



Life after prison

It can be hard to adjust to life after prison, however with help and support the transition will be made easier

Transition back to community

If someone has been away for a long time they may feel out of touch with how things work on the outside now. It may take a while to get used to how much things cost, new technology, what's happening at school and the involvement expected.

The way people get through prison is generally to shut down, not talk too much or get involved in other people's business. They don't generally get to make any decisions and have to follow a routine planned by someone else. A long sentence may mean they are not used to noisy kids and busy public places and having to deal with things like dogs, traffic, driving and bank machines. Unfortunately this can make returning to the community a challenge and it's good to remember this as they transition back to life on the outside. They may need to learn how to trust people again or share how they are feeling with others.

You may be worried that they will return to a life of crime. For some people changing their ways may mean they lose friends and associates. It can take some time to feel comfortable making new friends. Encourage them to reach out but be patient if leaving crime behind means a whole new way of life.

Changes at home

Finding employment after time in prison can be difficult and there might be a bit of a strain on the house financially until any benefits they are eligible for are received. It can be a good idea for the person returning from prison to get help to update their CV as it can be hard to account for gaps in work history. Any qualifications or new job skills gained in prison can be included.

It may be difficult for the person returning home to accept that you have managed without them. They may also have trouble sharing you with other people or you may feel you have to share them with everyone who wants to see them now they are home. Be kind to each other and remember that coping while they're gone does not mean you love them any less.

"I'd come back expecting to find someone who needed me. I expected to be useful. I was jealous as well, because she was so confident and I felt she was sharing herself too much with the children and not with me."

You may find yourself having to explain to neighbours or friends where this person has come from. It can be helpful to prepare a simple explanation in advance if you have not told them the whole truth. Remember, some people may be more accepting than you think.

Get support

For some people being in prison will be a time to clean up and take a break from drugs and alcohol. You can support this by not celebrating their return with a drink if they don't want to return to that lifestyle. Others may have been able to



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gain access to drugs while inside. If they were using prior to prison they'll need to remember that their tolerance is likely to have decreased and they will need to take care as this can place them at higher risk of overdose when they get out.

Sharing needles or tattooing equipment in prison places people at high risk of contracting Hepatitis C. This is a blood borne virus that affects the liver. You can request a free test and information about treatment from the Hepatitis Helpline.

Intimacy

If it is your partner returning from prison you may find it takes a while to get used to having them back in your bed no matter how much you missed them. You may have children sharing your bed now and the person returning may be used to sleeping in a single bed. It can take time for both of you to feel comfortable again and used to being in a space where you can be intimate with each other. If they have been in for an offence of a sexual nature you may want to talk to a counsellor about how you feel. It is not unusual to have very mixed feelings about this. Try not to rush anything and remember that sex is only one part of sharing closeness and intimacy.

"When I got home we were strangers really, though we'd been sitting at the same table in the visits rooms for years. We'd got married years before but it was like starting again."

Who can help?

Pillars - Pillars has a range of services including a free and confidential helpline for anyone who is affected by the imprisonment of a family member or friend. Phone 0508 PILLARS (0508 7 45 527) or visit www.pillars.org.nz

Family Budgeting Service - Free confidential budgeting advice over the phone or face to face. Phone 0508 BUDGETLINE (0508 283 438) www.familybudgeting.org.nz

Department of Corrections - Information for friends and families of people in prison. www.corrections.govt.nz



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