

Prison – planning for release

Leaving prison can be an exciting time. It can also be scary. You might not know what to expect or how to deal with the challenges you may face. This factsheet looks at how you can plan for release from prison and who might be able to help.

Key Points.

- You can do things to prepare for release from prison, such as thinking about housing, benefits and who can help you in the community. It is never too early to think about it.
- You may worry about how you will get help for your mental health. The prison should refer you to community mental health services if they feel you need more support. You need to give them permission to do this.
- How and when you are released will depend on the type of sentence you are serving.
- There are lots of people and organisations in the prison and community who can help you.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What is 'resettlement'?](#)
2. [How do I get help for my mental health?](#)
3. [How and when do I get released from prison?](#)
4. [How can I plan for my release?](#)
5. [Who can help me plan for release?](#)
6. [What happens when I leave prison?](#)
7. [What is MAPPA \(Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements\) and does it apply to me?](#)

Some information in this factsheet is quite complicated. This section gives an explanation of some of the phrases and words that we use:

- **The National Probation Service (NPS):** The NPS is a statutory criminal justice service. They supervise high risk offenders who have been released into the community. High risk offenders are people who are assessed as being a serious risk of harm to the public.
- **Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC's):** CRC's are private sector companies. They supervise medium and low risk offenders who have been released into the community. They are also responsible for providing resettlement services in prison and the community.
- **Offender Management Unit (OMU):** The OMU is a team in prison. They are responsible for making sure that you get through your sentence plan.
- **Offender Supervisors:** Offender supervisors work in the OMU. They are prison officers and probation officers who have had special training. They work with you to achieve the objectives on your sentence plan.
- **Probation Officers:** Probation officers supervise you when you are released into the community. They can work for either the NPS or CRC.

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1. What is resettlement?

Resettlement is the word used by prisons and probation services when you leave prison and go back into the community. Resettlement should mean that services support you and your family to prepare for life after prison.

Local Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC's) are responsible for providing resettlement services. These are called 'Through the Gate' services. They can also be known as 'resettlement teams'.¹

There might be different things to do when you leave prison, such as:

- getting help for your mental health,
- finding a job,
- applying for benefits, and
- finding somewhere to live.

If you have support, it can make getting back into the community easier. You can help to prepare for your release by thinking about your plans during your sentence.

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2. How do I get help for my mental health?

Treatment for your mental health might need to continue when you are released. It is important that the prison healthcare team refer you to services on release if you still need treatment. They can only do this if you give them your permission.²

Your GP

You may already be registered with a GP in the community. The prison healthcare team could update them on the treatment you have been getting.

If you do not have a GP, the prison healthcare staff should help you to register with one. The prison healthcare team should make sure that you have enough medication until you are able to get a prescription from your GP.³

You can find more information about '**GP – What to expect from your GP**' at www.rethink.org.

NHS mental health teams

If you have a mental health condition, healthcare staff must think about whether you should be referred to an NHS mental health team.⁴ This might be:

- a community mental health team (CMHT), or
- a team that deals with a specific condition, like personality disorders.

NHS mental health teams are made up of different mental health professionals, who work together to support you in the community.⁵

What are NHS forensic community mental health teams?⁶

In some areas there are forensic community mental health teams. They provide specialist support to assess, treat and manage you if:

- you have a mental illness or personality disorder,
- because of that you've committed a crime, or you are thought to be a risk to others.

The aim of the support is to:

- maintain and improve your mental health,
- improve the quality of your life, and
- manage the risk of you being violent or re-offending.

You can find more information about '**Healthcare in prison**' and '**NHS mental health teams**' at www.rethink.org.

Talking therapies

You may want to talk to a therapist about how you are feeling. Some people find talking therapies useful to treat mental health or behavioural problems.

You can ask your GP to refer you to talking therapies. But it is possible to refer yourself in some areas without going through your GP. The services are called Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services. These services are provided through the NHS and are free to use.

You can find more information about 'Talking Therapies' at www.rethink.org.

