

14. Getting Out

What is Parole?

Custodial sentences can have two components (minimum period and balance period). The minimum period is also known as the non-parole period, which is served in prison. About six out of every ten inmates will get to serve the balance of their sentence in the community on parole. Sometimes they may serve part of the balance in the community if they are not granted parole at the earliest possible time.

For sentences under three years, parole is usually granted automatically. Otherwise decisions about granting parole for longer sentences are made by the State Parole Authority. The Authority is made up of public servants and representatives of the community, including an Aboriginal representative.

If people have a good record in the prison, and have done programs to address their offending behaviour, there's a good chance they'll get parole when they apply. If parole is not granted, the inmate can appeal for a hearing by the Authority. This may be in person or by video link. Their family can come and support their appeal, especially if they're offering accommodation and support. To get parole, inmates need to have a stable place to live.

A Community Corrections Officer will need to visit and check this before the person's parole is approved. If the inmate plans to live with family, the Community Corrections Officer will make sure that members of the household support this plan.

People on parole have to keep to set conditions. This includes contact with a Community Corrections Officer.

Community Corrections Officers work from a Community Corrections office. They can help with referrals to community agencies, help finding study or employment, and help with programs designed to keep former inmates from going back to prison. Community Corrections Officers generally have a good understanding of the pressures newly released inmates face, and can provide both practical and emotional support. Community Corrections Officers will visit the home from time to time and talk to the family. Although their main focus is on the person on parole, their knowledge and support can be helpful for the rest of the family too. Community Corrections Officers may report breaches of parole conditions to the State Parole Authority. Not all breaches result in a return to prison. Decisions are made on a case-

by-case basis, depending on the severity of the breach.

The more your family member on parole puts into the relationship with the Community Corrections Officer, the more they're likely to benefit from it. However, while you can encourage your family member to make the most of contact with their Community Corrections Officer, you can't do the work for them.

Will inmates get day leave or weekend leave before release?

Inmates can apply for day or weekend leave if they're classified minimum security C3 (men) or Category 1 (women). They must:

- > be serving 24 months or more fixed sentence or non-parole period;
- > be free of dirty urines (tests in which drugs are detected) for three months;
- > have completed half their minimum term;
- > have a C3 (males) and Category 1 (women).

Different kinds of leave have their own rules:

- > work / education leave can be considered for commencement from 18 months to Earliest Possible Release Date (EPRD);
- > day leave and weekend leave require an approved sponsor (family member or friend

approved by CSNSW);

- > day leave each 28 days, 9 months from EPRD (12 months from EPRD for inmates in a camp/farm location) progressing to weekend leave each week 2 months from EPRD after completion of 3 day leaves;
- > weekend leave 4pm Friday to 8pm Sunday 2 months from EPRD and after 3 successful day leaves. Weekend leave, with an approved sponsor, can be taken every weekend.

Inmates serving 12 months or more, either with intellectual disability receiving support from Statewide Disability Service, or young male offenders who have graduated from Stage 3 Young Adult Offender Program at Oberon Prison, are eligible to apply.

Once approved, day or weekend leave can be taken every 28 days, or every 14 days from some isolated centres. To get day or weekend leave, inmates need a sponsor. The sponsor must be with them the whole time they're out of the prison. Being a sponsor is a big responsibility. It's often best if there's more than one sponsor to share the load. Sponsors must:

- > be over 18 years of age, with ID;
- > have known the inmate for more than 12 months before they entered the prison;
- > have no outstanding criminal charges;

- > have not been convicted and sentenced for offences relating to the importation, manufacture, distribution or trafficking of a commercial quantity of drugs during the previous ten years;
- > have not been convicted and sentenced for offences relating to the sale of a commercial quantity of drugs during the previous five years;
- > have not been convicted and sentenced for offences relating to a serious crime of violence during the previous three years;
- > have not served a term of imprisonment as an adult during the previous three years or periodic detention as an adult during the past two years.

Sometimes exceptions can be made for a partner who's facing criminal charges or has been in prison in the last three years if the Governor of the prison interviews them and gives approval.

