

Surviving on The Inside



Written by Chris Sheppard for the Community Restorative Centre

This document is used for training purposes only by the Community Restorative Centre.
This document is not for reproduction or distribution without express permission from the author
and Community Restorative Centre.

251 Canterbury Road
Canterbury NSW 2193

postal address
PO Box 258
Canterbury NSW 2193

phone (02) 9288 8700
fax (02) 9211 6518
email info@crcnsw.org.au

Helpful Tips on Things To Do Before Entering a Correctional Centre

Smoking before I enter prison: Smoking is now prohibited in NSW prisons, the smoking ban in NSW prisons started in August 2015. Entering the prison system can be a very stressful time and having to quit cigarettes in a prison may add to the stress you are already feeling. There are a number of ways to help you quit smoking before you enter prison. You can buy nicotine replacement patches from your local chemist for around the same price as a packet of cigarettes. Alternatively, you can see your local Doctor and he or she can prescribe medication to help you stop smoking, your local Doctor can support you through the process. You can also access the NSW Quitline. To access the NSW Quitline simply dial 137848 (13 QUIT). This call is charged as a local call from a landline, calls made from mobile phones are charged at a higher rate. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can request to talk with an Indigenous counsellor from the Quitline.

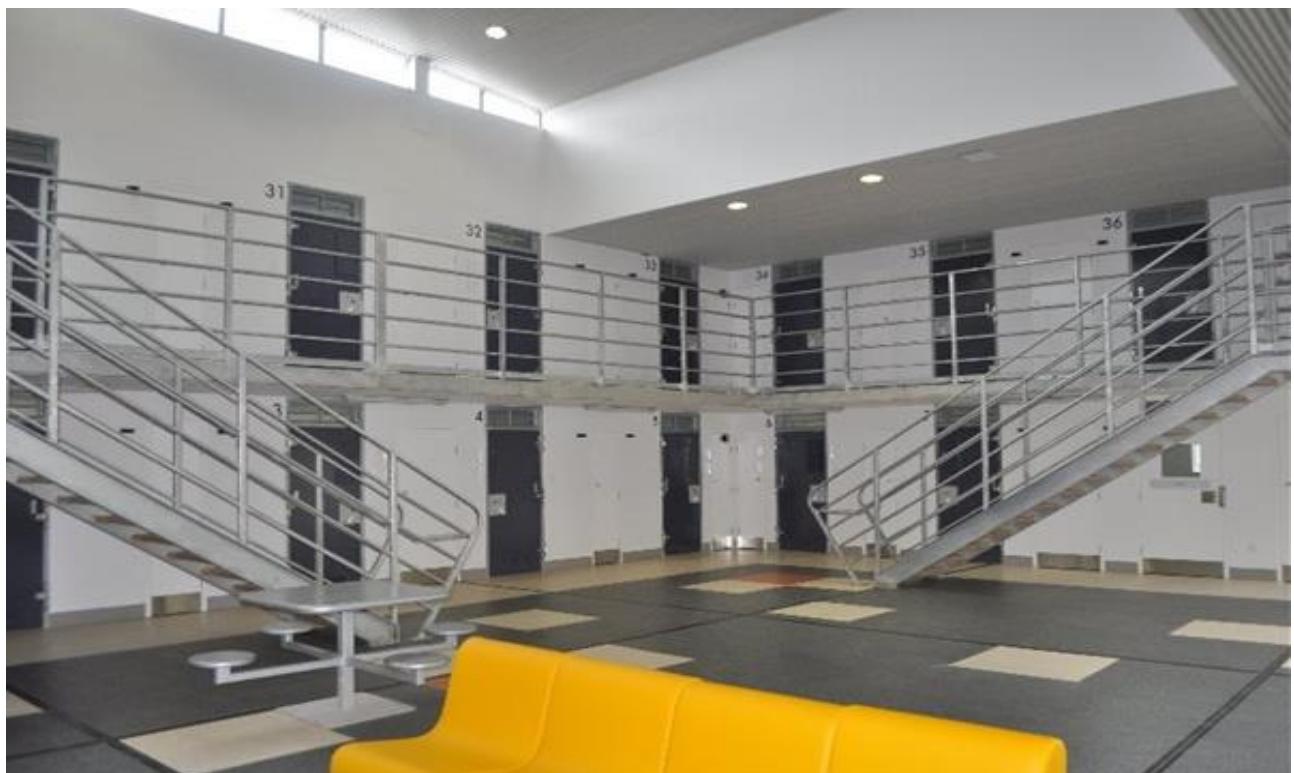
What the Quitline does: They provide professional counsellors, known as Quitline advisors who help people make individual quitting plans with them. Advisors discuss strategies for managing withdrawals and cravings, offer information about medications and products to assist with quitting, and recommend support services in your local area.

