

Prison - What happens while I am in prison?

Prison can be a difficult place. This factsheet looks at what happens in prison and how you can get help and support.

Key Points.

- There are lots of different departments and staff in a prison.
- They can help you with any problems.
- There are things that you can do to make the most of your time in prison, such as education.
- Family and friends can visit you. They may be able to get help with the costs, such as travel expenses.

This factsheet covers:

- 1. What is prison like?
- 2. What can I do in prison?
- 3. How do I get prison visits?
- 4. Information for families and friends of prisoners

1. What is prison like?

Prisons have different departments. These will usually include the following:

- A gatehouse and reception for when you arrive and leave.
- A visitors' centre for people visiting you.
- Houseblocks or wings as accommodation.
- Education and training workshops.
- A gym and exercise area.
- A healthcare wing.
- A Chaplaincy for emotional and spiritual care and support. It doesn't matter if you are religious or not.
- A unit for the Offender management team for managing your sentence plan.
- A segregation unit for safety or discipline.

There is more information about these areas below.

You will meet different staff to help you while you are in prison. They can give you information and advice while you are in prison and for your release. External organisations or charities may visit prisons to help with issues such as housing, money or finding a job.

Where will I stay?

Where you stay may be called a houseblock. Houseblocks are usually divided into different wings. There may be different houseblocks for different prisoners. For example, new prisoners, prisoners on remand, sentenced prisoners and lifers may all stay in different areas.

Some prisons have a healthcare wing. It is a bit like a hospital ward. You might go there if you have physical or mental health problems.

Some prisons have houseblocks for young offenders aged between 18-21 years old.

On each wing, there will be rooms or cells for you to sleep in. Sometimes there are shared rooms known as dormitories. Or you may need to share a cell with someone else. There will be showers and toilets, TV and pool tables, telephones, staff offices and food halls where you get your meals.

Can I get education and training?

Prisons should have different education and training courses.¹ Some are work related courses, such as bricklaying and mechanics workshops. There will be an education department, where you can learn skills including English and Maths. You may be able to get a qualification such as NVQs and GCSEs or do an Open University course.

The prison will have a library.² Libraries should have different books, magazines and newspapers. It should have information that could help when you are in prison or when planning for your release. You can take some reading materials back to your cell with you.

What are incentives and earned privileges?

Every prison should have a system of incentives and earned privileges. There are 4 levels to the scheme:³

- basic.
- entry,
- standard, and
- enhanced.

You will start on the entry level when you first enter prison. If you:4

- commit to your rehabilitation,
- behave well, and
- · help others.

Then you can move up to standard and enhanced level privileges. If you behave badly you will move down to the basic level of privileges. If you have the standard or enhanced level you might:⁵

- be allowed more visits,
- be able to earn higher rates of pay,
- get a television in your cell,
- be able to wear your own clothes,
- have your own money,
- get time out of your cell for socialising.

Will there be a gym?

There will usually be a gym with weights and exercise machines. There may be a gym hall or outside space for football and other games. You will be allowed to use the gym for a certain amount of time. If you are on standard or enhanced level of privilege, you may be allowed to use the gym facilities more.⁶

Can I get healthcare?

You should get the same kind of healthcare that you can get in the community.⁷ This includes help from doctors, dentists, opticians and any other healthcare professionals. Some prisons have a healthcare wing, like a hospital. You might stay there if you are very unwell.

The prison in-reach team can help you with your mental health. It is like a Community Mental Health Team.⁸

If your mental illness gets very bad, the prison can arrange to assess you under the Mental Health Act 1983. If you need hospital treatment they can transfer you to a hospital outside the prison. There are letter templates at the end of this factsheet that you can use to:

- ask to be transferred to hospital, and
- ask the prison to share information about your mental health.

There are also letters that your friends and family can use.

What is Chaplaincy?

Chaplaincy is a place where you can go to get religious or spiritual support. You don't have to have a religion to go.¹⁰ It supports everyone no matter what their religion is. There are regular services and you can ask to speak to the chaplain.

How can the Offender Management Unit help?