Your rights to services

You have the same rights to health, housing and social care services as anyone else. Local authorities have to assess someone who may have social care needs. This can include support in the community.

Anyone can contact the local authority and ask for you to be assessed. This means that you can ask for an assessment yourself. Or you can ask prison staff, a friend, relative, or another professional that you are in contact with, to ask for an assessment.⁷

You can find more information about 'Social care: assessment and eligibility' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet. You can ask staff, a friend, or relative to get this information for you too.

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3. How and when do I get released from prison?

How and when you are released will depend on the type of sentence you are serving. Some sentences are determinate. This means they have an end date. Others are indeterminate, which means there is no fixed end date.

Determinate Sentences

If your sentence has an end date, you will usually be released halfway through your sentence. The National Probation Service (NPS) or Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) will supervise you when you are in the community.⁸

Extended sentences

These are a type of determinate sentence. But they include an extended licence period.

The judge decides how long you should stay in prison. This is called the custodial period. The judge also fixes an extended licence period up to a

maximum of eight years. Once you have served two thirds of your custodial period you will either be automatically released, or you will be allowed to apply for parole.

If parole is refused, you will be released at the end of the custodial period. Once you have been released you will be in your licence period. You will be under the supervision of the National Probation Service (NPS) or Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) until the end of the extended period.⁹

There are different types of extended sentence. And they can be complicated. You may want to speak to your solicitor or Offender Supervisor for more details.

Indeterminate Sentences

If your sentence does not have an end date, the parole board will decide when you are released from prison. You have to spend a minimum amount of time in prison before you can be considered for release. This is called a tariff. The judge who sentenced you should've told you the length of your tariff.¹⁰

Your Offender Supervisor will tell you what your sentence plan is and what you need to do before release. Your sentence plan could include you doing things in prison such as education and offender behaviour programmes. It is important to do the things on your sentence plan. If you don't then this can affect your chances of getting parole.

Parole

You can apply for parole if you have a sentence of four years or more.¹¹ Or if your sentence does not have an end date. The court will give you a minimum amount of time for you to spend in prison before applying for parole. This is called your tariff. The parole board decides to release you based on information such as:¹²

- your offence or offences,
- your home situation,
- your plans for release,
- your behaviour in prison, and
- reports from prison staff including healthcare and probation staff.

If you have things in place such as housing, work or education, and a support network such as friends and relatives, it may be more likely for you to get parole.

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4. How can I plan for my release?

It is a good idea to think about leaving prison before your release date. It may be difficult to think about release, but there are some small things you can do to prepare.

Make the most of your time in prison

There should be things to do in prison, such as education, training, sports, and jobs. These things will give you skills and experience ready for when you leave. This can be helpful if you want to look for work, education or training on release.

Good behaviour

Try not to get into trouble in prison. Prison staff may record any incident you are involved in. Staff will look at these records if you apply for parole or Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL).

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)¹³

ROTL means you can do things outside the prison, such as education, training, work and spending time with family. These activities can help resettlement.

Remember that ROTL is a privilege, it is not a right. Not all prisons will have this system.

The prison will risk assess you before deciding to give you ROTL. Not all prisoners can have ROTL. For example, you cannot apply for ROTL if:

- you are a Category A prisoner,
- you are on remand, or
- you are convicted and un-sentenced.

If you want to apply for ROTL, ask your prison how you can do this.

Think about housing

If you have nowhere to live on release, the Through the Gate team or your Offender Supervisor can help you. If you have children or are vulnerable, you may be placed on a priority housing list. There are four main types of accommodation:

- general needs housing (including social or council housing),
- hostels and supported accommodation,
- private rented accommodation, and
- family and friends.

You can find more information about '**Housing Options**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Education, training or work

Think about what you want to do on release. If you would like to do education, training or work, you could start looking for this in prison. The Through the Gate team or ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence) scheme could help.

The education department in prison may be able to help you write a CV. Or help you to fill out application forms for work and training. It can be harder to get a job with a criminal record. Some jobs have rules about hiring someone with previous convictions, such as when working with children or vulnerable people.