What if I'm a smoker then enter prison? There is Limited support available to quit smoking while you are on the inside. You can request to speak to a nurse at the Health Centre within your Correctional Centre, alternatively you can call the Quitline by dialing MIN PIN 210 # on the phone in your unit for free to talk to someone about getting help to quit smoking. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can request to talk with an Indigenous counsellor from the Quitline to get help with quitting the smokes. Quitline provides professional counsellors, known as 'Quitline advisors' who help people make individual quitting plans with them. Advisors discuss strategies for managing withdrawals and cravings, offer information about medications and products to assist with quitting, and recommend support services whilst you are in a Correctional Centre. Corrective Services was providing people in reception prisons with two weeks of Nicotine Patches upon arrival however this has now stopped. Instead nicotine replacement lozenges are available on your weekly buy-up.

Are you on medication? If you are coming up to your sentencing date and you think you will be given a custodial sentence it is a good idea to take your medication to court with you and a letter from your doctor who prescribes the medication that explains what medication you are on, the amount of medication you are on and the reason you are on the medication. Be aware that it may take several days for staff in a watch house to organise dosing of methadone/suboxone.

What will happen to my Centrelink payment after I enter custody?

Corrective Services will notify Centrelink within a couple days that you have entered custody. If you are receiving Centrelink payments you will be paid up until the time you entered custody. Centrelink in the past sent a cheque to Corrective Services for any money owed to you which was put into your prison trust account- **THIS NO LONGER HAPPENS**. Any outstanding money will be paid into your usual bank account your Centrelink has always been paid into. If you have not been paid your final payment you have 13 weeks to claim your payment after entering custody. Notify a SAPO (Service and Programs Officer) that you want to make a claim so you can get the paperwork and have it filled in and submitted before the 13-week period expires that you have to claim.



Tips For Surviving In Prison

Entering the unit for the first time: If you don't know anyone in the prison system, don't be in a rush to go and make new friends. Take your time to get the feel for the unit and your new neighbours. You may not know other people's backgrounds or how they are feeling themselves so being patient to make friends is a safe way to avoid conflict with other inmates.

Do not stare. Staring is rude no matter where you are, but it won't usually get you into too much trouble unless you are in a prison. As you walk through the prison, keep your eyes forward and don't stare or it could be misinterpreted and bring you unwanted attention from other inmates. Setting up your cell and familiarising yourself with where things are (toilets, kitchen, phone, laundry) is a good way to fill in your first day.

Nights in Prison: The first night in prison can be a difficult time for anyone. You may feel alone, scared and find yourself feeling disconnected from the people you know and love. Your first night inside can be used to familiarise yourself with the prisoner handbook so you get an understanding of what your days will look like and how the prison system operates. It is a good idea to say what you need to say to other inmates before you are locked down in your cell for the night as yelling out to other inmates through your door after you are locked down for the night can cause upset to other inmates who are trying to rest or just don't need to hear what you have to say. Nights can be utilised to read a book, write a letter, and fill in request forms for jobs or programs or simply watch a bit of T.V.

Leaving your cell after waking up in the mornings: When you leave your cell in the morning at breakfast time it is a good idea to let people wake up properly before you approach them for **anything**. Not everyone gets a good night sleep in prison and other peoples stress levels may be different to your own so letting people wake up without being in their face is a fair start to their day.