Offender Supervisors and Offender Managers help you to manage your sentence. For example, they should manage your risk and help you to reach certain targets.¹¹ These might be doing an education course or working with mental health services.

Offender Supervisors work in the prison. Offender Managers usually work in the community, but they also sometimes work with people in custody.

The Offender Supervisor has links with outside agencies and organisations to help you settle back into the community on release. Part of their job is to stop you re-offending. They can help you do this by looking at your needs while in prison and on release. For example, they can help you with:

- · housing,
- relationships with family,
- · mental and physical health, and
- money issues.

Your Offender Supervisor in the prison will speak to your Offender Manager in the community. They will supervise you in the community on release from prison.

What is Segregation Unit or 'Seg'?

A segregation unit is separate from the normal wings. In segregation, you don't have contact with other prisoners. You may go to segregation to help with safety and discipline. For example, if you have broken prison rules. Or your behaviour is too difficult to manage on a normal wing.¹³

The Governor should only use segregation for a short period of time. The prison shouldn't use it inappropriately. Going into segregation is called removal from association.

You shouldn't be removed for more than 3 days unless a member of the board of visitors or of the Secretary of State consents to it. A member of the board of visitors or of the Secretary of State can consent to you being removed for up to a month. This may be renewed from month to month. If you are younger than 21 the month period is reduced to 14 days. The 14 days period can also be renewed.¹⁴

Vulnerable prisoners' unit

A vulnerable prisoners' unit is separate from the normal wings. If you are at risk from other prisoners you may go to a vulnerable prisoners' unit. Sometimes, you may have to be sent to segregation for a short time until you can be placed in the vulnerable prisoners' unit. 16

What staff are in the prison?

Staff can give you information, help and advice. Most departments are run by staff employed by the prison service. Staff from outside charities or organisations may also work in the prison.

Prison staff

Most staff in the prison will be prison officers. A prison officer does many things. They manage the security of the prison and keep an eye on how you and the other prisoners are behaving. They make sure vulnerable prisoners are ok. Prison officers should be able to explain how the prison works.

You may get a personal officer. This is a prison officer who can help you with any problems you may have in prison.¹⁷ You should tell your personal officer any problems or worries you have. They can help sort these out.

Other prison staff will work in the kitchens, training and education departments and Chaplaincy.

Staff from outside organisations

Some prisons will have staff from outside organisations to help you with things like housing, finding a job or money issues. These organisations may include local housing associations, Jobcentre Plus and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).

Some organisations visit prisons to help with childcare issues, such as Barnados. Some help women prisoners, such as the charity Women in Prison. Other charities have befriending services where someone will come and visit you in prison, such as the New Bridge Foundation.

If you have problems in prison an advocacy service may be able to help. For example, you might have problems with healthcare. An advocate can help to get your voice heard.

You can find out more information about '**Advocacy**' 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.

Other charities may visit or offer help with settling back into the community when you are released. These are known as ex-offender or resettlement charities. These include Nacro, Unlock and Clinks.

You can find contact details of useful organisations in the Useful Contacts at the end of this factsheet.

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2. What can I do whilst in prison?

All prisoners can go to education and training.²¹ Sentenced prisoners are often expected to do work.²² You could help in the kitchen by cooking, cleaning areas of the prison, recycling and laundry. You can learn new skills by doing work. This could be very helpful when you are released.

There are programmes to help you with your offending behaviour and why you are in prison. Some of these are explained below.

Offender Behaviour Programmes (OBPs)

These help you to look at why you have offended and they try to reduce the risk of re-offending. There are different programmes depending on your needs and why you are in prison. For example, the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) looks at the thinking and behaviour linked with offending and covers things like problem solving. There are other programmes that address managing anger such as Resolve. And there are specific programmes for sex offenders such as Horizon.²³

You might have to complete an offender behaviour programme for your sentence plan.²⁴ If you don't complete the programme, it may affect whether you get parole.²⁵ Parole means leaving prison before the end of your sentence.

Drug and alcohol programmes

These look at drug and alcohol problems. You may hear this called 'substance misuse'.

