, P.O. Box 1151, Lake Worth, FL 33460 (Online at: [prisonlegalnews.org](http://prisonlegalnews.org)).

Thousands of inmates earn degrees through correspondence courses, and you can become one of them!

**STEP 4:** Choosing the right field of study is important. Most college students pursue specific degrees related to the career path they have chosen. However, research shows that most people ultimately change career paths completely within a few years. The fact that they have a college degree is often sufficient to open new opportunities for them, even if the degree (e.g., Marketing, Science, English) isn't related to the new career. Choices for incarcerated students tend to be even more limited, so here are some points worth considering:

- All learning is good. If only one course is available to you, take it. It will help you develop study skills that you can apply later when you finally get to take the courses you really want.
- Consider a range of courses. Poetry might sound boring or completely out of your realm, but poetry is rich in vocabulary at the very least, and research shows a good vocabulary correlates with a rewarding career. And at its best, poetry inspires. Study something you never had the chance to study before. It can change your life. Philosophy sounds lofty, but it opens doors to consider many perspectives on the world that can have tremendous benefit both inside and outside of prison walls.
- Consider courses that offer skills you can apply in an entrepreneurial endeavor. Many inmates face challenges in being hired because of their criminal records, so they start their own businesses. What courses can help you launch and successfully run your own business? Any course that strengthens your math and computation skills is a good place to start. Also consider bookkeeping, basic accounting,



communications, marketing, public relations, business, writing and composition, or any course that will enhance skills you have or seek if you do have an idea for your own business.

**STEP 5:** Paying for your education can be a challenge. In 2015, the U.S. Dept. of Education launched the Second Chance Pell Pilot program to provide Pell Grants to help inmates cover the cost of their secondary education during incarceration. However, inmates and/or their families still pay the bulk of tuition fees in most cases. Perkins Grants are available for vocational or technical courses, but these typically do not cover the full cost. Grant applications can be requested through the school to which you are applying. Private foundations and social organizations (e.g., Rotary, Lions) also provide funding. You may need someone on the outside to help you locate these organizations and their contact information. Work closely with your school to help secure funding for your classes. It is also possible that student loans will be available, although you should pay close attention to the terms as some are worse than terms offered by predatory lenders. Educate yourself on all aspects of earning a college degree - especially how you pay for it.

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

Correspondence courses are an excellent way for inmates to pursue a degree in higher education. However, with the easy access of the Internet, many universities have switched to offering online courses instead of the traditional paper and pencil courses that could be sent through the mail. Internet access is not available to inmates; therefore, correspondence courses are not as readily available.

On the next page is a list of schools that continue to reach out to inmates to provide higher education. (Note: If you are aware of a college or university that provides courses specifically for inmates, please contact us so that we can update our information.)

College Program for the Incarcerated Haning Hall 222 <b>Ohio University</b> Athens, OH 45701 Phone Toll-free: 800-444-2910	Parent Link (Parenting Information for Incarcerated Parents) <b>University of Missouri</b> College of Education Phone Toll-free: 800-609-3727
Incarcerated Re-Entry <b>Rio Salado College</b> 2323 West 14th Street Tempe, AZ 85281 Phone: 480-517-8345 or Toll-free: 877-517-8345	<b>Boston University</b> Prison Education Program 808 Commonwealth Avenue, Room 237 Boston, MA 02215 Phone: 617-353-5945

## RELEASED FROM PRISON

Once you are released, take immediate steps to continue your education, even if it is just taking one class at a time at your local community college. Community colleges offer a wide array of courses you will need if you plan to go on for your bachelor's degree, and they are reasonably priced. If you already have your associate's degree, consider applying at a state university. These, too, are more reasonably priced. Also, once you are out of prison you can sign up for online courses as long as you have access to a computer and the Internet. This can save considerable expense in traveling to and from classes and provide scheduling flexibility so you can hold down a job while going to school. A word of warning: online courses do require you to be well organized and self-starting. Schedule time for your studies! And choose friends that will offer encouragement.

Some people do not realize that they CAN pursue an education that has been interrupted. If you have dropped out of high school, or even elementary school, no matter how old you are right now, you can pick up where you left off and take your education as far as you want. Here is the order of a traditional education:

- High School Diploma or Equivalency (GED)
- Associate's Degree (usually from a community college)
- Bachelor's Degree (from a four-year college or university)
- Master's Degree (from a college or university with a graduate program)
- Doctorate Degree (from a college or university with a doctoral program)

There will be an application process that usually includes placement tests or other qualifying exams. Don't be afraid of these! If you don't do well at first, the school can recommend a tutoring program. Most schools have these types of resources available right there on campus. There will also be an application fee. The financial aid office will guide you through the process of applying for financial aid by determining your eligibility for grants. Do not let the fear of paying for college stop you. College schedules are extremely flexible today so that students can be employed full-time even while attending school.

There are also more "non-traditional" students than ever before – students that are far older than the typical college student. Some colleges have programs designed to help with re-entry, such as:

Prisoner Reentry Institute  
**John Jay College/CUNY**  
 555 W. 57th Street, 6th Floor  
 New York, NY 10019  
 Phone: 212-484-1399

Ask friends and family members to inquire on your behalf before you are released to the college or university you are most interested in attending. Plan ahead!

**Inmates who participated in correctional education programs had “43% lower odds of recidivating than inmates who did not.” This represents a reduction of 13 percentage points on the risk of recidivism.**

Data based on a 2014 study published by RAND Corporation titled “How Effective is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?”

## **REMEMBER!**

The Bureau of Prisons conducted research on inmates who participated in programs inside the prison, such as vocational training and mock job fairs. Their studies showed that these programs that teach marketable skills to prisoners help to reduce recidivism and/or repetition of criminal behavior patterns.

Access to education can change an inmate’s life, lower taxes for taxpayers, and provide skilled labor for the workforce. Education uplifts the human spirit, promotes understanding and empathy, and improves the quality of lives for families.

Take charge of YOUR education. Do not just sit inside your cell counting off the days. Get busy. Do some research. Find out what courses are available. Volunteer to help teach others – it will help you in your own studies. Begin applying to colleges before you are released. Ask your friends and family on the outside to make calls to schools where you have an interest. There are more opportunities than you realize, but you have to take the initiative.

We wish you the best in your educational quest! Never give up. The knowledge and skills you gain will improve the quality of your life in ways you can only imagine right now.

**“Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.” - Albert Einstein**

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## Chapter 8

# BATTLING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

### For Individuals Overcoming Addiction

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Becoming incarcerated with a substance abuse problem or developing one during incarceration can make an already difficult situation far worse. Entering into a program available at your institution that helps combat substance abuse is essential and should be sought immediately.

It is imperative to seek professional help in fighting addiction. Before stopping or cutting down suddenly on drinking or using drugs, seek the advice of an appropriate professional. It can be potentially dangerous, even life-threatening, to suddenly stop taking something your body is used to getting. You may need a prescription that serves as a substitute for the addictive substance or to reduce your drinking or drug use gradually rather than trying to stop “cold turkey.” A professional will know the best way to help you 1) stop using; 2) stay drug-free; and 3) become and remain productive in the context of family, work, and society.

**According to a 2012 study by the Partnership at Drugfree.org and the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, more than 23 million Americans have overcome addiction.**

Source: <http://luxury.rehabs.com/drug-addiction/recovery-statistics/>

In addition to entering a program and seeking professional help, there are other steps you can take now to help regain control over your illness and life.

## **Take a True Inventory of Your Life and Addiction**

**STEP 1:** Make a list of all the pros and cons associated with addiction. This is an important step because it will help you realize the pro list is non-existent, but the con list goes on and on. Give this the attention it deserves - the attention you deserve.

**STEP 2:** Discuss your addiction with someone you trust who is not an addict. Be honest, don't get mad or defensive, and listen to what they say. Whether it's a pen-pal, a counselor, or a friend on the inside, talk it out. No one who cares about you wants to see you continue on this path. Sometimes having an honest conversation with someone we trust can help both parties recognize the need for change and lead to the next step.

**STEP 3:** Ask yourself this question: What is stopping me from quitting?

**STEP 4:** Keep track of your substance abuse, including how often and how much you use. This gives you a better picture of the role addiction is playing in your life. Many people have fought addiction by maintaining an addiction diary. Be honest with yourself if you do this. An example of how to maintain an addiction diary is included on the following page.