Filling in your day: Days in prison can be long and slow. Prisons may offer programs for inmates such as art/craft, music, gym, sport (touch football), drug and alcohol programs and education as well as employment. Jobs within the prison or in the community are available depending on where you are allocated and your classification. Job placement is a process and may take time. Reading, writing letters to loved ones or playing cards is a good way to fill in time. There is usually a library in most prisons which can be accessed by inmates. Sometimes the person who works in the library visits the unit with a cart full of books for you to borrow. Exercise is also a great way to fill in time, reduce your stress levels and burn off excess energy while you are inside. Push ups and sit ups are a basic exercise which can be done in your cell or within the yard in your unit.

Be prepared for delays: Due to the overcrowding in prisons and the limitations of welfare staff, delays are quite common within the prisons. Be aware any delays are not directed at you personally. It can take 2 -3 weeks for your phone account to be activated. A letter to your loved ones is often a good way to let them know how you are going as it is a small cost to send a letter and an effective way of communication. All letters you send and receive are read by Corrective Services to scan for any illegal activity.

Phone calls: Once you have entered custody and been through the screening process, welfare staff are able to facilitate one phone call to a family member or friend whilst waiting for a phone account to be activated, the phone call is generally to let people know where you are and to make arrangements to organise things you haven't had time to do before you entered into custody. The phone call can go for around 5 minutes. If you need longer to talk about things like your rental property, a person you were caring for or any animals that need looking after, the prison staff may give you more time on the phone to talk about these essential matters. The prison Chaplain may also be able to make a call to your family or loved ones to let them know how you are going. If you don't have a phone number for your family the prison Chaplain may be able to visit them at their home to let them know where you are and how you are going. If prison staff find out you have asked multiple staff and had more than one call, this may make them less likely to help you out in the future. Phone calls are also monitored and may be listened to by prison staff.

Request forms: Request forms are used to request things such as: accommodation change, exchange property, request employment or change employment, check the balance of your private cash account, appointments or interviews, additional or extended visits or request to see prison service staff or the General Manager. All written requests, enquiries and complaints are entered into a register, which is checked once a week by a senior officer. Keep a record of the date you submitted your form, and to whom you gave it. Where possible, you will be given a photocopy of your form, but it is not always possible for this to happen. Some enquiries, requests and complaints must be referred to a senior officer.

For example: if you wish to change accommodation, request an additional visit or a special phone call, or if you want to speak to the General Manager. The Senior Assistant, Superintendent/ Principal/ Authorised Officer is responsible to ensure Inmate Applications are finalised wherever possible within 14 days of issue.

Be aware **it can be a stressful period** waiting for a response from a submitted request form. **Being mindful and aware** that delays are common on the inside and that the delay is not directed at you personally may help you cope with any stress you are feeling while waiting for a response.

Ask for help: Don't feel you need to deal with any problems you have on your own. Upon arrival to your Correctional Centre you will be allocated a case officer who can support you to address any concerns you have. You can also put in a request form (or a bluey) to see the **SAPO** (Services and Programs Officer) or welfare worker who can help you address and work through your concerns. A request form can be accessed within the unit and filled in and handed to the guard on duty so it can be processed. Also, each prison unit has an official **Wing Delegate** which is another prisoner who is familiar with the prison system and can help other prisoners to cope, the wing delegate can also help you fill out forms and help you understand how things operate within a Correctional Centre.

Are you on medication? If you are on medication it is a good idea when possible not to let other inmates know what medication you are on and how much you are taking as this may lead to other inmates asking you to share it with them or even standing over you for your medication.

Avoiding trouble on the inside:

- **Read the prisoner handbook** or have someone sit down and explain anything you don't really understand in the booklet to you so you understand how the prison system works. (Good behaviour may lead to privileges, better jobs, easier parole, etc.)
- Be **AWARE** of your environment at all times.
- Try and avoid giving personal information to other inmates and don't leave any letters lying around that may have the senders name and address on the back of the letter (you don't want any unexpected visitors to your loved ones on the outside.)
- Remain visible to staff when possible if you are feeling uneasy about the unit you are in or request to talk to a staff member about any concerns.
- Be aware you may be putting yourself at risk of unwanted attention by gambling, asking favours or borrowing items. It may be easy to borrow items or ask a favour on the inside however returning the favour may be more difficult than you imagined.
- Try to avoid letting other inmates into your cell and try and stay out of other inmate's cells.
- Do your own time, don't make other inmates business your own as this can attract unwanted attention.
- If you are not in a gang don't be in a rush to join one, being in a gang on the inside can lead to unwanted attention from other inmates.
- **Protection** - Think very carefully about doing this as once you are in Protection it can be difficult to get out. Being in protection can be a harder way to do your time as other inmates will assume you are in there due to child abuse/sex charges, etc.