Volunteering may help if you do not feel ready for work yet. There are different things you can do to volunteer. Volunteering can give you an up-to-date reference and help with your wellbeing by doing something that you enjoy.

You can find more information about:

- Criminal Record Checks
- Criminal Convictions –When and How to Tell Others
- Work and Mental Illness

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

Think about benefits

You might be able to apply for different benefits when you are released from prison. These include housing benefit, child tax credits, employment and disability related benefits. It is important to go to your local Jobcentre Plus on release and tell them your current situation.

Some prisons have benefit specialists that you could speak to for advice. If there is not a benefit specialist, the Through the Gate team should be able to help. They could contact the relevant authorities for you.

You can find more information about:

- Prison – What happens while I am in prison

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

You can find more information about **‘Welfare benefits and mental illness’** at: www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/money-benefits-and-mental-health/

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5. Who can help me plan for release?

There are people and organisations that can help you think about your release from prison.

Through the Gate teams

There should be a Through the Gate team in every prison. These are sometimes still called resettlement teams. They can give you information and advice on things such as housing, work and benefits. The teams are part of the local Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC).

Sometimes the CRC asks a charity or voluntary organisation to provide these services for them. They could refer you to services in the community and give you helpful information.

Offender Management Unit

The Offender Management Unit (OMU) is responsible for helping you to achieve your sentence plan whilst you are in prison. You will be given an Offender Supervisor quite soon after arriving in prison. They can help you during your sentence and as you plan for release.

You may be released from prison with conditions. This could be that you are on licence, or on a 'tag' (known as Home Detention Curfew). Your local NPS or CRC will monitor and support you. In the community, you will be supervised by someone known as a Probation Officer.

Family and Friends

If you have a good relationship with family and friends, you might want to involve them as much as possible. They could be a good support network for you once you are back in the community. They may be able to help you with appointments or give you somewhere to live. Or speak with services for you such as probation and healthcare. They may also help support you if you are finding it difficult to return to normal life in the community.

You could ask the Through the Gate team or probation staff to contact them if you want them involved.

Local organisations and charities

Some organisations or charities provide a mentoring scheme for when you are released from prison. Sometimes someone from the service can meet you at the prison gates on your release. They will support you with appointments and refer you to services in the community. Ask the Through the Gate team if this service is available.

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6. What happens when I leave prison?

The National Probation Service (NPS) or a local Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) will supervise you. This will depend on your level of risk. The NPS will supervise you if you are a high risk offender. The CRC will supervise you if you are a low to medium risk offender.

A Probation Officer will supervise you. Their role is to:

- monitor you in the community,
- tell the court if you do not meet any conditions put on you, and
- help you with any problems such as:
 - housing,
 - your mental health, and
 - drugs or alcohol.

It is important to keep appointments with your Probation Officer. If you miss more than one you can be sent back to court. The court could send you back to prison.

Serving some of your sentence in the community

In some cases, you may be able to serve some of your sentence in prison and the rest in the community under supervision. This is known as being 'on licence'. Getting this depends on the type of sentence you are serving (see [Section 3](#)). The prison and probation service will assess your risk.

On Licence

Whilst you are on licence, there are rules you must follow. How long these rules apply for depends on the length of your sentence. These rules could include:

- living at a certain address,
- not meeting up with certain people,
- staying away from certain areas,
- completing offender behaviour programmes, and
- meeting with healthcare services or drug and alcohol services.

The conditions should be related to your offence. It is important to keep to these conditions. If you do not, you may be recalled (returned) back to prison.

Post Sentence Supervision (PSS)

If you were sentenced to less than 2 years and released on licence you will be subject PSS. This is an additional period of supervision after your licence period has been completed. The licence and supervision period combined will total 12 months.¹⁴

Home Detention Curfew ('On Tag')

You could be released from prison 'on tag' if you are serving a sentence more than 12 weeks and less than 4 years.¹⁵ You must sign a licence which says you have to stay at an address between certain times. This is known as a curfew. This may be known as being "on tag" because you have electronic device on your ankle.