## Personal Cravings Journal

Circumstances	Intensity	Emotions & Physical Response	Initial Response	Better Response
Who were you with? What happened? When did it happen? Where were you?	Rate the intensity of the craving 1-10.	What was I feeling during the craving? What did I feel physically and where in my body?	What thoughts went through my head just before the craving?	Is there another way to view the situation? What advice would I give to a friend in this situation? What would help in the future?
Example: I was with my co-worker at dinner after work on Tuesday. She asked if I'd cover her shifts the following week.	Example: 4	Example: Overwhelmed, frustrated, angry. Physically I felt it in my back and stomach.	Example: I can't handle the added workload. She expects too much of me. I just covered for her; she takes advantage of my kindness. I feel weak and need a drink.	Example: I overreacted to the situation. I meditated when I got home, and the craving went away.

### What's Next?

**STEP 1:** If you are still reading at this point, you have likely answered this last question – nothing. The very first thing to do at this point is research what resources are available at your own institution. Is there a program for substance abuse? If not, is there a group formed by



other inmates battling addiction? Put your feelers out and see. Having people to talk to who are also fighting addiction can be a big help. Seek out a program, but know that you can still do this if you do not have one available to you. If you are fortunate enough to have access to a program or a group, do not miss meetings. Go sick, go tired, go late - just go! Meetings must be a priority. Treat them like a job.

**STEP 2:** Consider problem associations and distance yourself from those groups. People abusing and/or selling need to fall from your friend list immediately. If you have a friend fighting addiction, battling the problem together can certainly be a help. However, if the friend is using and not fighting, you should sever your ties with the person. Surrounding yourself with people interested in improving their lives is the best approach. Build a sober network you can look up to and grow with. Avoid problem areas in your institution as best you can.

**STEP 3:** Consider asking for a transfer if you are currently incarcerated in a cell or pod with abusers or sellers. Prison politics can be a difficult issue to navigate; however, you must do your best to get away from problem people. If you are housed with them, finding alternative cellmates is the only realistic option.

**STEP 4:** Addiction often stems from a way of dealing with stress. Understand that stress does not go away. You must come up with new methods to manage your stress. Exercise is a fantastic way to combat stress. Exercise helps us release endorphins, lower blood pressure, and sleep better. It is a no-brainer that exercise is right for all of us.

**STEP 5:** Be honest with prison staff! Being incarcerated does not make us exempt from dental or medical problems. If you are having a dental or medical procedure done, let your dentist or doctor know about your previous substance abuse. While it is possible they will already have this information about you, they may prescribe less addictive medications if they know. Make sure they know. Being open and honest with medical professionals both in and, hopefully, out of prison one day is important.

**STEP 6:** Set and reach goals – not just around addiction, but around your entire life. Goals should be simple and attainable, but actual goals that mean something: read a book, don't miss a meeting for a month, and reconnect with estranged family or friends (as long as they are law-abiding and addiction-free) are examples of simple, worthy goals that you can attain. Grow as a person, and your world will grow along with you.

**“All the suffering, stress, and addiction come from not realizing you already are what you are looking for.”**

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

**STEP 7:** Relapse can and does happen. Fight relapsing with every fiber of your being, but know that life does not (usually) end with a relapse. Learn from it. What caused it? Were you stressed? Were you feeling good and wanted to feel even better? Were you in physical or emotional pain? Did it happen when you were hanging out with certain people? Was it a place? Learn what triggered your relapse. The next time you are experiencing the same thing, talk to someone before using. And if you do find yourself relapsing, getting clean as soon as possible is imperative to getting back on track. Do not let a single bad decision lead to an entirely ruined life. Catch yourself and start over immediately.

### **Tips & Points**

- Make and carry a list of all the reasons you want to stay clean. Read it in difficult times before using.
- Understand and never forget that addiction is a disease. Once you have it, it is always there. Remember that many people with all sorts of diseases, even addiction, live long, productive, and happy lives. You can, too.

- Remind yourself that cravings do not last forever. Be strong and survive the craving. It will pass.
- Try hobby after hobby until you find one you like. You will! Hobbies are great ways to occupy our minds and pass time.
- Do not dwell on setbacks or situations that cause you stress. Focus on the good in you and in your life.
- Congratulate yourself each day you make it through without using. It is a huge victory!
- Help others. Prison is filled with people needing that help. Sometimes helping someone with their problem helps us keep our mind off our own problems. Some inmates chose to prey on new inmates. Try to befriend and help one. We all need someone to look out for us from time to time.

There isn't a perfect science to treating addiction. It is a trial and error situation. What works best for one person does not work the same for the next person. You must find what works best for you. Just remember, you are worthy of a life free of addiction. When you are clean, the good only gets better. We hope you rise up and take this opportunity to improve your life. When you do that, you not only improve your life, you improve the lives of the people who love you. We hope you get clean. If you already are clean, please stay that way. We wish you all the love and luck in the world!

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## Chapter 9

# CREDIT REPAIR & FINANCES

### Gain Financial Literacy To Help While In Prison & At Home

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You can repair, build, and maintain good credit while in prison. Good credit is essential to everyone. Whether it's a home, car or even qualifying for a job (many employers actually look at your credit), good credit is something you must have. Being in prison and working to maintain credit can be a bit trickier. This is why we have put together this guide - to help you help yourself. Credit can go downhill fast once you get to prison. It's obviously much harder, if not impossible, to pay on existing debt. You might find yourself defaulting on loans, leaving accounts in limbo, etc.

**STEP 1:** First, do a "liability inventory" on your credit report by contacting the three major credit bureaus. Be sure to include your full name, address and social security number. They will mail your report to you (or to someone on the outside that you have designated). You're entitled to free credit reports from each of the three credit bureaus each year. Make sure you contact all three since not every account is always reported to all three.

Equifax P.O. Box 740241 Atlanta, GA 30374 PHONE: 1-800-685-1111	Experian P.O. Box 2002 Allen, TX 75013 PHONE: 1-888-397-3742	TransUnion P.O. Box 1000 Chester, PA 19022 PHONE: 1-800-888-4213
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NOTE: In order to help keep your credit report confidential, you can request that the information be sent to a loved one on the outside, and they can forward the information to you, excluding sensitive data such as social security number, account numbers, etc.

**The average household has \$130,922 in debt – \$15,762 of it on credit cards.**

<http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/credit-card-debt-statistics-1276.php>

**STEP 2:** Once you have received all three reports from Equifax, Experian and TransUnion, verify all of the information. If you find inaccurate information in any of the three reports, contact the companies immediately to officially dispute the record by writing to them and informing them it is untrue. They will then contact the creditor on file for a response. If none is given, the information will be removed from your credit report. When negative information in your report is accurate, only the passage of time can assure its removal. A consumer reporting company can report most accurate negative information for seven years and bankruptcy information for 10 years. Information about an unpaid judgment against you can be reported for seven years or until the statute of limitations runs out, whichever is longer. Use the Sample Dispute Letter on the following page to dispute inaccurate information in your credit report.



## Sample Dispute Letter

Date  
Your Name  
Your Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Complaint Department  
Name of Company  
Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing to dispute the following information in my file. The items I dispute are circled on the enclosed copy of the credit report that I received. This item (identify item(s) disputed by name of source, such as creditors or tax court, and identify type of item, such as credit account, judgment, etc.) is (inaccurate or incomplete) because (describe what is inaccurate or incomplete and why). I am requesting that the item be deleted (or request another specific change) to correct the information.

Enclosed are copies of (use this sentence if applicable and describe any enclosed documentation, such as payment records, court documents) supporting my position. Please investigate this (these) matter(s) and (delete or correct) the disputed item(s) as soon as possible.

Sincerely,  
Your name

Enclosures: (List the items/documents you are enclosing.)

**“Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.”**

- Warren Buffett



**STEP 3:** If you are delinquent on any of the accounts, this will need to be resolved before you can move forward on any of the additional steps below. You will need to write to each company listed. Explain that you are incarcerated and may not be able to pay the full amount. Ask them what, if any, options they will provide you to help you settle the account as paid. It is not unlikely to receive a settlement offer. For example, if you owe \$1,000 on a debt, the company may offer to settle the debt for much less. This option is not always given, but it is more likely that they would work with you because you are incarcerated, and their ability to collect is hindered because of this. The company may request that you pay the entire settlement at the same time, or they may offer terms for a payment plan. If you are delinquent on any accounts, it's a win for both sides. The company is able to collect some money, and you are able to improve your credit. Refer to the Sample Settlement Letter on page 62.

## Sample Settlement Letter

Date

Your Name

Your Address

City, State, Zip Code

Complaint Department

Name of Company

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Attention: (name of collector or collection agency)

Address

RE: Collection letter dated (date of letter here) or phone call on (date of call here) reference account #: (account or reference number)

Dear Mr./Ms. (Collector's or Collection Agency's Name)

I do not agree that I owe as much as you claim I owe on the above referenced account. In an effort to save both of us a great deal of time and expense I am offering to settle this account for \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

If you accept my offer, please send written confirmation to my address listed above. Once I receive your written confirmation, I will mail full payment to your organization within thirty business days. (Please note that prison checks take time to process.) If you wish to discuss this settlement offer, please write to me at the address provided. Because I am incarcerated, you cannot reach me by phone. Regardless, please understand that I will not make any payment until receiving written confirmation that you accept my offer.