How to respond to verbal threats or violence from other inmates:

Dealing with verbal threats or acts of physical violence directed at you personally can be difficult to deal with in any prison. The advice you may receive on how to defend yourself off other inmates or people that have spent time in custody may be to fight back so you gain respect off the person or persons who are threatening or attacking you. Even if you win the fight it does not mean the person attacking you will go away and leave you alone. Be mindful that retaliating or defending yourself with verbal threats or physical violence can attract criminal charges, even adding time to the length of your sentence. If threatening behaviour or acts of violence are directed at you personally try to stay calm and protect yourself the best you can. If you have been threatened or attacked or feel at risk of an attack and you are having trouble handling the situation on your own you can talk to another inmate or the wing delegate and ask for advice, another option (or last resort) could be to talk to a prison officer or welfare worker about your concerns.

Some strategies for avoiding verbal threats or an attack from other inmates are to keep to yourself and don't retaliate to any threatening behaviour, if you feel threatened where possible try and stay in the view of prison staff or the CCTV cameras. Not getting involved in other people's business is a good way to stay safe on the inside. Thinking about what you say and the words you use is also a helpful way to avoid threats or physical violence being directed to yourself.

Important Prison language: There are a lot of words we use in general conversation within our community/home every day that may be quite common and accepted. However these same words used within a prison can have a totally different meaning for other inmates. There are a couple of words inmates use to address the prison staff, these two commonly used words are *Chief* and *Boss*. To call another inmate Chief or Boss would be an act of disrespect by you and on just about every occasion you will have a very upset inmate or inmates on your case! So, do not call another inmate a Chief or Boss. Female prison staff are usually called *Miss* or *Ma'am*.

What does the word *Dog* mean on the inside? A Dog is an inmate who reports on other inmates to prison staff or to the police, (otherwise known as an informer). This word is not to be taken lightly! If you are heard using the word Dog expect someone to want to know what and why you said it and who is the person you are calling a Dog, you may even be asked from other inmates to prove what you are saying is true, if you can't give a good reason or proof why you are using the word Dog you will more than likely find yourself in more trouble than you can handle with the other inmates. It is almost certain that you will be putting yourself at risk of **serious harm** from other inmates for calling someone a Dog or for even using the word Dog if you can't prove what you are saying is true.

Below are a few more examples of some commonly used words and their meanings in prison:

- Boss used when addressing officers
- Brasco toilet
- Brew cup of coffee; also jail-made alcohol
- Bridge up to fight or show off
- Bupe Buprenorphine, a prescription medication for people addicted to heroin or other opiates
- Buy-ups Approved purchases by inmates (e.g. toiletries, chocolate,)
- Chat/ chatty Chat is an inmate who is dirty; a chatty cell is a dirty or untidy cell
- Chief officers, especially those in charge
- Cockatoo/ cocky inmate who is the lookout to alert inmates that an officer is coming
- Collar and tie five-year sentence
- Date roll toilet paper
- Dog inmate who reports on other inmates to officers
- Dog and bone phone
- Doing a brick 10-year sentence
- Done/ petrol methadone
- Frequent Flyer return inmate
- Greens prison clothing
- Gronk irritating inmate
- Lockdown inmates locked in cells
- Maam female officer
- Peter thief an inmate who steals from another inmate's cell, (highly loathed individuals)
- Rock spider pedophile
- Screw Correctional Officer
- Scrim an inmate who thinks they are important because of the particular job they have in prison
Eg. certain clerical positions
- Segro segregation of inmate
- Shiv improvised knife
- Spinner inmate acting strangely and possibly unpredictable due to mental health issues
- Two-outs cell with two inmates
- Wing inmate accommodation area
- Yard secure outside area near a wing