Contractors such as Serco or G4S will fit the electronic bracelet and install monitoring equipment at your address. This will record when you enter and leave the address. If you do not meet the times of your curfew, the tag

will notify the contractors. And the police may bring you back to prison. This is being recalled.

There is a helpline that you can call if you have any questions about your electronic tag.¹⁶ Their telephone number is in the [Useful Contacts](#) section below.

What else should I consider?

Belongings

The prison should return all the things you came in with, including clothing. If your clothes don't fit anymore, the prison may give you clothes if they can. You have to sign for your things, so check that nothing is missing before you sign.

Money¹⁷

You will be given any money that you have saved or earned whilst you were in prison.

The prison may give you a travel warrant when leaving prison. This will pay for your travel back home.

Most people will get a discharge grant when released from prison. This is a small amount of money which can help with immediate living expenses. Some people will not be given a discharge grant. Reasons you may not get a discharge grant are if you:

- are under 18,
- are serving a custodial sentence of 14 days or less,
- are being transferred to a hospital under the Mental Health Act, or
- you have over £16,000 in savings.

If you have found accommodation for your first night on release, you can apply for an extra grant. This is about £50. It will be paid directly to the accommodation provider. The governor will decide if you can be given this payment.

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7. What is MAPP (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) and does it apply to me?

MAPP involves the police, the National Probation Service (NPS), prison service and other agencies, such as mental health services. It manages violent and sexual offenders in the community.

Who is managed through MAPP?

MAPP applies to:¹⁸

- anyone who is on the sex offenders register,

- violent and sexual offenders who have been sentenced to 12 months or more in custody,
- violent and sexual offenders who have been sentenced to 12 months or more in custody and then transferred to hospital under section 47/49 of the Mental Health Act,
- violent and sexual offenders who have been detained under section 37 of the Mental Health Act, with or without a restriction order, and
- other dangerous offenders who have been cautioned for, or committed an offence, and are considered to pose a risk of serious harm to the public.

How does MAPPA work?

The probation service will assess your risk and decide if MAPPA should manage you. If MAPPA manages you the probation service decide the level of management you need by appropriate services.

There are three levels and your level can change. If you are level 1 MAPPA, one or two agencies may manage you. If you are level 3 MAPPA, a number of senior people from several agencies could manage you. They will meet regularly and review your needs.¹⁹

How does this affect me?

MAPPA can help with your needs such as mental illness, drug or alcohol problems and housing issues. MAPPA is there to protect the public and help you settle into the community.

You do not have to go to MAPPA meetings, but it is important to work with the agencies they ask you to work with.

How long will I be on MAPPA?

This depends on which category you are in. If you are a:²⁰

- registered sex offender, you are on MAPPA until your “registration” ends,
- violent and other sex offender, you are on MAPPA until your licence or hospital order, including any restriction order, ends, or
- dangerous offender, you are on MAPPA until the agencies involved decide that your level of risk has reduced enough.

What if I disagree with being on MAPPA?

If you feel that you shouldn't be on MAPPA, you can speak to your Probation Officer. They can answer any questions you have about MAPPA.

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This factsheet mentions different people and organisations that can help you while in prison and the community.

Some prisons let you visit some websites on the internet. If your prison does not let you do this, you could ask a member of staff, relative or friend to look into these organisations for you.

Some of the phone numbers are free for you to call from a prison phone. But you might have to ask for the numbers to be included on your PIN phone list. You could ask a member of staff to make a copy of this factsheet so you can take a copy when released.

Healthcare Services

NHS 111

They can help if you are feeling unwell or provide information on local health services. They are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Telephone: 111

Resettlement services

Electronic Monitoring Service (EMS)

You can call if you have any problems or questions about your electronic tag. You can also call EMS from the monitoring unit free of charge.

Telephone: 0800 137 291

Drug and Alcohol Services

Change, Grow, Live

Delivers drug and alcohol services in prisons and communities. You can search for services on their website.