Sincerely,

Your name



**STEP 4:** Once you have any prior financial obligations under control, it's time to look at what you keep and what you get rid of. Do you have any active credit cards? If you are looking into closing some credit card accounts, try to save your oldest accounts, even if you only save one. The longer you have an account, the better it looks on your credit report. If you are looking to close the account because of higher interest rates or annual fees, try contacting the card issuer to see if they would waive the annual fee or reduce the interest amount. If they know you're serious about leaving them, they may be more apt to work with you, and it benefits you to keep those older accounts open.

**STEP 5:** If you do not already have one, open a savings account in your name. Try to make deposits to it each month no matter how small. Never remove money from it if at all possible. The time you have it open, the frequency of deposits and your ability to not make withdrawals from your savings account may not directly impact your credit score, but it could directly impact your ability to make a large purchase on something such as a home or a car one day. You can't go wrong by starting and building a savings no matter how small. Please note that some banks require a minimum amount of money to be kept in your savings account. Also, many banks offer better interest rates as you put more money into savings. Please check to be sure that you are not in a state that attempts to "collect money for incarceration." Some states will come after your money if you have any to pay for incarceration costs. This is an unfortunate practice that can keep incarcerated people from ever rebuilding their lives. Please be sure you check before opening a savings account.

### **Financial Tips After You Are Home**

- Avoid loans. Loans must be paid back, and they can often land you right back in a situation you are forever trying to get out of. If you cannot make the purchase with cash, try to wait until you can. Predatory lending fees from banks are all too prevalent, and debt is one way we keep ourselves down. Especially avoid the so-

called “payday” loan businesses. Their payment plans make it nearly impossible to ever pay them off. Avoid them at all costs. If you absolutely must borrow money, do so from a reputable bank.

- A good vehicle is essential, but most people cannot afford a new one. Many people jump blindly into a costly new car loan, which ends up costing much more by the time you finally pay it off. You lose value the day you drive it off the lot. It is better to purchase an older car that is safe and runs well, and pay for it with cash if you can. Flashy is fun, but it shows poor judgment and holds you back in the long run. A good, safe used vehicle is the way to go. Purchasing your used vehicle with saved cash and keeping it well maintained is the smartest move. Public transportation is usually an option, and although it may be inconvenient, it will allow you to save money for your used car purchase. And once you buy your car, consider car-pooling with a responsible co-worker when possible.
- Budget your life. Write down all of the expenses you must pay for monthly and add them up. This shows you how much you must earn each month. If you are earning less than you are spending, you will need more income or need to reduce your monthly costs. Always striving for both is your best plan of attack. Some examples of items in your monthly budget would be house rent or mortgage payment, water bill, electric bill, health insurance (you may be eligible for reduced coverage if your income is low), groceries, home gas, and vehicle gas. Many people create a budget list but don't include everything. One of the best things you can do is to literally keep a log of every single penny you spend. Pick up a notebook, jot down the date, and then log every item - cup of coffee, bus fare, a box of Girl Scout cookies

- whatever you spend money on, write it down daily. You will be surprised how much you spend on items you didn't include in your original budget.

- Be frugal and learn to be content with what you have. In your neighborhood somewhere there are parks, hiking trails, beaches, bike paths, and more. Many local organizations sponsor free events - craft shows, art shows, family events, outdoor concerts, movies, etc. Discover your backyard and live fully in it with your loved ones. The finer things in life aren't things at all. It is peace of mind and security. It is time with the people we cherish. When we spend our lives trying to pay off debt, it is much harder to enjoy. Live simple, and truly live large.
- Compare prices on everything. Saving money puts you in control. We promise you will feel better each day by saving as much as possible. Find the cheapest price of gasoline in your area, pay for bills online to avoid the cost of a stamp and envelope, make all of your stops in one trip when you need to drive somewhere, etc. You get the idea. Save on everything you possibly can!
- Be thrifty, and be resourceful. Learn to sew damaged clothes. If sewing was manly enough for the Vikings, it is plenty manly enough for men today. Do not discard. Fix, repair, restore. If you are not sure how to fix something, search Google. Believe us when we tell you the answer is there. You can learn nearly any skill on YouTube - how to repair a leaky roof, play the guitar, speak Spanish, solve algebra problems - all free, and all at your pace! Also, learn to negotiate prices when possible. Buy in bulk when you can if it saves money. This can make a lot of sense on items like toilet tissue, cleaning products, groceries, etc. Purchasing used items isn't just for cars.

Goodwill and other thrift stores sell secondhand goods at excellent prices. We live in a consumable/disposable society where people get rid of perfectly good items just because they run out of closet space. You'll be surprised at how much you can save on clothing costs alone by shopping at thrift stores. You can also pay attention to seasonal clearances at regular retail stores. Don't buy things just because they're on sale, though. If you live in a cold climate and you're going to need warm socks and boots, then yes, keep an eye out for the end of winter clearances and buy these items to have on hand for the next season.

- Avoid high cost consumables that provide no benefit: soda, alcohol, cigarettes, junk food, etc. These items have no value and actually harm you. They are also very expensive. If you need to kick a habit, do so! Put that money away for something of value for you or your family. People quit these bad habits daily, and so can you. You will feel great to watch your savings add up and use that money for something truly rewarding.
- Spend time, not money. There are occasions when we must give gifts and want to give gifts. The gift of yourself and your time is the greatest gift of all. Whether you make something for someone (a meal, a cake, a handmade gift) or make time to do something special with them, chances are you will spend much less money than if you headed to the mall to buy something. Money should become your servant, not your master. Always ask yourself: Do I *need* this, or do I *want* this? The peace of mind that comes with being out of debt is incomparable. You will have less stress and will enjoy life in ways you have never imagined.

It can sometimes seem like nothing is possible behind those walls, but that isn't the case. In fact, there isn't much that's impossible behind those walls when given the right tools. We hope this chapter helps you improve your financial status.

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## Chapter 10

# PARENTING FROM PRISON

### For Parents in Prison

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The separation of child and parent is one of the most difficult issues involving incarceration, especially for the child. And an unfortunate reality is that children of inmates are statistically more likely to become incarcerated than children who do not have a parent in prison. Having a parent in prison creates unique hardships other children never contend with. We say this not to discourage you, but to prepare you. This guide is designed to help you strengthen the bonds between you and your child and to help both of you improve on a bad situation.

First, a reality check. Perhaps you were not the most involved parent you could have been before you were incarcerated. Perhaps your own parents were not the best role models. You may be tackling “parenting from prison” with a lot of unresolved related issues. These could get in the way of your attempts now to be the best parent you can be while incarcerated. But, instead of allowing these to become excuses that keep you from reaching out to your child, embrace them as reasons to reach out. Children want and need their parents’ involvement, even if that parent is incarcerated.

**STEP 1: Reach out.** If you are not currently in contact with your child, get in contact. Whether by mail, phone or third party, you need to establish contact. There are some cases where you may have been ordered by the court not to have contact with your child, and you must, of course, avoid contact if you have been court ordered to do so. These

instances are rare, but they must be respected, or that can further jeopardize your relationship with your child.

**STEP 2: Stay in contact.** Make note of important dates in your child's life such as school projects, events with the family, etc. Send cards on birthdays and holidays. In some cases, you may need to make the cards if none are available to you for purchase. Do so. Your child will likely appreciate the gesture even more. Relying on artists around you (there are usually many), you may likely create an even more meaningful and personal card than you would have by just purchasing one. Maintaining contact is absolutely essential. Write letters. Be positive, and be consistent. Staying in contact won't always be easy. Sometimes your child may pull away because of incarceration.

**Parents held in the nation's prisons—52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates—reported having an estimated 1,706,600 minor children, accounting for 2.3% of the U.S. resident population under age 18.**

Data provided by a 2008 Bureau of Justice Statistics Report titled *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*

It is up to you as a parent to make this work. One suggestion for a child having a phone conversation with his or her incarcerated parent is to have some recent photos of the parent in hand or at least nearby while talking. This is something you could suggest to the current guardian of your child if your child is too young to approach with this request.

**STEP 3: Get along with family.** Regardless of your relationship with the child's caretakers (current spouse or partner, ex-spouse, grandparent, aunt/uncle, foster parent, etc.), respect the relationship the child has with this authority figure. Resist any urge to meddle, second-guess, or criticize. Model the value of respect. Respect the person caring for your child, and encourage your child to do the same.

