



### Preparing to Go Home

How many true friends do you have? Do you have a special person to share your feelings with? Someone to talk to about your family? Someone you trust with your deepest secrets without fear that they might use them against you? Did your best friends visit or write you while you were away? Being in prison can be lonely. Coming home after being away for months or years can be even worse.

While you were away, the people you know went on with their lives. Maybe they moved or got a new job. Maybe they married, split up, or had kids. While you were waiting to get out, you may have worried that everyone else was moving on without you and you would be left to “figure it out” on your own.

You may have heard about churches or local groups that offer “mentors” or “life coaches” to help you return to the outside world. Just like a coach helps team members get better at their sport and win, a life coach helps you reach goals in your life. How do they help? They listen, teach, help, and give you good advice. Mentoring programs put you in

touch with people like this who want to coach you. These mentors will walk the path of life after prison with you. They keep you going while you adjust to the re-entry process that begins when you walk out of prison.

### What is Mentoring?

Many people believe that everyone should get a second chance in life. This means you, too! Mentors think that after prison, you have paid for your mistakes. So, you deserve to start a new life without the problems that come from time in jail. Mentors know that fitting back into the outside world can be hard. They want to help you succeed. Mentors share what they have learned with you and they are there for you when you need them.

As your coach, your mentor helps you bring out the skills you already have. They even help you learn new skills. Mentors help teach you the rules of the “game” that will help you move toward your goals. They can help you see your life through a different lens so you understand it better. They cheer you on and lift your spirits when things get hard. And they give you hope and encouragement when you face new situations.

Studies show that people getting out of jail often do better when they work with a mentor. For example, people with a mentor have a better chance of staying out of jail. They are more likely to find a job. And, they connect with their family and their community more, too.

### How Do I Get a Mentor?

There are many places to find a mentor. You can start before you get out or after you are out.

You can find a mentor -- talk to these people about mentoring programs:

- Case manager
- Parole or probation officer
- Religious group (church, mosque, temple)
- Ministry at your prison
- Halfway house case worker or bulletin board

Mentoring should be offered to you for free. Do not use a group that charges you money. If they want to charge you, look for another group that will provide a mentor at no cost. A mentor is there to help you as you return home and to be a coach. A mentor will be there to help you grow as a person and citizen. (Look in the “To Learn More or Find a Mentor” section for website links to mentoring groups.)

A mentor is...	A mentor is not...
Adult friend	ATM/Santa Claus
Someone to talk to	Social worker, therapist
Supporter	Parent
Guide	Disciplinarian
Cheerleader	Peer (“Homie”)
Someone on your side	Door mat
Motivator	Employer
Role model	Babysitter
Teacher	Savior

## What Should I Expect from Mentoring?

Mentoring programs will provide you with a caring adult who has offered to help. They are trained in ways to help you fit back into life outside of jail. They also must pass a check of their history. This is to make sure the mentors can be trusted.

A mentor will be matched with you. This match is made based on what you need, where you live, things you both like, and so on. The goal is to match you with a person who will be the best fit for you. As a woman, you will be matched to a woman. Mentors are usually not matched on their faith. Each program has its own rules, so ask about how the program works.

The program will want you to agree to meet with your mentor or life coach for at least a certain number of hours each month. Most programs ask that you meet in person with your mentor for at least 4 hours each month, and speak on the phone once each week. It will be up to you and your mentor to decide what best fits your needs. You and your mentor are partners, so it is best for the two of you to choose when and where you meet. Some mentoring programs may start by having you and your mentor meet in a group session. As you get to know the mentors, then you will start one-on-one meetings. Other groups match you right away with one mentor. Each program is different. So, don't be afraid to ask questions. You want to find the program that is best for you.

Some groups have mentors who have been to prison before. These mentors have already learned to have success in the outside world. They know about the kind of problems you had before jail and what you face when you get out. They have been out for years and have gone through their own ups and downs. Now they want to share what they have learned with you. Be sure to tell the mentoring program workers if there is a type of person you would like to be matched with based on what you think will work best for you.



## “ Things I wish someone told me: ”

1. “I’ve been in and out of prison all of my life. I was trying to do the right thing, but I was always around negative people...I want to learn how to be a positive person. I think if I am around positive people, I won’t go back to prison.” – Luella, 49 years old.
2. “I lived in foster homes and had no stability. I used my children as my friends. Wish I knew someone who had gone through the same things. People aren’t trustworthy in prison...I want to know people you can trust.”  
– Brandi. In prison multiple times for as long as 2 years to as short as 6 months.
3. “Looking for positive people. Had some in my family and friends,...but I thought they were boring. I like to drink and party. Want to get my best friends back but I have to stay positive and keep on the right track.”  
– Shamika, 28 years old. Jailed 3 times. Out 6 months.
4. “Had a great support system...All of my charges were DWI. I crashed my car and almost killed myself (because I was drunk). My friends stopped drinking while I was incarcerated. Almost lost all of my friends...I want a best friend again. I want a friend who can help me stay sober.” – Kara, 25 years old. Jailed 4 times for DWI. The longest was 6 months. Had probation revoked once. Currently on 50 days house arrest.

## What Do I Get Out of it?

A good mentoring program can help you in many parts of your life.

- **Life Skills – mentors can:**
  - Set smart goals to help you fit into the outside world
  - Figure out the things you are good at, and where you could learn more
  - Help you stay positive even if some things around you are not
  - Teach you to order your life so you can handle all the things you need to do
- **Getting a Job – mentors can:**
  - Help you find your interests and skills
  - Teach you how to make yourself look good on paper to apply for jobs
  - Practice job interviews with you
  - Find out more about companies that might hire you
  - Help you dress in a way that helps you get hired
- **Reading and Writing – mentors can:**
  - Tutor you in school subjects that need work
  - Coach you on getting your GED or high school diploma
  - Introduce you to places to learn beyond high school
- **Things required by the court, parole, or probation – mentors can:**
  - Help to motivate you through this process
  - Teach you how to avoid problems before they happen
  - Help you meet any requirements that may have been set (like curfews or halfway house rules)
- **Community – mentors can:**
  - Introduce you to local people and places that are helpful
  - Show you what has changed with the area, the buses, trains, and so on
  - Take part in local activities with you

### To Learn More or Find a Mentor:

Mentoring Groups – look at these websites to learn more about mentoring.

[www.caresmentoring.org](http://www.caresmentoring.org)

[www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org)