Website: www.changegrowlive.org

The Forward Trust

Delivers drug and alcohol services in prisons and communities.

Telephone: 020 3981 5525

Address: Unit 106 - 7, Edinburgh House , 170 Kennington Lane
London SE11 5DP**Email:** info@forwardtrust.org.uk
Website: www.forwardtrust.org.uk

We Are With You

Delivers drug and alcohol services in the community. You can search for services on their website.

Online chat: via website:

Website: www.wearewithyou.org.uk/

Ex-offender organisations

The Hardman Directory

Provides a list of funding that is available to ex offenders. Also has a list of companies who employ people with convictions.

Website : www.hardmantrust.org.uk/directory

Nacro

Provides a range of services across England and Wales. You can search for local services on its website.

Telephone: 0300 123 1889

Resettlement Advice Service: 0300 123 1999

Address: Walkden House, 16-17 Devonshire Square, London, EC2M 4SQ

Email: helpline@nacro.org.uk

Website: www.nacro.org.uk

Prisoners' Advice Service

An independent registered charity offering free legal advice and support to adult prisoners in England and Wales. Provide advice by telephone, letter and legal outreach sessions,

Telephone: 0207 253 3323

Address: PAS, PO Box 46199, London, EC1M 4XA

Email: advice@prisonersadvice.org.uk

Website: www.prisonersadvice.org.uk

Prison Reform Trust

Provide an advice and information service that can give information on prison rules, life in prison, your rights, prison conditions and how to get help in prison.

Freephone voicemail for prisoners: 0808 802 0060

Prisoners' Families Helpline: 0808 808 2003 (9am - 8pm).

Address: Prison Reform Trust, FREEPOST ND 6125, London, EC1B 1PN

Website: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

St Giles Trust

Provides a range of support, such as mentoring, help with housing, finding a job and maintaining ties with family.

Telephone: 020 7708 8000

Address: 64-68 Camberwell Church Street, London, SE5 8JB

Email: info@stgilestrust.org.uk

Website: www.stgilestrust.org.uk

Unlock

A charity and membership organisation, led by reformed offenders. It has a helpline that provides information on many topics including how being in prison affects benefits and housing, banking, insurance and employment.

Helpline: 01634 247350 (Monday – Friday, 10:00am – 4:00pm)

Text: 07824 113848

Address: The Helpline, Unlock, Maidstone Community Support Centre, 39-48 Marsham Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1HH

Email: advice@unlock.org.uk

Website: www.unlock.org.uk

Housing

Langley Housing Trust

A Christian charity that provides resettlement accommodation for ex-offenders and those at risk of offending. It also delivers resettlement projects.

Telephone: 03330 035 025

Address: Langley House Trust, PO Box 6364, Coventry, CV6 9LL

Email: info@langleyhoustrust.org

Website: www.langleyhoustrust.org

Shelter

Can provide information and advice on housing and homelessness.

Housing Advice Helpline: 0808 800 4444 (8am-8pm Monday-Friday and 8am-5pm Saturday-Sunday)

Address: 88 Old Street, London, EC1V 9HU

Email: info@shelter.org.uk

Website: www.shelter.org.uk

Women Offenders

Women in Prison

Campaigns for women offenders and ex-offenders.

Website: www.womeninprison.org.uk

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Further Reading

You can find more information about:

- Prison – Going in
- Prison - What happens while I am in prison
- Healthcare in Prison
- Complaints about prison
- Complaints about probation
- Criminal Record Checks
- Criminal Convictions – How and When to Tell Others
- Housing Options
- Work and Mental Illness
- Welfare Benefits and Mental Illness

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

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- ¹⁹ As note 16, chapter 7.
- ²⁰ As note 16, para 6.41.

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Last updated September 2020

Next update July 2023

Version: 4

This factsheet is available
in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0808 801 0525

Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS
PO Box 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0808 801 0525

We're open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org

 [facebook.com/rethinkcharity](https://www.facebook.com/rethinkcharity)

 twitter.com/rethink_

 www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to www.rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on 0808 801 0525 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

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