Create a support system either using family or pen-pals. It will be much easier to stay involved with your children if you have a good support system on the outside. A positive relationship with your child's caregiver is essential. Keep them informed, and ask them to keep you informed. Let them know the positive progress you're making in your life as well so it is reiterated to your child. Try to work as a team if possible. It will be important for your children to see that you and their caregiver have faith in each other and operate in unison for their benefit.

**STEP 4: Keep promises.** If you make a promise, always keep it, and try to never make a promise you are unsure of. Your incarceration may prompt your child to question the confidence they once placed in you. Work to rebuild trust. Be honest.

**STEP 5: Get involved.** Focus on your child's hobbies such as music, sports, etc. Be aware when related topics are in the news so you can discuss these events or mention them in letters. Work with your social network outside of prison to find some after-school or weekend programs related to these topics in your child's hometown. Make a list of locations, days, times, materials needed, etc. and give them to your child. They will be thrilled to see how much you care, and they may feel empowered to see that you are capable of doing things just like any other parent could do. You do not need to go into detail on how you obtained the information. In some cases, you will find caring staff members who will help you do this. Suggest this to the prison as an actual option for other parents. If they won't help, ask a pen-pal or family member on the outside for help.

**STEP 6: Help with homework.** No you can't look over their math homework each night, but you can and should ask what they're studying, how they're doing, and how you can help. If they are older, ask them to share papers with you – stories or essays they've written, things like that. Give them specific praise and feedback. Learn the names of the teachers, administrators and coaches. Listen. If they are having difficulty in a subject, offer guidance. Since you can't study with



them, encourage them to talk to the teacher, guidance counselor, coach, etc. Encourage them to find a tutor if necessary. Avoid talking negatively about the teacher or school.

Encourage the child to take responsibility and learn to solve problems at school. Talk about the future – college and careers – and how being a good student now will lead to success.

Encourage them to participate in clubs, band, chorus, sports or other

extracurricular activities that will help keep them in school. Research shows that kids who are involved in at least one extracurricular activity are less likely to drop out. Always ask for copies of report cards. Discuss these with your child. Knowing you are interested will increase their motivation to do better. Don't criticize if they do poorly, but discuss with them how they can do better. Let them make suggestions. Listen, and offer guidance. Discuss issues such as tutoring or discipline with your child's caregiver. Be as involved with decision making as possible.

**"We'd said we'd keep in touch. But touch is not something you can keep; as soon as it's gone, it's gone. We should have said we'd keep in words, because they are all we can string between us-- words on a telephone line, words appearing on a screen."**

- David Levithan

**STEP 7: Promote positive behavior.** You are no longer in a position to be a disciplinarian, but you are in a position to reinforce positive behavior by praising your child. Thank and praise them for good behavior, focusing on school, etc., but being careful not to burden them with guilt or responsibilities that should not be theirs. For instance, don't ask your son to be "the man of the house" or your daughter to be "the woman of the house" (depending on which parent is incarcerated). Their job is simply to stay out of trouble and do well in school and to help at home the way all children should with regular chores and responsibilities – not taking on the role of an incarcerated parent!

Don't make them feel guilty about things. They have enough to deal with. Be positive. Don't lose your temper.

**STEP 8: Know your child's interests.** Prolonged periods of incarceration can cause gaps. Children grow up quickly and it is important to stay connected as their interests evolve and change. No child wants to fill out a questionnaire, however, incorporate some questions you would like to know into your letters. You can ask about favorite color, favorite food, type of music they listen to, dream vacation, etc. Keep track of these personal details and use them in your iterations.

**STEP 9: Invite them to visit.** While visits may not be something you can do all the time, try to arrange to see your child as often as possible. Keep up appearances when you visit with your child. It is important for them to know that you are safe and doing well. Let them know what productive activities you do while in prison. Visiting time can grow idle sometimes. Prepare a mental list of positive issues to discuss. Talk to your prison about programs that may be available to parents. In some cases, they will let you record a book to tape or CD to send to your child. If your prison doesn't have such a program, suggest it to a caring staff member. Ask your prison to email us if they would like some children's games for the prison visiting room. We will try to send them some. They can email us at: [general-information@writeaprisoner.com](mailto:general-information@writeaprisoner.com)



**STEP 10: Say, “I love you.”** All children need to hear this. Say it on the phone, in letters, in cards, and during visits. Say it with your actions. Even if you did not have a positive relationship before you were incarcerated, it’s not too late to build one now. Your child may be angry with you or even feel responsible for your incarceration. Regardless of your child’s attitude today, consistently showing your love can make a long-lasting and positive difference.

**STEP 11: Parent.** Parenting is never easy even under ideal circumstances. Your incarceration affects not only you but your family as well, especially your children. Of everything you can do while in prison – furthering your education, working at a prison job, etc. – nothing is more important than reaching out to your child with love, respect, and consistency. Set a good example. Be positive. Communicate frequently. Address problems as they arise honestly and with a real desire to resolve them. Be a role model. Yes, even in prison you can be a role model. Show them that you take responsibility for your actions, that you don’t blame others, that you can still better your life, and that you love them and intend to be there for them to the best of your ability. Don’t shy away from the subject of incarceration with your child. Talk to them about what brought you to this situation and most importantly, how they are going to avoid it by learning from your mistakes. WriteAPrisoner.com has created CrimeFreeKids.com, a non-commercial site just for children impacted by crime and incarceration. Your child will find similar stories to relate to there. It is largely set up as a crime awareness and deterrent website. Provide your children with the opportunity to ask questions about your incarceration. Open the dialogue on the subject, and keep it open should they have more questions as they get older.

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## Chapter 11

# PREPARING FOR PAROLE

## For Inmates Appearing Before the Parole Board

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Many inmates don't take the time to learn about parole until after the initial shock of incarceration has really set in. The truth is, you should begin preparing for parole the moment you begin your sentence. Here we'll address some of the steps you should be taking to ready yourself for parole. The great thing about getting ready for parole is that it's all of the things you should be doing anyway. These steps can only help you better yourself and your situation!

**STEP 1:** Learn your first available parole hearing date and start building toward it. Get your application as soon as possible. It will contain specifics that you will need to prepare for.

**STEP 2:** Begin furthering your education. Parole boards want to see that your time in prison was used constructively. Furthering your education is also one step that has been proven to reduce your likelihood of returning to prison. Therefore, furthering your education during incarceration makes you a better candidate for parole.

**STEP 3:** Don't fight, gamble, steal, abuse drugs, or do anything else that will get you in trouble. This is often easier said than done, but you must work your absolute hardest to avoid disciplinary issues. If you come before the parole board without incidents during incarceration, it will demonstrate to them your improved status. Actions speak louder than words, and avoiding disciplinary problems during incarceration speaks volumes.

**STEP 4:** Attend any support groups in prison that aid in your rehabilitation, such as substance abuse or anger management. Try to focus on groups related to the crime for which you are incarcerated.

**STEP 5:** Consider hiring an attorney. A good attorney can help you prepare the best possible presentation for a successful parole. Research your attorney before hiring him or her. Read reviews online, check with the Better Business Bureau, ask how they will approach your parole hearing. You want competent representation, and not every attorney will deliver that. Do your homework before hiring anyone.

**Adult correctional systems supervised an estimated 6,851,000 persons at year-end 2014, about 52,200 fewer offenders than at year-end 2013.**

Source: <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5519>

**STEP 6:** Find a home. This is easier said than done. However, this is an important condition of release. The parole board will look very favorably upon you having a home lined up. Ideally, this should be with a law abiding family member. If that's not an option, make sure it's a law-abiding citizen. If you would like to place a Reintegration Profile for Housing at no cost on our website, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

Reintegration Profile Department  
P.O. Box 10  
Edgewater, FL 32132

**STEP 7:** Have a job lined up. Having employment upon release is again a statistical reassurance to the parole board that you will succeed upon release. If you would to place a Reintegration Profile for Employment at no cost on our website, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

Reintegration Profile Department  
P.O. Box 10  
Edgewater, FL 32132

**STEP 8:** Have a support group ready to transition into. Have the organization's name, address, meeting times, etc. Show the parole board that this isn't about appeasing them, but rather ensuring your continued success once released. Doing this not only helps you to get parole, it helps ensure you won't violate parole.

**STEP 9:** Secure letters of support from DOC staff, pillars of the community, family, and anyone else who may have an impact on your parole to include with your parole application. Write letters of request in a professional format. When submitting materials to the parole board, write a cover letter in a professional format. Start each letter with "Dear Honorable Members of the Parole Board:" using a colon instead of a comma. Close each letter with "Sincerely," and use your complete name. Check for errors several times before submitting letters.