Your sentence plan might include doing this programme if you have drug or alcohol issues.

Outside organisations run some substance misuse programmes in prisons.

You can find more information on www.rethink.org about:

- Drugs, alcohol and mental health
- Healthcare in prison

Or call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)

ROTL lets some prisoners leave the prison for things such as work, training, job interviews or home leave. Quite a few prisons now do this, to help you settle back in the community.²⁶

The prison needs to do detailed risk assessments before you can leave.²⁷ In some cases a member of prison staff may escort you.²⁸

You can't usually get ROTL if you are only on the basic level of the incentives and earned privileges scheme.²⁹ You can find out more information about the incentives and earned privileges scheme in section 1 of this factsheet.

You will be on a temporary licence when you are in the community. You will need to meet conditions such as not meeting up with certain people and not going to certain areas.³⁰

ROTL can help you if you are due for release soon. You can meet local organisations and employers in the local area and see family.

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3. How do I get prison visits?

What are the visiting times in prison?

Visiting times will vary in each prison. You can ask prison staff about visiting times.

How often can I get visits?

This depends on whether you have been convicted or whether you are on remand. 'Convicted' means being found guilty and sentenced. 'Remand' means you are awaiting your trial or sentencing hearing.

If you are on remand, you can have more visits than a convicted prisoner. You can get three 60-minute visits a week.

If you are a convicted prisoner, you are allowed at least two 60-minute visits every four weeks. ³¹ Some prisons allow more visits as a reward for good behaviour. ³²

If you are far away from home, people can save up their visits. They can visit you less often but have more time at each visit. This is known as accumulated visits.³³ You can speak to the prison to see how this works.

How do I arrange a visit?

If you are convicted or sentenced, you will need to send visitors a visiting order. This includes the names and details of the visitors, including children under 18.³⁴

If you are on remand, you don't need to send a visiting order. Your visitor can call the prison and book a visit.³⁵

It is a good idea for people to book visits in advance, as visits can get booked up quickly. They can book their future visits when they come to see you.

Can my visitor bring children with them?

Children can visit. You should ask staff how many children could come. Most prisons will have toys³⁶ and possibly a crèche for younger children.³⁷

What can I expect?

There may be a visitors' centre at the prison. The staff can give information and advice to family and friends, such as prison life and family issues.³⁸

You may want to check with the prison what you and your visitors can and can't do. For example, some prisons don't allow anything to be passed between you and visitors³⁹ or don't allow you to touch each other.⁴⁰

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4. Information for families and friends of prisoners

It can be difficult if you have a friend or relative in prison. It will affect people differently. Some people may be angry, upset or feel ashamed and worried.

If you are worried about your friend or relative's mental health, you can use our sample letter below to write to the prison.

The Prisoners' Families Helpline provides advice and information to families of prisoners. You can find their details in the useful contacts section below.

You can find more information on www.rethink.org about:

- Complaints about prison
- Healthcare in prison
- Prison Planning for release
- Prison Helping someone who is in prison

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Further

Reading

Prison Advice Service

PAS offers free legal advice and information to prisoners throughout England and Wales regarding their rights, conditions of imprisonment and the application of the Prison Rules.

Phone (Advice line): 020 7253 3323 (Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

10:00-12:30 and 14:00-16:30)

Address: Prisoners' Advice Service PO Box 46199 London EC1M 4XA

Email: advice@prisonersadvice.org.uk

Website: www.prisonersadvice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/;

Prison Reform Trust

Prison Reform Trust is a charity that has information and advice for prisoners.

Telephone (information and advice): 0808 802 0060 (Monday and

Thursday 3:30pm - 5:30pm, Wednesday 10.30am - 12.30pm)

Telephone (office): 020 7251 5070

Address: FREEPOST ND 6125, London, EC1B 1PN

Website: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

SEAP

SEAP deliver advocacy in some prisons.

Telephone: 0330 440 9000

Address: Head Office, PO Box 375, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 9HU

Email: info@seap.org.uk
Website: www.seap.org.uk

Unlock

Unlock is a charity led by reformed offenders. They provide information on many topics including how benefits and housing are affected by being in prison, banking, insurance and employment. They provide confidential peer advice on overcoming the effects of criminal convictions and some limited casework.

