



Preparing for release

As you prepare for someone to leave prison it is not unusual to feel a range of emotions. It is possible to feel excited and nervous at the same time. You may feel really good about welcoming the person home and having them live with you. Or you may have decided that things would be better if they were to live somewhere else.

There can be pressure on families to house a person returning to the community. You will need to weigh up whether this is in the best interest of everyone living there. If they were convicted of a sex offence you may find they are limited as to where they can live and who can live with them and visit. This may make you feel as though you have to choose between them and your children. Unfortunately you may face criticism from friends or family whatever you decide.

If you have been visiting someone in prison and supporting them financially they may expect that you will also have them to live with you. If you don't want that it is best to let them know before they get out. This can be a difficult conversation to have and you may find it helpful to talk to someone at Pillars first. It is very difficult to have someone leave once they are living with you.

Great expectations

Promises may have been made while someone is in prison about how things will change and it is not unusual to have high expectations of how things will be when they get out. Parents or partners of prisoners may worry that things will go back to how they were before or get worse. It is unlikely that things will have got spontaneously better if they were not good before. This can lead to tension and disappointment.

"Before he came home, we had a constructive conversation about how we could manage the return to home. If had been so long, that we had come to have our own way of living without him. He decided he would return as a visitor and slowly take on family activities as he became more confident."

It can be very hard to maintain good open communication during prison visits. It might feel as though there was never enough time or privacy or that you didn't want to bring the mood down by talking about heavy topics. You may have protected the person inside from how tough things have been for you so as not to spoil a visit or argue. This is understandable but may have lead to them having unrealistic expectations about how things will be when they get out. It's a good idea to try and raise any unresolved issues before the person is released.

Living with children

It can be an exciting time for children as they prepare to welcome home a parent who has been in prison. For some it will be a relief if they feel they have had to take on adult responsibilities while their parent was away. Some children may fear their parent will reoffend and end up back in prison. Whatever the situation it's important to listen to children and let them talk about how they are feeling.

You may find the children are reluctant to be disciplined by the parent returning from prison. They may suddenly feel protective of the person who has cared for

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them or in some cases lean towards the returned parent. This may be more obvious in older children. It can be hard to see just how much children have matured during prison visits and the person returning will have to catch up on how much the children have grown and changed. They may suddenly seem out of touch with the kids and their age.

"Their father keeps treating them like they're six-year olds and they're both teenagers now."

Keeping the person in prison up to date with changes and decisions made outside can help make the transition back to home life easier. Try to keep them included in decisions made at home and any milestones in the children's lives. You could try making the prisoner responsible for the kids' behaviour during visits. This can all help with an easier transition when it's time to be released.

Hope

When things get tough it's important to keep talking and if you need to, ask for help. It can be a very lonely time but may help to remember that you are not alone. There are close to 10,000 people in prison in NZ and nearly all of them will be returning home at some stage.

All relationships are subject to the stresses and strains of daily life. It will be hard work. But some people say their relationship has been strengthened by the challenges they have faced and survived together.

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

Relationships Aotearoa - provides counselling, family therapy and individuals, couples and families / whanau. Check to see if you are eligible for free or subsidised assistance. Phone 0800 735 283 or visit www.relationshipsaotearoa.org.nz

Hepatitis Helpline - support and information about Hepatitis C. Phone 0800 33 20 10 or visit www.hepatitisfoundation.org.nz

Work and Income - General Enquiries 0800 559 009 or www.workandincome.govt.nz

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

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