The content of your letter should be about your regrets of your previous lifestyle that led to incarceration, your newfound hope, and your current and future endeavors that will keep you out of prison. Your letter should be sincere.

Supporting letters from others should describe what you have done to improve, reassure they are willing to be a supportive network for you upon release, and give the parole board a sense that you are ready to reintegrate back into society. These letters can also come from future employers on company letterheads that show you have lined worked up prior to release. Start working on the content of letters early. You don't want to miss any opportunities to show yourself in the best possible light, and it may take some time to collect these letters. If you have a positive relationship with a staff member at the prison, a letter of support from this person could also be very helpful.

**STEP 10:** Be sure that any family and friends know the exact date, time, and location of your parole hearing if they plan on attending. They represent you. It is important that they are punctual, well dressed, and polite.

**STEP 11:** Fill your application out completely and neatly, preferably typed. Check it multiple times for errors. Store the application in a safe place where it is not subject to ruin. Submit it early. Remember, no step is insignificant in this process.

**STEP 12:** If at all possible, seek out a private area in your institution and rehearse speaking to the board out loud - addressing your crime, describing what you have done with your time in prison, telling what your future holds, and addressing any other questions you think may come up.

**STEP 13:** Arrive to your parole hearing looking clean and neat. Your appearance and demeanor matter. Address everyone on the parole board respectfully. Never interrupt. Don't get upset when they interrupt you. A decision is often quick; however, a release if parole is granted could still take a few weeks. Decisions can take time. Be patient, and don't press for an answer.

**STEP 14:** Bring copies of everything you submit with your application. If something gets misplaced or lost, you want to be sure you can produce a copy during your parole hearing. Bring any other supporting documentation you think may be vital.

**STEP 15:** Do not minimize your offense or refer to systematic injustices. Take full responsibility for your incarceration and stay focused on showing the parole board how you have improved and that you are ready for release. There are many injustices in our justice system. This is not the place to address them. The parole board's function is to determine if you are ready for release, not weigh your innocence or guilt.



**STEP 16:** Prepare to face your victim. The victim may have a right to be present. Never be disrespectful to them or their families. Be sure your supporters follow suit. If an appropriate opportunity is present, consider offering a sincere apology. Even if they fight to keep you incarcerated this time, perhaps your behavior at the parole hearing will soften their position next time. Great deference is given to victims at parole hearings.

**STEP 17:** If you are denied parole, don't lose hope or be disrespectful to the parole board and run the risk of jeopardizing your parole the next time around. In fact, if given the opportunity, thank the parole board for their time and tell them you intend to keep bettering yourself. If you are unable to do this in person, do so in a letter. You may see them again. When you do this, you are just giving them another reason to grant your parole next time. If you are denied and wish to appeal, know that most appeals are unsuccessful. That being said, make sure you appeal in a timely fashion, as there will be a limited period in which you can file an appeal. Also, be sure to save any paperwork involving your initial parole hearing. You may need it during the appeals process.

That's all we have to offer on this subject. We wish you all the luck in the world at your parole hearing! We hope to see you home and doing well for yourself and others soon!

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## Chapter 12

# REPAIRING REPUTATION AND RESTORING RIGHTS

For Individuals Who Want To  
Improve Reputation and Status

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Having been incarcerated can certainly come with a stigma. We can pretend it's not there, but we know it is. Employers, neighbors, even family members can look down their noses at people previously arrested and incarcerated. Be that as it may, it is also a new day in America. Mass incarceration and mass arrests have affected so many citizens today that the former stigma associated with incarceration is simply not as powerful as it used to be. Just about everyone in the U.S. has now experienced having a loved one or family member who has been incarcerated, so the stigma is not what it once was.

In fact, one major campaign, 'Ban the Box', has been successful in 18 states and is gaining momentum. 'Ban the Box' asks employers to remove the check box from job applications asking if applicants have ever been incarcerated. Even President Obama directed federal agencies to "ban the box" on federal job applications.

Coming home, being gainfully employed, and never returning to prison are certainly ideal ways to rebuild your life and reputation. This chapter will walk you through some other options that may be available to you. You may have more opportunities than you realize.

**Record Sealing:** Record sealing is the process of removing from general review all records associated with a court case.

However, the records do not typically completely vanish and may still be reviewed under restricted circumstances; in most instances, it requires a court

order to unseal records once they are sealed. Many states do order records to be destroyed after they are sealed. Once a record is sealed, in some states, the contents are legally considered never to have occurred and are not acknowledged by the state.

Laws pertaining to sealing a record vary greatly from state to state. If you are interested in pursuing the act of sealing your record, you don't necessarily need an attorney. However, like most legal proceedings, it is advised. In some cases legal professionals such as paralegals will offer their assistance with this at a discounted rate from that of an attorney. You must verify that you are eligible for record sealing before beginning the process. Requirements vary from state to state.

**Expungement:** Having your record expunged is typically more effective than just having it sealed. Once a record has been expunged, it essentially can be stated that the expunged incident did not occur. There are some limitations to this rule depending on which state you reside in. In some states, you must seal a record (see above) before you are eligible for expungement. Just as with record sealing, you may want to employ the services of an attorney or legal professional to help you apply.

**“Based on reports of recruiters and HR professionals surveyed, the United States appears to have the greatest number of companies with corporate policies requiring online reputational checks.”**

[http://www.job-hunt.org/guides/DPD\\_Online-Reputation-Research\\_overview.pdf](http://www.job-hunt.org/guides/DPD_Online-Reputation-Research_overview.pdf)

**Mugshot Sites:** A new and somewhat unfortunate trend is the rise of mugshot websites. These sites typically take all public arrest information programmatically from official online record sources, including booking photos, charges, addresses, and other information associated with an arrest and make it public for people to find said record on a search engine. Additionally, these sites are very good at search engine optimization. This means when people search your name and you have past arrests, these sites tend to rank very well in the results. For a hefty fee, the website will usually offer to remove your posting, usually between \$40 and \$400. However, it doesn't prevent another website from doing the exact same thing. This can make it incredibly difficult for anyone with even an arrest (regardless of the outcome in court) to ever move past the incident. Paying for the removal of your information is an option you may elect to use. Reports are often mixed with doing this. It is also worth noting that this practice is currently under litigation in multiple courts and may possibly be ended by future rulings.

**Federal Pardons:** The President of the United States can grant pardons for all federal offenses, excluding impeachment. Generally speaking, applications for pardons are referred for review and non-binding recommendation by the Office of the Pardon Attorney, an official of the United States Department of Justice.

The application for a presidential pardon can be downloaded at the following URL: [www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/pardon/legacy/2007/06/12/commutation\\_form.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/pardon/legacy/2007/06/12/commutation_form.pdf)

Applications also be requested by mail:

Office of the Pardon Attorney

145 N Street N.E.

Room 5E.508

Washington, DC 20530

**State Pardons/Clemency:** While the President presides over pardons for federal offenses, the individual governors in each state

ultimately preside over state offenses. Some states have a board of pardons, while others are overseen by the parole board, and some directly by the Governor's office. For information on obtaining an application for a state pardon, you would need to write your respective governor's office and ask for one. Don't plead your case in your initial letter. Simply state that you would like an application, and provide a self-addressed stamped envelope if possible. The individual options for each state should be listed in the application sent to you. The address for each state is as follows:

<b>Alabama</b> Alabama Board of Pardons & Paroles PO Box 302405 Montgomery, AL 36130-2405	<b>Alaska</b> Parole Board 550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1800 Anchorage, AK 99501-3570
<b>Arizona</b> Arizona Board of Executive Clemency 1645 West Jefferson, Suite 101 Phoenix, AZ 85007	<b>Arkansas</b> Arkansas Parole Board Two Union National Plaza Bldg. 105 W. Capitol Avenue, Suite 500 Little Rock, AR 72201
<b>California</b> Governor's Office State Capitol Attention: Legal Affairs Sacramento, CA 95814	<b>Colorado</b> State of Colorado Executive Chambers 136 State Capitol Denver, CO 80203-1792
<b>Connecticut</b> Connecticut Board of Pardons and Paroles 55 West Main Street Waterbury, CT 06702	<b>Delaware</b> Kent County Courthouse Courtroom 1 (unless otherwise notified) 414 Federal Street Dover, DE 19901

