

## **Tips for Family and Friends About Re-Entry**

The person coming out of prison is not the same person who went into the facility just as you are not the same person you were when s/he left. All of you have been through trauma due to the arrest and incarceration.

Loved ones struggle financially and emotionally. "Going on with life" is easier said than done. While some of the worries one may have before incarceration are relieved, new worries and concerns arise. And unless the individual has sought out emotional support from someone or a group who understands this traumatic event, those wounds and feelings remain unattended to.

In my experience with loved ones the hope of reunification is a mixture of excitement and anxiety. They have "managed" while their loved one was away and now they are excited to have him/her come out while at the same time feeling unsure of how it will go. Some even have expressed feeling leary and somewhat distrustful of the future.

Incarceration forces everyone to change, to "adapt." Different habits and schedules have been established; new rules for daily living and new routines are put into place. Each person involved has grown into a way of moving through their life.

Unless addressed, many expectations for hopeful reintegration will fall flat....the belief that it will just work itself out and life will fall into place is often met with disappointment and hurt...people feel let down, even angry. Without some understanding of the trauma everyone has experienced, the bumpy road of re-entry becomes full of big potholes and unexpected curves.

I think it is important and valuable to address all sides of re-entry issues and trauma. Hurt feelings, misinterpretations of behavior, misunderstandings of words and intent are bound to occur when people are reuniting. Personal and social situations require skill in the ability to talk to each other as well as the ability to understand each other's point of view.

My intent is to address both sides of re-entry---the returning citizen has his/her perspectives and the loved one has his/her perspective. Life has changed for all involved.

Here are some of the things I have encountered and learned about from returning citizens during their re-entry:

- \* They are not used to being touched, so may react by pulling back.
- \* They do not like to be run at or approached from behind. This poses real issues with young children if not addressed
- \* They do not like to be in crowds with noise and lots of movement. Places like WalMart may create anxiety.
- \* They may not want anyone touching their food with bare hands
- \* They may not want anyone doing their laundry
- \* It may be uncomfortable to engage in small talk conversation. They may seem almost anti-social
- \* They may want to sit in public places with their back to a wall and also be able to see the door

- \* They may jump or strike when touched in their sleep. They may be uncomfortable sleeping with someone in the same bed
- \* They may be overwhelmed by all the choices presented to them regarding food, clothes and hygiene items
- \* They may hoard food or candy even though it is unnecessary
- \* They may get car sick
- \* They may become easily frustrated when asked to make choices
- \* They may overreact when asked questions and appear quickly defensive
- \* They may be overly suspicious and insecure

Here are some of the things I have encountered and learned from families and friends as they welcome their re-entering person home:

- \* They want to hear what prison was like
- \* They want to throw a welcome home get together
- \* They want to go visit family and friends
- \* They want the returning person to feel happy to be home and be "up" emotionally
- \* They want to put it all behind them
- \* They want him/her to pick up on his/her responsibility right away
- \* They want to "get back to normal"
- \* They want closeness emotionally and, if appropriate, physically
- \* The young children want to play with, jump on and hang on him/her
- \* They feel unappreciated if their loved one is somewhat aloof
- \* While they want him/her to resume the relationship, they may be reluctant to give up the way they have been doing things, especially if there are children involved.
- \* They take it personally when their loved one reacts out of suspicion or insecurity