Your family member in the prison must make the application for day or weekend leave. If they ask for you to be a sponsor, you'll then be contacted by staff from the prison.

Planning for release

Inmates are encouraged to start planning for their release three to six months before they leave the prison, especially if they've been inside for a long time. Inmates may do the NEXUS program,

which helps them get ready. Some families regret having taken a family member back after feeling pressure to do so. If you don't feel able to have your family member home with you, tell them well beforehand rather than just before release. This will give them time to get used to the idea and make other plans. Don't tell their Community Corrections Officer that you can have them home unless you mean it. You could end up making things worse for your family member if they don't have stable accommodation in the first few months after they're released.

There are a limited number of places at supported accommodation services that cater especially for people leaving prison. Some of these services have special expertise in working with people with drug or mental health issues. Your family member will need to apply for these programs before they leave prison. They can talk to the Services and Programs Officer (SAPO) or Community Corrections Officer about these options.

You may be able to encourage them to consider them, but you can't make the arrangements for them. If you're concerned about your family member's ability to make these plans, you can contact the SAPO or Welfare Officer to alert them to your concerns.



Transitional Accommodation

CSNSW provides a number of different services that help to plan for release out of prison and to help make the first few months back in the community as smooth as possible. These include:

Transitional Supported Accommodation (TSA)

Up to 12 weeks supported accommodation provided to offenders under the supervision of Community Corrections with locations including Glebe House, Enmore, Rainbow Lodge Glebe, Adele House Coffs Harbour, Namatjira House, Alstonville and new locations opening in Wyong and Waratah.



Initial Transitional Support (ITS)

Up to 12 weeks support by an ITS case worker, who works collaboratively with CCO's in support of the offenders case plan to reduce risk of reoffending. Areas covered are Bathurst, Campbelltown, Dubbo, Kempsey, Lismore, Mt Druitt, Parramatta, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong and Wyong.

Extended Reintegration Service (ERS)

Up to 12 months of support for individuals who need supported accommodation and have complex health needs. This service is limited to the South West Sydney area. Your family member can get more information about transitional accommodation from their SAPO.

Exit Checklist

Inside the prison, inmates should be given a copy of the *Planning Your Release NSW Exit Checklist*. This is a booklet prepared by CRC for CSNSW. It guides inmates through the main things they need to do to get ready for release, and gives useful tips and contact numbers.

Important tasks include:

- > getting ID (e.g. birth certificate, Medicare card);
- > finding accommodation;
- > dealing with debts – even if these can't be paid off, making

arrangements beforehand will make life easier;

- > arranging follow-up medical care, including methadone, suboxone or bupe (bupranorphine);
- > planning for more study or work;
- > finding support so people aren't on their own.

If you've been holding ID for a family member, you may need to send it back to them during this time as they'll need it straightaway when they're released.

You may be able to help your family member by getting information about local TAFE options or employment services, or other agencies that may offer them support. Sometimes inmates try to rely on the prison 'grapevine', but this may not provide accurate or up-to-date information.

Remember that you can provide options but you can't make your family member follow them up.

Release day

Inmates will be expected to organise their own transport back home. They can be given the fare to where they are going to live. Prison staff can organise travel vouchers for inmates who don't have any other transport options.

It's a big encouragement for an inmate if they have someone to meet them at the gate when they're released. However, if you want to set limits about the support

you can give your family member, meeting them at the gate may give the wrong message.

There are usually a lot of practical things to do in the first couple of days after release. These can include:

- > opening a bank account;
- > going to Centrelink;
- > attending Job Search or other employment interviews;
- > meeting with their Community Corrections Officer if they're on parole;
- > buying essentials such as food and toiletries;
- > connecting with health care or pharmacotherapy (e.g. methadone) providers.

Be aware that after the initial excitement of release things can often feel flat. Your family member may be the centre of attention in the beginning, but soon after people have to get back to their normal lives.

Your family member may find it overwhelming having to deal with people and may withdraw a bit. Try not to expect too much in the early days.