<b>Florida</b> The Office of Executive Clemency Florida Commission on Offender Review 4070 Esplanade Way Tallahassee, FL 32399-2450	<b>Georgia</b> State Board of Pardons and Paroles 2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive SE Suite 458, Balcony Level, East Tower Atlanta, GA 30334-4909
<b>Hawaii</b> The Governor of Hawaii State Capitol, 5th Floor Honolulu, HI 96813	<b>Idaho</b> Commission of Pardons and Parole P.O. Box 83720 Statehouse Mail Boise, ID 83720-1807
<b>Illinois</b> Illinois Prisoner Review Board 319 East Madison Street, Suite A Springfield, IL 62701	<b>Indiana</b> Indiana Government Center – South Room E321 302 W. Washington Street Indianapolis, IN 46204-2278
<b>Iowa</b> Iowa Board of Parole 510 E 12th Street Suite 3 Des Moines, IA 50319	<b>Kansas</b> Kansas Department of Corrections ATTN: Prisoner Review Board 714 SW Jackson, Suite 300 Topeka, KS 66603
<b>Kentucky</b> Office of the Governor 700 Capitol Avenue Frankfort, KY 4060	<b>Louisiana</b> Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole P.O. Box 94304 Baton Rouge, LA 70804
<b>Maine</b> State of Maine Governor's Board on Executive Clemency 111 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333	<b>Maryland</b> Maryland Parole Commission 6776 Reisterstown Road Baltimore, MD 21215-2314

<b>Massachusetts</b> Executive Clemency Coordinator Executive Clemency Unit 12 Mercer Road Natick, MA 01760	<b>Michigan</b> Office of the Parole Board Pardons and Commutations Coordinator Post Office Box 30003 Lansing, MI 48909
<b>Minnesota</b> Board of Pardons 1450 Energy Park Drive Suite 200 St. Paul, MN 55108	<b>Mississippi</b> State of Mississippi Parole Board 660 North Street Suite 100A Jackson, MS 39202
<b>Missouri</b> Department of Corrections Missouri Board of Probation and Parole P.O. Box 236 Jefferson City, MO 65102	<b>Montana</b> State of Montana Board of Parson and Parole 1002 Hollenbeck Road Deer Lodge, MT 59722
<b>Nebraska</b> Board of Pardons P.O. Box 94754 Lincoln, NE 68509-4754	<b>Nevada</b> Nevada Board of Pardons Commissioners 1677 Old Hot Springs Rd., Ste. A Carson City, NV 89706
<b>New Hampshire</b> Department of Justice 33 Capitol Street Concord, NH 03301	<b>New Jersey</b> New Jersey State Parole Board Attn: Clemency Unit P.O. Box 862 Trenton, NJ 08625

<b>New Mexico</b> Office of the Governor Attn: Pardons State Capitol Building, Suite 400 Santa Fe, NM 87501	<b>New York</b> New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Executive Clemency Bureau The Harriman State Campus – Building 2 1220 Washington Avenue Albany, NY 12226-2050
<b>North Carolina</b> Governor's Clemency Office 4294 Mail Service Center Raleigh, NC 27699-4294	<b>North Dakota</b> Clerk, Pardon Advisory Board Division of Adult Services P.O. Box 1898 Bismarck, ND 58502-1898
<b>Ohio</b> Ohio Parole Board 770 West Broad Street Columbus, OH 43222	<b>Oklahoma</b> Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board P.O. Box 53448 Oklahoma City, OK 73152
<b>Oregon</b> Governor of Oregon 900 Court Street NE Salem, OR 97301-4047	<b>Pennsylvania</b> Board of Pardons 333 Market Street 15th Floor Harrisburg, PA 17126
<b>Rhode Island</b> Office of the Governor 82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903	<b>South Carolina</b> Division of Legal Services Attn: Pardon Application Processing 2221 Devine Street, Suite 600 P.O. Box 50666 Columbia, SC 29250



<b>South Dakota</b> South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles P.O. Box 5911 Sioux Falls, SD 57117-5911	<b>Tennessee</b> Board of Parole Division of Board Operations 404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 1300 Nashville, TN 37243-0850
<b>Texas</b> Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles Clemency Section 8610 Shoal Creek Boulevard Austin, TX 78757	<b>Utah</b> Utah Board of Pardons and Parole Attn: Pardon Specialist 448 East Winchester Street Suite 300 Murray, UT 84107
<b>Vermont</b> Vermont Crime Information Center Pardons 45 State Drive Waterbury, VT 05671-1300	<b>Virginia</b> Pardons Staff Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth P.O. Box 2454 Richmond, VA 23218-2454
<b>Washington</b> Washington State Clemency and Pardons Board Office of the Attorney General P.O. Box 40116 Olympia, WA 98504	<b>West Virginia</b> Office of the Governor State Capitol 1900 Kanawha Boulevard E. Charleston, WV 25305
<b>Wisconsin</b> Office of Governor Scott Walker 115 East Capitol Madison, WI 53702	<b>Wyoming</b> Wyoming Board of Parole 3120 Old Faithful Road, Suite 300 Cheyenne, WY 82002

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT PARDONS:** Pardons being granted are extremely rare. Your prison record typically needs to be an exemplary one. If there are any pending fines associated with your incarceration, they will typically need to be paid in full

prior to submitting your application. Letters from prison officials, former presiding judges (serving or retired), educators, pillars of the community, etc. may all be welcome additions when applying. What you have done with your time in prison will have a huge impact. Inmates who pursued educations in prison are going to see better results than inmates who got into trouble during their incarceration.

**Online Reputation:** Today just about everything is available online. This is especially true in the case of criminal charges. Negative online reputations can frustrate job opportunities and hurt future endeavors. Here are some steps that we recommend after release:

- Reviewing articles about your crime and reading comments from people who don't know you and don't know your case can be frustrating, but the best approach is to ignore them. If you start replying to online comments, you may only reignite interest in older negative articles about you.
- Get a LinkedIn.com account. Fill it out completely. These accounts not only rank high in search results when someone searches for your name, they are specifically designed to network with professionals and gain employment.
- Volunteer at community events. This is a great way to give back to the community and an opportunity to earn and build a good reputation. Volunteers are often covered in news stories. If you want to get recognized for the good you're doing, simply start doing good.
- There are many paid services online that will actively work to repair your online reputation. These are typically very costly. However, this may be an option you wish to pursue. A search will return many options if you're interested in a paid service.
- If you want to take a less public approach to asking that negative content about you be removed, consider

writing the author of the content. Just remember that news websites are typically very unlikely to remove a story unless there was an error. This suggestion applies more to comments made on forums, Facebook, etc. However, if a news article incorrectly states information about your case, you may have luck in getting them to correct that information. Just be prepared to provide evidence for any claims of posted misinformation.

- You can also consider the creation of other social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter once released. These can help push down negative results on search engines. Conduct yourself in a respectful way. Avoid posting photos that are not in good taste. Avoid using profanity online. Never engage in online arguments or negative commenting. Everyone has a past, but not everyone behaves like they have a future. You do. Embrace it!

**“Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”**

- Abraham Lincoln

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## Chapter 13

# BACK TO WORK

### For Inmates Coming Home Within the Year

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Congratulations! You are coming home soon, and you will need employment. This checklist is designed to help you hit the ground running. One of the largest contributors to inmates returning to prison is a failure to return to work. It is important to recognize that this can be a challenge, but it's one that you can and must overcome.

**Let's get started!**

**STEP 1: Begin collecting letters of reference to include with your job applications.** Your efforts to begin securing a job upon release should begin now. This is another good reason to stay out of trouble while you're incarcerated – so you can ask for letters of reference from your prison chaplain, friends on the outside, etc. Ask that letters be addressed "To Whom It May Concern" and that they highlight your best skills, work ethic, and job-related social traits (e.g., cooperation, leadership). Make copies of the originals so you can include these with every job application.

**STEP 2: Know what area you will be living in, and secure housing.** Before you can find a job, you need a place to live. Friends and family members may provide guidance on this. Try to avoid neighborhoods and settings that are affiliated in any way with the charges that resulted in your prison sentence. Seek the freshest start possible by living in an area where you have no bad history. If you are unable to live

with a friend or family member, ask for their help in finding a place to live upon release.

**STEP 3: The computer is a wondrous tool, and it can help you before you even hit the street.** If you are still incarcerated, check with staff at your facility, and get a WriteAPrisoner.com Resume posted immediately if you are coming home within the year. Ask staff to help you enter the information here: <http://www.writeaprisoner.com/inmate-new-reintegration>. There is never any fee to anyone for this service. If any employers in your area are using our service, an email notice will be sent to them with your contact address and employment information. Lining up employment before release is the ideal situation, and we have helped other soon-to-be-released inmates do just this!