Telephone: 01634 247350 (Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm)

Address: Maidstone Community Support Centre, 39-48 Marsham Street,

Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1HH

Text or WhatsApp: 07824 113848 Skype: search for Unlock Helpline Email: advice@unlock.org.uk; Website: www.unlock.org.uk

New Bridge Foundation

New Bridge works with individual offenders responding to their own needs, talents and potential. They organise befriending by letter and face-to-face visits for people serving sentences.

Telephone: 020 8671 3856

Address: 1a Elm Park, London, SW2 2TX Emails: info@newbridgefoundation.org.uk Website: www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/

Prisoners Families Helpline

Provide advice and information to people who have a family member involved in the criminal justice system.

Telephone: 0808 808 2003 (Monday – Friday 9am – 8pm, Saturday and

Sunday 10am - 3pm).

Email: info@prisonersfamilies.org
Website: www.prisonersfamilies.org



Sample letter if you want to give information to the prison and/or ask for a transfer to hospital

[Name of Governor or Healthcare Manager]

Date:

Dear [Name of Governor / Healthcare Manager],

Re: [Your name]. Date of birth: Prison number (if you know it)

I am writing to give the prison more information about my mental health.

To give you more information about my circumstances:

[Give details of your mental health, what has been happening recently that worries you about your mental health, and any other relevant background information. List as much of the worrying behaviour as possible, but try not to make the letter too long. You might want to consider the following questions:

- Have you got a mental health diagnosis? If not, what has been happening recently to make you concerned about your mental health?
- Has your mental health got worse since being in prison?
- Have you seen anyone from healthcare since being in prison? Would you like to see someone?
- Have you been taking any medication or getting therapy? Tell the prison if your treatment has stopped since being in prison.
- Before prison, did you see anyone about your mental health such as a GP or Community Mental Health Team? Give the prison any details.
- Is there anything else that the prison needs to know? For example, do you take drugs or drink alcohol? Would you like to see someone about this?]

[If you feel that you are so unwell that you should be in hospital I feel that the prison is doing all they can for my mental health, but it can no longer manage my condition in the prison. I would like to be assessed for a transfer to hospital under [keep the one relevant to you] section 47 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (if you are sentenced)/ section 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (if you are on remand and have an ongoing court case).

The Government wants to make sure that the criminal justice system takes people's mental health into account. I feel the prison needs to understand my background, and would like you to take this into account while you are caring for me.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature] [Your name]

Sample letter for friends/ relatives to provide information to the prison and ask for a transfer to hospital

[Your name] [Your address] [Your telephone number (optional)] [Your email address (optional)]

[Name of Governor or Healthcare Manager]
[Prison address (you can find this at www.justice.gov.uk)]

Date:

Dear [Name of Governor or Healthcare Manager]

Re: [Prisoner's Name] Date of birth:

Prison number: (if known)

I am writing to you about [name of your friend/relative] [state relationship). I am worried about [name of your friend/relative]'s mental health. I would like to give you more information about them while they are under your care.

[Give details of your friend/relative's symptoms and behaviour which is causing you concern and any relevant background information. List as much of the worrying behaviour as possible, but try not to make the letter too long. You might want to consider the following questions:

- Has your friend/relative got a mental health diagnosis? If not, what has been happening recently to make you concerned?
- Has their mental health got worse since going into prison? For example, have they said anything on the phone or in letters that has worried you? Have you noticed a change in their behaviour or appearance when visiting them?
- Do they receive any treatment, such as medication and/or therapy?
- Have they ever accessed mental health services or are they accessing them now? You
 could give the prison details of any services if you know these. This could include details
 of their GP or Community Mental Health Team.
- Does the person understand their illness or do they think they are well (do they lack insight)?
- Are there any other circumstances you think the prison should know about? For example, drug or alcohol use?

