



### Preparing to Go Home

The doors finally open and you are excited to go home. You have no idea what awaits you. It has to be better than what you are leaving. Before you step out the door, or if you are already out, are you prepared for what is in front of you?

The world will throw many issues at you. You need to be ready to face them. One challenge we all face is how to live a healthy lifestyle – both physically and mentally. Good health lets you focus on your goals. But, healthy living is not automatic. You have to be actively getting healthy and keeping your good health.

### Before Your Release

While inside, you probably felt the stress of being locked away from your family and friends. You were around people who acted differently. They had different styles. They talked and used body language in a way you didn't. They may have made you wonder about your own mental state. You also lived under rules that took away some of your

basic freedoms. You didn't get to choose your schedule, clothes, food, or even friends in some cases. Without the chance to make decisions, you may have felt like a robot – you just went through the motions. And, maybe you were addicted to a drug or alcohol at first and were treated for withdrawal.

All of these things could cause mental and emotional health challenges. You might have become depressed, stressed, withdrawn, anxious, frustrated, or even angry and aggressive. You may even now feel sad, hopeless, or unable to sleep. You wonder if you matter and may have even thought about suicide. If these feelings last, they can be mental health symptoms. This does not mean that you will feel like this forever. But, they are important enough that medical help may be needed. Think about these questions:

- While you were inside did you receive medications for the symptoms just described?
- Were you ever placed in isolation or reprimanded for any of these symptoms?
- Have you received prescription drugs to help you with controlling your behavior?
- Were you ever diagnosed with hypertension (high blood pressure)? Hypertension is directly related to high stress levels and can lead to strokes and heart attacks.

If you are on medication now, you should look for and keep getting medical help for your symptoms (see *Physical Health Tipsheet*). Look past where you are now to how you can become better. Remember, life is not about what happens to us. It is about how we respond to things when they happen.

While in jail, you can't control the demands and rules – your schedule, what you eat or wear, and so on. You can control how you react to these things. Learn how to calm your mind through meditation and deep breathing. Try to walk for at least 20-30 minutes every day. If your body is healthy, your mind will feel better, too.

Before you leave, make sure you get a copy of your medical records including all prescriptions. Also get information for doctors and medical centers in your neighborhood. Ensure that you have at least a 1 to 3 month supply of all prescribed drugs so that you can continue your medications while looking for a place to live and a local doctor. Take a copy of this information with you and give it to any doctor that you visit once you are released.



### After Your Release

Once you are out, you will have many questions to answer. Where will I live? How can I get a job? Where can I get money? While these are all important, so is your state of mind. The pressure you will feel after release can lead to an unhealthy mental state. Many health care experts say that people who get out of prison go through some of the same things as soldiers coming home from war.

## Know When to Ask for Help

Some people may develop depression, experience grief and anger, turn to alcohol or drugs, and even think about hurting themselves or others. The signs of serious problems include:

- Feeling worried almost all of the time
- Crying often
- Increased irritability, anger, and arguing a lot
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Feeling on edge or fearful, overwhelmed by sadness, confused
- Having trouble thinking clearly or focusing, and a hard time making decisions
- Increased alcohol or substance use
- Increased headaches or aches and pains
- Trouble with your “nerves”

If these signs and symptoms continue and get in the way of daily life, ask for help. Once you have housing, check with your parole or probation officer, or someone who can help you get medical insurance and direct you to the appropriate healthcare service if needed. There is nothing wrong with asking for help if you feel you can't cope with the things you face after release – unemployment, housing, family conflicts, relationships, money, and so on. There are people and places to help you: a therapist, religious leader or a support group, and at times medication. When these problems are treated correctly, you'll feel better and can get back to leading a normal and rewarding life.

If you are eligible for Medicaid, find the nearest social services office to apply. If you are not eligible for Medicaid, under the Affordable Care Act every U.S. citizen can get medical benefits, including mental health care. Check with the nearest social services office about how to apply.

No matter what we look like on the outside, our mental health matters. Learn to get your mental health back in line so that you can become the best you can be.

## Tips for Good Mental Health:

- If you are on medicines, follow the doctor's instructions. Do not stop taking your medication without talking to your doctor. Some medications cause bad reactions if you just stop.
- Get away from toxic people and places.
- Replace any self-hating messages that society throws at you as an ex-offender with positive affirmations. (See the Self-Empowerment Tipsheet).
- Learn to control your emotions. Get help if you need to by finding anger management classes through your doctor, parole/probation officer, or health clinic.
- Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night. A lot of important things happen in your body and brain as you sleep!
- Eat healthy foods. Fried and processed foods tend to raise stress levels and cause high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which lead to heart disease. A lot of sugar also can affect your mood and cause obesity.
- Exercise. Exercise can help you feel better about yourself and give you a different outlook on life. Walking is one of the best exercises. Exercise relieves stress and helps you stay fit.

## Resources

- **Treatment Referral Line** – 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)
- **Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
- **Mental Health** – This website focuses on mental health information and resources. It has a great deal of information about all kinds of mental health issues, how to talk about it, and how to get help. It also has information in Spanish. [www.mentalhealth.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.gov)
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** – This link is to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website. There are many links here to services for drug or alcohol abuse and mental health assistance. [www.samhsa.gov/prevention/](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/)
- **Affordable Health Care** – This site provides information about the Affordable Care Act, how to get insurance, and connects to an insurance marketplace. People who do not have a lot of money may be able to get insurance at a lower cost. [www.hhs.gov/healthcare](http://www.hhs.gov/healthcare)
- **General Healthcare Information for Women** – This site contains all kinds of helpful health related information focused on women and their needs. [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)