**“The preparation  
for good work  
tomorrow is to do  
good work today.”**

- Elbert Hubbard

**STEP 4: Scan the Want Ads.** If possible, have your family or friends pick up multiple local papers and begin a list of potential jobs for which you are qualified. Do this approximately two to four weeks prior to your release. Have the list in hand immediately when you come home, and get right on the phone, and begin lining up job interviews. The job market is tough, but it's not impossible.

**STEP 5: Prepare your “free world resume” (moving beyond your WriteAPrisoner.com resume if that did not result in a job offer).** We provide online examples and tips on preparing resumes, because there are too many points to cover in this chapter. Please ask a friend or family member to visit: [writeaprisoner.com/tips-for-writing-resume](http://writeaprisoner.com/tips-for-writing-resume) for details on writing a great resume.

**STEP 6: If you possess a specific trade or craft such as woodworking, pool cleaning, plumbing, etc., post this on Craigslist.com.** You are able to post on this website as many times as you like. Most listings expire

after a brief time, so continue to aggressively pursue employment here. Craigslist.com is the nation's largest classified ads website. In addition, employers are posting job listings here, and you should routinely come back to this website to apply to any jobs that meet your specifications. Other useful job websites include Indeed.com, Monster.com, and LiveCareer.com. If you are 55 or older, ExperienceWorks.org can help you find employment. Don't stop there... use the Internet to post your skills wherever possible. Until you have a job, make looking for work your job!

**STEP 7: Call your Department of Labor office.** Tell them that you are a recently released ex-offender, and ask if they have any special assistance for you to find employment. They can be found in the phone book or search Google.com by typing in: department of labor (YOUR STATE). You can also check with the local unemployment office as jobs are often posted there.

**STEP 8: Get ID.** Although it may take some time to get a new driver's license, you can request an official state ID at your local driver's license office. Call ahead to see if you need an appointment and to see what kind of information you will need to provide. Most employers will ask to make a photocopy of your official ID, so it is best to take care of this right away.

**STEP 9: Plan your transportation.** If you don't have a driver's license and/or access to a car, carefully plan for transportation both to your job interview and to the job itself once hired. Find out if there is a bus, train, subway or other type of public transportation that can get you there on time. Few things make a worse impression than arriving late.

**STEP 10: Build your wardrobe.** Many people come out of prison with a great support system of family and friends who can help you purchase new clothes, but if you are without these resources, try your local Goodwill, Salvation Army or other used clothing store. Typically, you can find affordable used suits and dress clothes that can get you

through any job interview. Presentation is a must. Dress in clean, professional attire.

**STEP 11: Prepare for the interview.** Be neatly groomed. Be early for your interview. Be informed about the business and job ahead of time. Be prepared with any questions you might have. Be prepared to disclose your conviction on a job application; this will not necessarily prevent you from being hired, but do report honestly if this question is asked on an application. Make eye contact and smile during the interview. Believe in yourself.

**Individuals who obtain employment when released lower their recidivism rate by 68.5%.**

Data based on a 2010 study by Tripodi, Kim, and Bender published in *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*

You need only Internet access and the will to achieve your goals to make use of the suggestions provided on this checklist. Libraries have the Internet access, and you have the rest! We welcome you back to this side of the fence, and we wish you all the best in finding employment and happiness. One of the most rewarding letters we receive is from former members who are still out of prison and doing great. We sincerely hope you join them!

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## Chapter 14

# HOW TO START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

## For Ex-offenders Looking to Build Their Own Business

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It is not uncommon to find unrealistic expectations in prison. Often you will hear inmates listing off the many businesses they are going to own – restaurants, nightclubs, production studios. While it is a wonderful thing to dream, and even better thing to pursue, these are not roles one simply steps into. Business ownership is something that requires a great deal of planning, work, and education, regardless of whether that education is learned in actual business or school. The stigma of incarceration can hurt employment opportunities. We all know this. While things are improving in that respect, it may be that upon release you want to pursue your own business, hopefully while employed elsewhere.

**There are almost 28 million small businesses in the US, and more than 22 million are self-employed with no additional payroll or employees.**

Source: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonnazar/2013/09/09/16-surprising-statistics-about-small-businesses/#201d65c13078>

Starting a business can be risky. Hundreds of thousands of new businesses open each year, but many end up failing. According to Small Business Administration research, only half of new businesses survive



the first five years and only one-third of new businesses are able to survive 10 years. Don't let these statistics deter you from pursuing your dream. Use this knowledge as power. Starting a business takes a lot of hard work and planning, but understanding the risks involved will help you better prepare to put the odds in your favor.

## Getting Started

**STEP 1: Brainstorm.** Ask yourself what you are passionate about or at least interested in. Make a list of professions you think you would be good at, qualified for, and successful with. Make a list of pros and cons for each of these ideas. Be honest with yourself. Some professions won't be practical because of your background. That's okay, many others will be. Ask yourself questions like, "What areas of this business will I need help with?" Just because you aren't familiar with every aspect of a certain industry doesn't mean you should avoid starting a business in that field; it simply means you may need a little more guidance to do so successfully. Determine the need for your service. Who needs what you are offering? Does it appeal to enough people in order for you to earn a living?

**STEP 2: Choose a name for your business.** The name of your business is the first introduction people have to your products or services. It is important to choose a name that accurately represents your business and the brand you are looking to build. It's equally as important that you choose a name that isn't already taken. Consider the feeling you want associated with your name. Do you want a name that's clever? Humorous? Professional? No matter what you choose, you'll want a name that's memorable. Once you have a name in mind, it's a good idea to search online to see if someone already owns a website with your desired name. If a website already exists, you may want to choose a different name. While they may not necessarily keep you from registering that name, they may make setting up an online presence more difficult in the future. Need a business logo? You can't go wrong at Fiverr.com where artists around the world offer to design logos for as little as 3 designs for \$5.

**STEP 3: Write a business plan.** A business plan is an essential roadmap for business success. This living document generally projects 3-5 years ahead and outlines the route a company intends to take to grow revenue. A solid business plan can help you avoid mistakes that often occur as a result of poor planning. A good business plan also helps you find your niche in the marketplace. What makes your business different from others? Figuring this out will help you stand out from the rest and give you advantages over your competitors. Here are some standard elements to consider including in your business plan:

**“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do.”**

- Steve Jobs

### **Appendix:**

Appendix is an optional step, but a useful place to include information such as résumés, permits, leases, etc. You will need to decide what additional information you should include in your appendix if you make one.

### **Company Description:**

Company description should provide information on what you do, what differentiates your business from others, and the markets your business services.

### **Company Structure:**

This section describes how your business will be set up, whether it will be a corporation, sole proprietorship, non-profit, etc., and also includes who will manage your company.

**Executive Summary:**

Executive summary is a short summary of your entire business plan. It should include your profile and goals.

**Financial Projections:**

If you will be seeking funding, providing financial projections to back up your loan application will be critical.

**Market Analysis:**

Prior to ever launching a business, it is required for you to research your business industry, the market and active competitors.

**Marketing & Sales:**

How will you market your business to prospective clients? What is your sales strategy? This is all information you want to address in this section.

**Organization & Management:**

Here you will want to include the company's staff and management composition. Initially, it may be just you. This is fine. However, you may want to include employees for future projected earnings.

**Services or Products:**

You are going to be selling one of these two things, or possibly both.

**STEP 4: Decide on a location.** In some cases, your home address works fine. Having a home office can drastically reduce costs, which helps drive your bottom dollar up. However, if you need a lot of space for equipment, employees, etc., a home-based business may not be right for you. Additionally, some cities may have ordinances against certain types of businesses and/or ordinances against running a business in a residential area. Check with City Hall before deciding

on a home-based business. If you are in need of office space outside of the home, make sure you choose a location that makes sense for your business plan. If your business relies on customers coming to you, you'll want to choose a location that's easy to find. After all, it's difficult to find customers when it's difficult to find your store.

**STEP 5: Secure financing.** Starting a business can be financially challenging. Don't overspend. A lot of businesses begin with the "you have to spend money to make money" approach. Don't fall victim to this. Keep costs as low as possible. Every dollar you spend on a shiny new truck, bus stop advertisement, etc. is a dollar you will no longer have. To some degree, you do have to spend money to make money, but you want to do this with money you are generating through service, not money you have borrowed or saved. Make your dollars count.

Getting a business loan right out of prison can certainly be challenging. You would likely need some collateral to offer the bank. An unsecured line of credit may not be practical. In this case, you may need to look to your personal network of friends and family. If that is not an option, simply pay as you go. In fact, paying for your new startup with money you are earning from another job may not only be the most practical idea, it is likely the best. It is one that prevents you from accruing more debt. And if you can avoid borrowing at all, all the better!