[If you feel that your friend/relative's mental health is so severe that you think they should be in hospital]

I feel that the prison is doing all it can for [name of your friend/relative], but it can no longer effectively manage their condition. Because of this, I would like you to arrange an assessment to see if [name of your friend/relative] should be transferred to an appropriate hospital bed under section 47 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (if your friend/relative is sentenced)/ section 48

of the Mental Health Act 1983 (if your friend/relative is on remand and has an ongoing court case).

I understand that one of the Government's priorities is to make sure that the criminal justice system considers people's mental health conditions. I feel that the prison needs to know about [name of friend/relative's] background, and would like you to take this into account while you are caring for them.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature] [Your name]



¹ Rule 32(2) The Prison Rules 1999

https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2014/psi-19-2014-ai-14-2014-pi-13-2014-sentence-planning.pdf (accessed 14 December 2018) para 1.9

¹² National Offender Management Service. *Prison Service Instruction* 19/2104 Sentence Planning.

https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2014/psi-19-2014-ai-14-2014-pi-13-2014-sentence-planning.pdf (accessed 14 December 2018) paras 2.7 and 2.13

2018)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploa ds/attachment_data/file/262122/prisons-sex-offenders.doc (accessed 19 December 2018)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploa ds/attachment data/file/262122/prisons-sex-offenders.doc (accessed 19 December 2018)

¹⁷ UK House of Commons. Justice Committee publications: *The Creation* of the National Offender Management Service – The role of the prison

² Rule 33 The Prison Rules 1999

³ Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 30\2013 para 1.10.

⁴ PSI 30\2013 para 4.1.

⁵ PSI 30\2013 para 9.5.

⁶ PSI 30\2013 para 9.18.

⁷ Gov.co.uk, *Prison life.* https://www.gov.uk/life-in-prison/healthcare-inprison (accessed 11 December 2018)

⁸ British Medical Journal. *Dealing with mental disorders in prisoners* .https://www.bmj.com/bmj/sectionpdf/187696?path=/bmj/345/7885/Analysis.full.pdf (accessed 11 December

⁹ Ss47-48 Mental Health Act 1983.

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice. Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners, PSI 05/2016. London: Ministry of Justice; 2016. Para 12.4.

¹¹ National Offender Management Service. *Prison Service Instruction* 19/2104 Sentence Planning.

¹³ Prison Rules 1999 45(1)

¹⁴ Prison Rules 1999 45(2).

officer.

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmjust/361/36107.htm (accessed 18 April 2019).

- ¹⁸ https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/helping-families/children-with-a-parent-in-prison (accessed 16 May 2019)
- ¹⁹ https://www.womeninprison.org.uk/about/what-we-do.php (accessed 16 May 2019)
- ²⁰ https://www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/ (accessed 16 May 2019)
- ²¹ Prison Rules 1999 32
- ²² Prison Rules 31(1)

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/758926/descriptions-of-accredited-

programmes.pdf; (accessed 16 May 2019)

- ²⁴ PSI 19/2014 para 2.8
- ²⁵ PSI 19/2014 para 2.11
- ²⁶ PSI 13/ 2015 2.1
- ²⁷ PSI 13/2015 para 2.4
- ²⁸ PSI 13/2015 para 3.8
- ²⁹ PSI 13/2015 para 7.10
- 30 PSI 13/2015 para 5.47 & 5.48
- ³¹ Gov.uk. Staying in touch with someone in prison.

https://www.gov.uk/staying-in-touch-with-someone-in-prison/visiting-someone-in-prison (accessed 18 April 2019)

- ³² PSI 30/2013 para 9.5.
- 33 PSI 16/2011 paras 5.6 5.12
- 34 PSI 16/2011 Annex G page 5
- 35 PSI 16/2011 Annex G page 5
- ³⁶ PSI 16/2011 para 3.19
- ³⁷ PSI 16/2011 para 3.10
- 38 PSI 16/2011 para 4.1 and 4.6
- ³⁹ PSI 15/2011 para 2.5
- ⁴⁰ PSI 15/2011 para 2.12

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This factsheet is available in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927 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 0300 5000 927.

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



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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 0300 5000 927 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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