**STEP 6: Make it official.** It is now time to do some paperwork. Don't worry though; it's really not that hard. Most small businesses start off as a sole-proprietorship. It may be that you want to form a corporation or non-profit instead. If so, these are typically more involved and come with different requirements. For the sake of starting a business, we will address starting a sole-proprietorship. Initially, you will need to register a 'Doing Business As' name. These are often referred to as 'DBAs.' Registering your DBA is done either with your county clerk's office or with your state government, depending on where your business is located. There are a few states that do not require the registering of fictitious business names. Contact the appropriate office in your area to begin.

**STEP 7: Secure business licenses and permits.** Find out what types of licenses, permits, insurance, bonding, fictitious name registration, etc. you will need to comply with local, state, and/or federal laws. To run your business legally, there likely are specific federal and state licenses you will need to obtain. Depending on how your business is structured, you may need a federal tax identification number or employer identification number (EIN.) Some states require a state tax identification number as well. In many cases, you'll also need a permit to operate your business. Are your services and/or products subject to state sales tax? If you, you'll also need to set up an account with the state Department of Revenue. Contact your city, municipality, county, and/or state to find out the specific requirements in your area.

**STEP 8: Prepare for accounting and taxes.** Starting a business can be daunting enough, so you want to do your due diligence in keeping accurate and up-to-date records. Here are a few tips:

- a) First, set up a business checking account. Always keep your personal finances separate from your business finances.
- b) Save every receipt associated with business costs. Set up folders for each month and label them accordingly (e.g., month/year). Be sure to save anything relevant, such as credit card statements, invoices, cancelled checks, etc. When you have two or three forms of record for one purchase, you may want to paperclip these together. Staples can be messy and damage records if you need to take them apart to make copies. You will also want to keep a log of how your expenses are broken down. For example, utilities, employee wages, and business equipment are legitimate deductible expenses, but they are reported differently on your tax return. Keeping your records and receipts organized in their respective categories is essential.

c) Manage your cash flow. This can be a challenge if your business is seasonal or subject to other variables. Simply put, cash flow refers to how the money is flowing in and out of your business. It is wise to estimate your revenue and expense projections for as far into the future as possible. You should try to project at least three months out. This keeps you from making spontaneous purchases that might come back to haunt you. Just because you have the money in the checking account doesn't mean you should spend it.

d) Find a good tax preparer months before your tax filing date and make contact. Check reviews of tax preparers in your area on Google. While it is always better to hire a certified public accountant (CPA), it can also be a lot more money. Initially, it may be more feasible to work with a tax preparer. You should speak with a tax professional as early as possible in establishing your business in case you need to file quarterly returns, a common practice in self-employment.

e) If you use a vehicle for business, you will need to keep a log showing total miles driven for the year (or beginning/ending odometer readings), and the total business miles driven for the year. If you want to claim actual expenses of the vehicle, you will need receipts or totals for gas, oil, car washes, licenses, personal property tax, lease and interest expense. Discuss this and other specifics with your tax preparer.

**STEP 9: Web identity is critical for the most modest venture and even the largest Fortune 500 companies.** Build yours and do it for low cost. Facebook and Twitter have become fantastic marketing tools in reaching regional audiences for local businesses. Additionally, for as little as \$15 per month, you can build and maintain a website. Wix.com offers a user-friendly and affordable platform. WordPress.com is another option. On your website you can provide testimonials, photos

and details of the types of services you offer, operating hours, a form to contact you (if web visitors are viewing your site after business hours), and much more. We are in the age of web identity. If you do not have it, you are missing business opportunities.

**STEP 10: Invest \$10 in a nice business card.** Think about what you want on here. Phone number, address, website address, social media links, map, maybe a coupon for 10% off a job. There will be countless times in your business that you will be wishing you had these. Think it through and have them ready to hand out day one.

**STEP 11: Know your resources.** There are many support systems in place to help new entrepreneurs succeed. “Inmates to Entrepreneurs” is an excellent website that offers sound advice and guidance. SCORE gives free business advice; so does the Small Business Association.

Whether you launch a window-washing business, website design service, or any other business, we wish you every success!

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## Chapter 15

# WELCOME HOME GUIDE

### For Inmates Coming Home

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Welcome home! It's time to prepare for your release. Ours is one business where seeing a member leave us is a happy occasion. However, it is an unfortunate situation when a former member ends up back on WriteAPrisoner.com due to being rearrested, and we sincerely hope to never hear from you under such circumstances. Our site provides a great deal of information for recently released inmates to help them get started with their new lives, and we encourage you to visit our website for more information on reestablishing yourself in the outside world.

**STEP 1: Completely familiarize yourself with all conditions of release or parole.** Make note of all dates that require activity on your part, whether it's a phone call, visit, or restitution payment. Be sure to abide by any restrictions regarding areas where you may frequent or stay. This paragraph seems obvious, but simple mistakes can cost you your freedom again. Stay on top of it.

**STEP 2: Get ready to go back to work.** Having employment upon release is a statistical reassurance that you will succeed upon release. If you would like to place a Reintegration Profile for Employment at no cost on our website, ask a friend or family member to visit <http://www.writeaprisoner.com/inmate-new-reintegration> or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to:



Reintegration Profile Department  
P.O. Box 10  
Edgewater, FL 32132

**STEP 3: Join our forum.** The WriteAPrisoner.com Forum can be a great place to locate resources in your area. Our forum members can be very helpful. Additionally, we also would love to get feedback on how to better help inmates rehabilitate and reintegrate. Much of our site has been built around this feedback, and we would certainly appreciate yours. <http://www.writeaprisoner.com/prison-forum>

**STEP 4: Establish positive relationships.** Think of churches, synagogues, mosques, and volunteer organizations. Follow the arts in your local papers. There are always free and enriching activities available. Attend! Get a library card where you will have free access to the Internet, books, magazines, etc., Check for local sports leagues to become involved with. Visit state parks. Food is easy to grow, and it's healthy and keeps you occupied. Get a cookbook, and learn to make more for less. The point? Filling your time up with

**"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."**

-Nelson Mandela

quality activities will help you avoid the pitfalls of falling back into old habits, which may have landed you in prison in the first place. It may seem odd going from a cell to a car show, from lock-up to a library, from prison to a park, but each new, positive experience will take you farther from incarceration and toward a future of liberation.

**STEP 5: Get the essentials.** Visit Goodwill or the Salvation Army if you need help with clothes or household items. They are both affordable resources. Many churches offer free goods. Also try your

local dollar store for affordable essentials: thermos, flashlight, jumper cables (if you have a car), supplies, etc. Microwave ovens are very cheap and an affordable way to prepare meals. A TV can often be obtained through charity groups, and it can provide entertainment to keep you occupied instead of relying on bars or old friends likely to get you in trouble. A cell phone is an important tool. Buy a calendar and make notes of all important dates. Be sure to address all issues mandated by parole or probation on the calendar. Make an emergency card for your wallet with contact information of next of kin.

**STEP 6: Line up transportation.** Research your local bus schedules, subways, etc. Public transportation may be your only means of travel initially, so write it all down, keep it with you, and be prepared until you are ready to purchase a car.

**Incarcerated men and women who maintain contact with supportive family members are more likely to succeed after their release.**

Source: 2012 article published in *American Jails* titled "The Family and Recidivism."

**STEP 7: Get to know your new surroundings.** Make a list (or ask a friend or family member ahead of time to do this) listing your local healthcare clinic, dentist, etc. Locate the local Department of Motor Vehicles (call ahead of time) and ask what you need to bring in to get a state ID card prior to getting a license. Be sure to identify and locate local law enforcement organizations that you are required by law to stay in contact with. Change your address with the United States Postal Service. Check your state's laws and determine whether or not you can have your voting rights restored. If so, register to vote. Libraries provide Internet access for those who don't have computers. Use Google.com/maps to print directions to any of the places you need to visit.

Useful numbers and addresses you should compile include walk-in clinics, homeless shelters, Salvation Army, Goodwill, Red Cross, United

Way, church outreach programs (food banks, etc.), unemployment office, Manpower office, parole offices, libraries, etc.

Sadly, as you know, many inmates end up back in prison. **You have much more control over this than anyone else in your life.** It's up to you to stay out, and we have faith that you will. We hope that the resources provided here will help you reintegrate smoothly back into society and keep you on track to a bright future. Wishing you all of the luck and success in the world! Welcome home!

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"America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life."

-- President George W. Bush, 2004 State of the Union Address



To request a free copy of this book for your prison's resource library,  
please ask a member of the prison staff to send the request to:

WriteAPrisoner.com  
Self-help Book Request  
P.O. Box 10  
Edgewater, FL 32132

